

Chapter 1: We Got Company, Ma

“Peters, Peters, Peters!” The voice was shrill and hard and had I known Peters I would not have recommended it to him. But Peters was nowhere to be found. Perhaps he preferred it that way, desired but unseen. Unfortunately, I am compelled to remember that Peters, dear soul...

Ah, but that was another story, in another time. Plenty of time for that. It is the woman calling out to him who intrigues me at present. Tall, willowy, immaculately dressed, well, I’ll spare you the obvious metaphors though Lauren Becall comes to mind, why the divine creature has a delightful little golden handgun nestled behind my right ear, and is twittering sweet nothing encouragements for me, such as, “Keep writing, oh do keep writing, dear.”

I would have hoped that making love to her earlier would have been enough, would have won her to my side, but immediately as we had finished, or shall I say, as soon as we were both quiet again and calm, she picked up the little trinket and positioned it in the closest proximity to my right eye, and, shall we say, bade me to continue, take up where I had left off, take up the pen again, young man, resume the keyboard.

Needless to say, I had to start the whole business again, as I had thrown the previous pages out the window at the moment when she had started to undress, as I conceived it would be far better to leave no reminders of the past once we had journeyed together through the doorway of love.

Excuse me! Hold on a minute! What the when, why and – let’s face it – the hell am I talking about?

Well, what would you write about if you’d been made love to by a beautiful woman whom you had met less than an hour before and then been tied to a chair and told to write, while

she held a magical little murder weapon to your head and screamed down the hallway to her accomplice, Peters, who had apparently been listening to and probably taping the whole proceedings from the apartment across the hall?

Well, be that as it may, I won't antagonize you too much, I do need at least one friend in this damn ghastly business. Perhaps Peters and the woman, the girl, the lady - her name, by the way, is Stricklandson - think I know something about something, which of course I do. Everybody knows something about something, but the trick is to know something about the right something.

And, by faith in such coincidental thinking, I fear I am tied up here writing my epitaph.

Chapter 2: Miraculously

What's this? Peters is on the phone. He is calling his mother collect. It appears that there was some plot to assassinate a visiting president, which has been temporarily foiled. Five bullets went astray and the poison turned out to be an obscure form of guava fruit. Miraculously, however, no one in the security forces seems to have found out that there was any threat and so they are going back tonight for another try. Their plan appears to be to use my apartment as a decoy base of operations. They feel that, with someone sitting, typing all day and night, no one will suspect them of hiding out here. It seems that they tried the same trick with Mrs O'Flattery next door, but she didn't know how to type so they left her in the fridge.

But what do the lovely Stricklandson and the hideous Peters, who has now entered the room, have to do with this story? And I myself, the great bystander, how did I come to be seated in the middle of this mess?

Perhaps they will enlighten me before pickling, I mean embalming, so at least I'll have a good story to tell in the afterworld? Without a good story, I hear, no one is going to give you directions or tell you what's going down up there. So that, by such bad luck, gentle reader, your faithful narrator would be left in no better situation than he finds himself in here.

Ah, yes, things are becoming clearer to me now. Peters and Stricklandson appear to be freelance operators working in the employ of a secret bureau of some foreign government. Their target, a rival tinpot dictator, is currently on a speaking tour of the United States. Tonight, he is addressing a special session of the United Nations on how he has solved the problem of

illegal drugs in his country. Of course, nobody believes him, but it is all very proper and appropriate because whenever a visiting head of state comes to his country, he always pretends to believe everything he has to say also. In this way, everybody gets along very well, which is, after all, the whole point of diplomacy, is it not?

So, apparently, from what I can make out from this telephone conversation, in which Peters has spent most of the time being berated by his mother, who seems to be the head of this gang, the plan is for Peters and Stricklandson to place a small canister of poison gas amongst the flowers to be given to the president by members of his loving expatriate community as he greets them on the steps of the UN after his speech. The president will smell the flowers, the canister will explode, and poof, sweet revenge for whatever long-running soap opera of a grudge they think they have been carrying the water for.

They are planning to give the canister to a drug dealer who lives on the third floor of my building. He seems to have been a childhood friend of the president, but was kicked out of the country during one of the periodic official purges of drug dealers that allow the president to get so many billions of dollars of American aid. This guy, who is also a stand-up comic, tried out his material in some off-Broadway city for a while, then moved to the Big Apple and the Great White Way, where he couldn't catch a break and so took over his neighbourhood crack operation, running a steady flow of pimps, whores and Caucasian businessmen - white punters he likes to call them - up and down the stairs, in and out of, his apartment.

Chapter 3: The Trick,

as far as I can see, will be for me to slip out of the apartment sometime between the transfer of the canister and the payoff from Stricklandson and Peters to this drug lord comedian. Ah yes, I have an idea, and I'm reasonably sure I can afford to write it down as I think it out, since I don't think any of these guys is planning to read a word of what I write, which is hardly, I may say, flattering for a writer, but, in this case, perhaps just as well. I'll ask for a moment's pause, because, after all, no writer is never not going to get up and go to the bathroom, or walk around for a bit of a stretch and think what to write next. Then I'll suggest they move me into the small room and close the door, which, I will say, will mean my typing will create a greater reverberation in the inner courtyard of our building and will be heard more easily by any Federal agents snooping around outside. With the door safely closed behind me, because there is hardly enough space for one person standing, let alone seated, in this room, which is really a glorified closet, I will drag out my vintage synthesiser workstation, which I haven't used since I was tossing up between being a prog or glam rocker in the nineteen-seventies, quickly sample eight bars of the sound of a keyboard, and then set it to repeat to eternity, while I slip out the window, climb up the pipe onto the roof, and get away. This done, I can take a little stroll, get a papaya juice from around the corner, and catch the 11:30 rerun of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (or it might be *The Thief Who Came to Dinner*) at Theater 80 St Marks. By the time I come out, history will have taken care of itself. I mean, let's face it, what the hell do I care about drug dealers, presidents, and the market segmentation of their illegal recreational supply chains? I've got enough problems of my own. Bye.