

THE STORY SO FAR

Following a failed attempt to rob a security van, and a horrific explosion, three charred bodies are identified as Joe Pirelli, Terry Miller and Harry Rawlins.

Dolly Rawlins, Harry's widow, is left bereft. She had doted on her husband for twenty years. He was a revered and highly respected criminal, and his death leaves her unable to face life without him.

Then Dolly discovers her husband's carefully laid out plans for another security van robbery. She and the other widows, Shirley and Linda, have little in common, apart from their grief, but she convinces them to join her as they begin preparations to carry out the robbery that Harry had planned.

Initially, the other widows think Dolly is out of her mind. But the lure of money encourages them to believe they are ready to go through with the plan. Dolly realises they need a fourth person to make it work – a get away driver.

Amongst Harry's plans, Dolly finds an address for Jimmy Nunn and decides to pay him a visit. At his rundown flat she meets Trudie Nunn, who has a young baby. Dolly had always longed to be able to have a child with Harry, but she tragically suffered a series of miscarriages. Trudie is young and nervous, and Dolly is shocked to learn that her husband, Harry, is still alive. Devastatingly, she also discovers that Harry is the father of Trudie's child.

This terrible betrayal fuels Dolly's determination to proceed with her plans. This is now revenge. Bella O'Reilly comes on board as the getaway driver and the four women succeed in carrying out the dangerous robbery.

After the heist Dolly hides the bulk of the money in a nursery school locker room, dividing it up into substantial amounts to enable each girl to escape to Rio. Dolly has outwitted Harry Rawlins,

who cannot believe that his faithful and loving wife has proved herself to be an equally, if not more, masterful criminal than himself.

Revenge: Widows 2 begins with the women living the high life in Rio, all waiting for the right time to collect their money.

But they are fearful that the 'dead' man Harry Rawlins is going to come after them.

CHAPTER ONE

Bella had recommended Mr Jarrow to Dolly as one of the best men in London, and so Dolly had made an appointment. She was slightly taken aback to find five other women in the reception area also waiting to see him – it was more of a conveyor belt than she had imagined. But she enjoyed taking furtive glances over the top of her glossy magazine and trying to work out what each woman was having done. In some instances it was obvious: a nose needed shortening by a couple of centimetres; eye bags could be removed. But she did wonder what the two women sitting in the corner were in for. Why bother with a nose job if your face was completely hidden behind a black *niqab*? At least their husbands would see their faces when they took them off, she mused.

Husband. Every time Dolly thought of the word she felt a strange tightening in the pit of her stomach. It had been a long time since she had referred to her ‘husband’ . . .

‘Mrs Rawlins?’

Dolly was jolted from her thoughts. The receptionist, who spoke with a slight French accent, had a face that had obviously never needed any kind of cosmetic surgery.

‘Mr Jarrow will see you now.’

The consulting room itself was as immaculate as the waiting room, from the pale green carpet and the imposing desk to the perfectly placed antique carver chair for the patients. Mr Jarrow himself was very good-looking, but he seemed a little too neat; perhaps he’d had a job done on his own face? He was very quiet, his voice soothing.

‘I’d like a facelift,’ Dolly said simply.

‘I see,’ he said. ‘A complete facelift, Mrs Rawlins?’

Dolly nodded.

He got up from his desk and came over to her. He held her head as he inspected her eyes and her neck, and his hands when he touched her face felt cool.

‘With this form of surgery,’ he explained in his soothing voice, ‘the stitches will be placed behind the ears; your hairline will remain just as it is now. We will stitch here –’ he indicated where the stitches for the eye socket would be – ‘and here.’ She felt his feather-light touch below her right eye.

He took a seat back behind his desk and began to sift through her file, looking at the photographs she had had taken earlier that day – front, side-view right, side-view left – looking at Dolly, then back to the photographs.

Finally, he closed the file. ‘You were widowed six months ago?’

Dolly nodded. She had already supplied this information.

‘And you have no relatives, no family?’

Dolly shook her head. Again she had told him this already.

Mr Jarrow tapped the desk with a very fine, thin, gold pencil. ‘You do understand . . .’ He paused. ‘You do understand that no surgery can permanently prevent ageing?’

Dolly nodded. This too had been gone over before. ‘But you can make me look younger, isn’t that right, Mr Jarrow?’

He looked up and gave her a sweet, direct smile. ‘You were married for twenty-five years?’

Dolly said, ‘Yes.’

‘The loss must have been . . . very great.’

‘Yes,’ said Dolly. ‘It was.’

He gave a slight cough and opened her file again. ‘Did you love your husband, Mrs Rawlins?’ He flicked through the pages.

He’d taken her completely off guard.

‘Why do you ask me that?’ she said. And then, very quietly, rather shakily, she added, ‘I loved him.’ She barely recognised her own voice.

Mr Jarrow looked up and slightly tilted his head. ‘I’m sorry?’



‘I loved him.’

He nodded. His pale blue eyes seemed to stare right through her. ‘Then his death must have been a very great loss to you.’

Dolly could feel her breath leaving her body. ‘Yes,’ she said. ‘Yes, yes, it was. It was a very great loss to me.’

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Harry Rawlins stepped out from the terminal into the sunlight of Rio. The glare of the sun bounced off his mirror-tinted glasses and he could feel the sweat trickling down the back of his neck and into his crumpled linen suit. He shifted his small holdall from one hand to the other and looked up and down the lines of parked cars.

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Jimmy Glazier had a strange lump in the pit of his stomach. There he was, Harry Rawlins, back from the dead. Jimmy’s pudgy, sweat-glistening face beamed, he waved, and he saw Rawlins stare towards him. Jimmy scuttled between the parked cars and reached Harry. He felt so childish, with all the emotion swelling inside him, and all he got out was, ‘Good to see you, Harry. Welcome to Rio.’

Jimmy had always admired Harry Rawlins. He’d been one of the big ones, one of the good men, and even though he’d only worked for Rawlins once, he’d gone to him twice for help, and Rawlins had never turned him down. When Jimmy received the cable, he felt it was his chance to repay him. As they moved towards Jimmy’s car – a beat-up old Buick, which he’d bought when he first came to Rio – Rawlins was strangely silent. First he moved round to the wrong side of the car and Jimmy had to say jovially, ‘Ah, no, Harry, it’s this way round,’ before nervously opening the passenger door for him. Then he clumsily took Rawlins’ holdall – fumbling as if



Rawlins was some sort of royal guest – and asked if there was any more luggage.

Rawlins shook his head. ‘No, just the one bag, Jimmy.’

Jimmy placed it carefully in the boot, before jumping into the driving seat. Inside the car was boiling, and Rawlins immediately lowered the window, with Jimmy doing likewise, before leaning his arm along the back of the seat and looking at Harry.

‘When I heard the news, I just couldn’t believe it,’ he said, shaking his head. ‘You lost a good team, good men, Harry. Christ, I thought you’d gone down with them!’

Rawlins cut him off sharply. ‘Can we get out of here, Jimmy? I’m sweating like a pig in here.’

The air-conditioning didn’t work, and as the car eased into the traffic, the wind blowing through the open windows did little to cool them down. Jimmy couldn’t read Rawlins’ expression behind his mirrored sunglasses, but despite the boiling hot sun, he was happy. He had the big man, Mr Rawlins, in his car, coming to stay at his place, in Rio.

They drove down the hill from St Paolo and headed towards the centre of town, passing several elegant-looking villas, with shady patios and their own pools, half-hidden behind heavy fencing, palm trees and shrubberies. Jimmy pulled up by a pale pink villa with solid-looking wrought-iron gates, to let a mangy-looking dog cross the road, before moving on.

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The driveway to the pink villa was lined with lush-looking palm trees. It went sweeping past a garage and round to the side of the house, where five sun-loungers with umbrellas were arranged round the pool. The faint sound of the Tijuana Brass Band could be heard coming from a small transistor by one of the sun-loungers, where a woman was stretched out, covered with suntan oil.

Linda Pirelli.

She picked up the radio and turned the dial to find a different station, but all she could get was a garble of voices in a language she didn't understand. She turned back the dial until she found the Tijuana Brass Band again, then hurled it into the pool, where it gurgled for a moment before sinking to the bottom.

Up on the balcony above the pool, Shirley yelled, 'Linda! Come up 'ere for a minute, will you? I saw that!' before stalking back into the bedroom. The twin beds were covered with neatly folded piles of clothes, ready to be placed into open suitcases. Shirley was all made up, hair done to perfection, and wearing a silk shirt, knickers, suspenders and stockings, and very high-heeled shoes. Carefully and methodically, she started filling the cases.

Linda stormed into the bedroom. 'Whaddya want?' She looked through the drawers. 'Oi, you bin going through my things!'

'I have not been going through your things,' Shirley retorted. 'I just want that blue shirt back that you borrowed yesterday. Where've you put it?'

Linda stomped over to the chest of drawers, rifled through a tangled mess of clothes and dragged out a crumpled shirt. 'Ere yer go.'

Shirley looked at it in disgust. 'Never mind, you can keep it!'

Linda flopped down on the bed and sullenly watched Shirley go back to packing her beautifully folded, crisp new clothes.

'Yer got enough bleedin' suitcases?' She snorted.

'Yes, they're nice, aren't they?' Shirley replied with a smile. 'They're all mock croc leather, you know.'

Linda picked one up. 'Well, they weigh a ton before yer even put a bleedin' Kleenex in. 'Ow much did they cost?'

Shirley squinted at her watch, the digits seeming to blur. She should have got the other one, the Cartier. 'Bella's going to miss me. I've got to go.'

'Well, 'ow yer gonna get to the airport?'

Shirley went back to her packing. 'I've got a taxi coming. But Bella said she'd be here to see me off.'

'Yeah, she also said she'd teach me to swim!' Linda threw herself back on the bed.

'Linda, move off!' Shirley chided. 'Go and sit over there!'

Scowling, Linda moved to a chair and stuck her feet up on the edge of the dressing table.

Shirley turned. 'By the way, that cistern overflowed again. When you gonna move that money? Bella's bought diamonds; why don't you buy diamonds? I mean, I got my money changed into dollars. What did Dolly say? Change that money as soon as possible. That money's traceable, Linda!'

Linda frowned. 'I'll do it tomorrow.' She then started unscrewing pots of cream from Shirley's already neatly packed vanity bag. She dabbed her finger in and began rubbing lotion into her face.

Shirley watched her disapprovingly. 'You don't put dollops of that on your face, Linda. That's Queen Bee jelly with vitamin E. You've only got to use a drop.'

Linda moved away from the dressing table. 'Sorry, sorry, sorry. Queen Bee jelly! Christ, Shirley, if they put gnat piss in a bottle you'd buy it if they said it was good for your face!'

Shirley squinted at her watch again. 'Wonder where Bella is?'

'Yeah, I've been waitin' by that pool for her all mornin.'

Shirley looked at her. 'You're burning, you know. Look at your skin. It's awfully bad for it, Linda. I've told you, you shouldn't sit in the sun, you'll get cancer.'

'Bollocks.' Linda sat down on the bed. She watched Shirley finishing packing for a moment, then asked, rather plaintively, 'Why can't I come wiv yer, Shirl?'

Shirley turned. They'd been over this before. 'You are not coming with me and that is final. Dolly said separate, and that's what we're gonna do!'

Linda mimicked her. '*Dolly said sep-a-rate!* Dolly also said no taxis to the villa. Well, you've just blown that, 'aven't you? She said

no taxis and no cars. Bella's bin in and out of 'ere like a dingbat in that Rolls-Royce . . .'

Right on cue they heard the crunch of gravel on the drive. Linda rushed to the balcony.

'Ere she comes. Gawd, what does she think she's come as – Shirley Bassey? Look at 'er!'

Linda watched as Bella stepped out of the white Rolls-Royce. She looked stunning. It was a strange thing with Bella – she might have been a tart, she might have come from the streets, but God she had taste. She knew what she wanted, and she always wanted – and got – the best.

Linda yelled down, 'Dolly said no taxis and no cars to the bleedin' villa! Well, you've come fucking incognito, I must say!'

Shirley had packed her suitcases and was now inspecting a jacket. 'You sat on this, Linda. Look at it, you've crumpled it.' She stepped into her skirt and zipped it up.

'I'll take a couple of yer cases down for yer.' Linda walked unsteadily down the stairs, staggering under the weight of two suitcases, and dumped them in front of the Rolls.

Bella looked at them quizzically. 'Hey,' she said, 'unbelievable! We've got the same suitcases – just different colours.'

Linda stomped back into the house, paying no attention, as Shirley appeared with suitcase number three. 'What's the matter with her?' Bella asked.

Shirley shrugged. 'I don't know, she's like a bear with a sore behind, sometimes.'

Bella jerked her head towards the chauffeur. 'It's all right, he doesn't understand English.'

Shirley nodded. 'Oh, well, thanks for coming.'

Bella handed her a small packet. 'This is for you, kiddo. You take care of yourself!'

Shirley unwrapped the tiny locket decorated with an 'S' in diamonds; very tasteful and no doubt very expensive.

'Thanks, Bella, it's lovely.' She beamed.

Bella grinned. 'Well, kiddo, you have a good time in LA. If you do everything I'm doing, you will!'

Shirley gripped her hand. 'I hope it works out for you, Bella. He's a super guy.'

Bella nodded. 'Yes, he is, Shirley. He's everything I've ever wanted. I've never been so happy in my whole life.'

Shirley's jacket suddenly flew down from the balcony and landed on the roof of the Roller.

Shirley whipped round. 'There was no need to do that, Linda! She turned to Bella. 'She hasn't changed her money yet, you know! It's still in the cistern; made me soak my skirt.'

Bella shook her head, smiling. 'I'll have a word with her later.'

Linda appeared with suitcase number four. 'That's it!'

Shirley looked at Bella. 'Just waiting for the cab, then I'm off.'

At that moment the taxi appeared through the wrought-iron gates and came to a halt with a spray of gravel.

Linda was already shouting at the top of her voice: 'Four suitcases, amigo, to the airport, pronto!'

Shirley turned to her. 'There's no need to shout, Linda.'

The driver got out of the cab and started piling the suitcases into the boot. At the same time the chauffeur got out of the Roller and opened the rear passenger door for Bella.

She turned to Shirley with a grin before getting in. 'This is the life, eh, kiddo? This is the life.' The chauffeur shut the door, and the electric windows slowly glided down. 'Look after yourself, hon. See you back in London.'

The chauffeur slowly turned the Roller round and drove off, as Bella gave a last wave to Linda, which she pointedly ignored.

Shirley started checking that all the suitcases had been packed into the taxi, then suddenly remembered and shouted after the Roller as it disappeared through the gates, 'Thanks for the present!'

Linda gave her a bemused look. 'What present?'

'Oh, Bella gave me ever such a nice little thing. A farewell gift.'

Linda looked miffed: one, because she hadn't thought of it herself, and two, because nobody ever told her anything. She started to get into the taxi but Shirley put a hand on her arm. 'Oh, come on, Linda, there's no need for you to come with me.'

Linda turned. 'I'm just comin' as far as the airport, OK? Come on, get in.' She flicked the driver on the back of the neck as Shirley settled in next to her. 'OK, amigo, move it, pronto!'

Both girls slammed into the back of the seat as the taxi whipped round in a U-turn and sped down the drive.

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Harry Rawlins looked round Jimmy Glazier's small, untidy flat. It was crazy – it was as if they'd moved a tower block from Paddington smack into the centre of Rio. The building was certainly just as noisy, as the sound of stereos and transistors blaring, couples arguing and screaming kids drifted up from outside and through the shutters. The kitchen was separated from the dining room by stripped plastic curtains, from behind which he could see a woman furtively watching them.

'Maria!' Jimmy yelled. 'Come out and meet my friend!'

Maria stepped through the curtains. She was heavily pregnant and there was something very sensual about her, with her long, dark hair in one big braid down her back. She nodded to Harry, looked at Jimmy, then turned and went back into the kitchen.

Jimmy was sweating freely, and Rawlins could smell the reek of it filling the little room.

'Hey, don't pay any attention to her,' he said, popping open two cans of beer. 'She's a bit broody. She's expecting another kid. It's this heat. With no air-conditioning in here, it boils you up, yer know what I mean? Boils you up, Harry. Sidddown!'

Harry pulled out one of the kitchen chairs and sat. 'What time do the banks open, Jimmy?'

Jimmy looked at his watch. 'It's siesta now, so give it about an hour. The bank's in the square.'

He pulled his chair closer and Harry was overpowered by the sickly sweet smell of Jimmy's body odour.

'Harry . . . I've got a little number lined up in England. It's a doddle, honest!'

Harry couldn't help but smile. How many times had Jimmy Glazier been put away because of his sure-fire doddles?

He patted him on the shoulder. 'Look, Jimmy, I'm over here to collect cash, and that's it. I'm out of the business now, OK?'

Jimmy nodded. 'Anything you say, Harry.' He guzzled down his beer and flipped open another one.

Harry stood up. 'I'm a bit whacked, Jimmy. Mind if I put my head down?'

Jimmy was on his feet. 'Anything you say, Harry. All you gotta do is ask. My place is your place, you know what I mean? You been good to me, Harry. This is my chance to repay you.' He continued to prattle on as he led Harry towards an even smaller room off the lounge. This was a child's bedroom, with a tiny cot bed and toys littering the floor. The shutters were closed, but the air was still hot. Jimmy kicked the toys out of the way and pulled back the grimy sheets.

'Ere you go, 'Arry. I'll give you a shout in a couple of hours, OK?'

Harry nodded. 'Thanks, Jimmy.'

Jimmy hovered by the door for a few moments, still beaming, before going back to the lounge. After a moment, Harry heard the sound of yet another beer can being ripped open, and the low murmuring of Jimmy and Maria, speaking in Portuguese. Obviously Maria didn't want Harry to stay, but by now he was too tired to even think about it. He lay on the bed, the clammy heat stifling him, and then he fell asleep.

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Dolly looked at the sheet of instructions Mr Jarrow's over-polite Frenchified assistant had just handed her. She was supposed to bring night clothes and dark glasses. The operation was to be in two weeks, the only time Mr Jarrow had available. He was obviously a very, very busy man.

Dolly looked up at the assistant. 'Are the glasses compulsory?'

'No, Mrs Rawlins, just a suggestion. If you could be here at three-thirty on the day of the operation just to have a final check, we'll take you over to the clinic.'

Dolly smiled. She felt as if she was actually bursting with happiness, like a child who's just been told she's won a prize. She picked up her handbag, gave the assistant a brief nod, and walked out into the street. The sun was shining and she felt good; things were going just as she'd planned.

She walked across to the meter – it was always a good sign when you got a meter immediately, particularly in Harley Street – and got into her hired green Ford Fiesta.

Now, she thought, for stage two.

She'd found his name in the Yellow Pages. She soon discovered that most private detectives were connected to one large firm, so she'd kept on ringing numbers until she found one who seemed to work on his own. That was the kind of man she wanted. His name was Victor Morgan – Victor Morgan of the Victor Morgan Private Investigation Bureau.

* * *

Victor Morgan had had his offices in Kensington for about four years, in a sprawling old building off the Cromwell Road. That afternoon he was studying his newest acquisition, a word processor that had set him back five and a half grand. But he thought it was going to be worth it. In a few months he would have a filing system of floppy disks that would fit into one drawer. Yes, things were looking up.



He was busily checking over the computer's manual when he heard footsteps outside the door. He looked at his watch – Mrs Marsh was smack on time.

The door handle rattled and he yelled out, 'Push . . . push, Mrs Marsh!'

Dolly, from outside, turned the handle one more time, gave it an almighty shove and hurtled into the office.

'You OK?'

'Yes, I'm fine,' she said, patting herself down. 'Something wrong with your door?'

He smiled. 'Gotta get it fixed one day. It's a tricky lock, but it's all right when you get the hang of it. Do sit down.'

He shut the door behind her, and Dolly took stock of the man she'd chosen. He was big, well over six foot, and stocky with it. Not particularly good-looking, but there was a kind of warmth to him that didn't fit with the conventional image of a private investigator.

His bulk filled the chair as he sat back down at his desk and leant forward. 'Well, Mrs Marsh, what can I do for you?'

Dolly placed her handbag on the desk. 'I would like you to watch . . . er . . .' She broke off.

Here we go again, thought Victor: the hesitant wives too embarrassed to admit they wanted you to follow their husbands.

Dolly coughed. 'I'm here on behalf of my sister, actually.'

Why they had to lie, Vic never knew. He looked her in the eye. 'Your sister?'

'Yes. My sister believes her husband is having an affair with another woman, and we would like you to watch her house and find out a little about her. Do you do that kind of thing?'

He nodded. He did do that kind of thing. He didn't like it, but the truth of it was that it was his bread and butter.

'Yes,' he said. 'You'd like me to keep a woman under surveillance?'

'Yes, exactly.'

He got out a sheet of paper and began to make notes, in what seemed to Dolly a very professional manner.

‘Right. Her name?’

Dolly hesitated for another moment. ‘Trudie. Trudie Nunn.’

‘OK.’ He nodded. ‘And the address?’

Dolly gave him Trudie Nunn’s address in Islington.

‘And how long would you like the surveillance on Mrs Nunn?’

Again Dolly hesitated. She’d had it all worked out in her mind before she came in but suddenly she was all of a dither.

‘Well . . . we . . . my sister and I would like to know . . . what kind of work she’s doing, and if . . . my sister’s husband is visiting her and who she sees . . .’

‘Absolutely,’ he said. ‘That’s all part of the job. But how long do you want me to watch –’ he looked at the page – ‘Mrs Nunn? Or Miss Nunn?’

‘Mrs Nunn. Mrs Trudie Nunn.’

‘Right.’

Dolly thought for a moment. ‘Well, how much do you charge, Mr Morgan?’

He leant back in his chair. ‘Twelve-fifty per hour, plus expenses. Usually I don’t do round the clock – I work from seven in the morning to seven at night, but if you want the night shift I can go from seven at night through to two in the morning.’ He smiled. ‘In my experience, if there is any hanky-panky going on, it will have happened before then, if it’s going to happen at all.’

Dolly was not amused. ‘I see. Well, I’d like you to do three or four days to begin with, and see how we go from there.’

‘OK, four days of seven to seven, or on the seven to—’

‘Day and night,’ insisted Dolly. She’d already opened her bag and taken out her wallet.

Ah. He rubbed his hands. Now’s my chance, he thought. He shifted his chair round towards his new toy and began tapping

out numbers. Instantly a flashing sign appeared, saying: 'BOOT ERROR – BOOT ERROR – BOOT ERROR.'

Dolly looked up from her calculations. 'I'll pay you in advance for two days, is that all right? I make that £475.' She counted out the money and put it on his desk.

Morgan's computer was now flashing: '£35.02'. He shook his head sadly.

'I've not quite got the hang of this yet . . . But that's fine.' He tried to switch off the machine. 'Er . . . another thing, Mrs Marsh. Do you have a photograph of your sister's husband, or any particulars? His name, for a start.'

Dolly was taken aback. 'Yes, his name is John, er, *Jonathan* . . . Jarrow . . . J-A-R-R-O-W.' She spelt it out, then described Harry Rawlins while Morgan nodded, taking careful notes.

'Right you are. So you want me to watch this Trudie Nunn, and if this Mr Jarrow turns up you want me to make a note of it – how long he stays, et cetera. Is that it?'

Dolly nodded. 'Yes, yes, that's precisely it.' Despite the shenanigans with the computer, she reckoned Mr Morgan wasn't as dumb as he looked. She made a mental note not to make any slips in front of him.

Business done, she stood up. 'Is there anything else you want to know?'

'Well, I'd like to know where I can contact you.'

Dolly opened her bag, searching through her wallet for the card she'd picked up at the hotel desk that morning. Morgan went back to tapping out something on his word processor.

'You'll find me here, should you need me.'

Still tapping, he flicked a look at the card she'd placed on his desk and said, 'I don't know that one.'

'It's very quiet, just by Queen's Gate.'

'And that's where you'll be, Mrs Marsh?'

'Yes, you can contact me there . . . but I'll call in.'

He smiled. 'I'm sure you will, Mrs Marsh.'

He stood up and they shook hands. His grip was firm.

As he walked Dolly towards the door, Helen, the group secretary for a number of offices, entered with her arms full of papers. 'Oh, I'm terribly sorry, I didn't know you had—'

'That's all right,' said Dolly, 'I'm just leaving.'

As Dolly closed the door delicately behind her, Helen gave Morgan an enquiring look. 'Something juicy?'

'Not really.' Morgan crossed back to his desk. 'Oh my God,' he said, 'now what's happening?' The machine seemed to taken on a life of its own, the printer churning out sheets and sheets of paper.

Helen rushed up behind him. 'You've got it on repeat!'

'God damn it, I set it to receipt! I wanted a receipt!'

Helen turned the machine off and looked at the receipt. 'Ooh,' she said, 'cash. That's unusual for you!'

He smiled. 'Yes. Look, there's some letters for you to do, and whatever you put in the machine yesterday, I'm afraid you're going to have to put back in today. I wiped it!'

She shook her head. He was reaching for his old camelhair coat, the one he always wore, whatever the time of year.

'OK,' she said. 'You know you're going to have to employ me full-time now you've got that machine.'

He turned with a grin. 'My darling girl, this is the age of technology. When I get that machine going I won't even need an office!'

'Chance would be a fine thing,' she retorted.

He went to open the door, giving it its usual tug, followed by its usual pull – but it remained firmly stuck.

'Forget about your fancy computer – why don't you get that door fixed?' Helen said.

He gave it one more tug and the door swung open. 'Just a matter of technique!' he said with a wink and breezed out.

Helen sighed. She'd been in love with Victor Morgan for almost two years, but he'd remained totally oblivious, showing no sign that

he thought of her as anything more than just another piece of office equipment.

In fact, he didn't seem to care very much about anything – with the possible exception of his old car. Whatever the ups and downs of the business, he didn't seem to worry about money, and she wondered if he had private income from somewhere. She knew he'd been in the police for twenty years before retiring to open his own investigation bureau – mostly dealing with petty debt collecting, marriage troubles, divorce settlements, writs, warrants and, of course, the odd industrial espionage job, which paid a bit more. But there was an awful lot about Morgan that she didn't know, like the story of the boy in the photograph that was always tucked behind his bookcase. Good-looking boy; the image of his father. Once she'd asked about him, asked his name. Morgan had just shrugged. 'It doesn't really matter what his name is, Helen. He's been gone a long time.'

'Gone where? Abroad somewhere?' she'd asked.

'No, he was a heroin addict,' he'd replied. And that was all he'd ever said.

There had been a wife, she knew that much, and maybe a divorce. But Helen would have had to be a very good private investigator to find out anything more about Morgan's personal life.

As for her chances, she'd given up thinking anything would ever come of it. She'd once screwed up her courage to ask him to her place for dinner. He'd said yes, briefly kindling her hopes, and it had been a very pleasant evening. But that was as far as he'd ever let it go.

Helen sighed, then began to read the manual for his new word processor. If he was never going to get the hang of it, maybe she'd better.

* * *

Shirley squinted at her watch as the taxi pulled up at the airport. 'You know something, I can't tell the time on this. I wish to God I'd got the other watch. What do you think, Linda, d'you like it?'