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Never Stop on the Motorway

Cheap at Half the Price

The Expert Witness

(an excerpt from *To Cut a Long Story Short*)

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NEVER STOP ON THE MOTORWAY

DIANA HAD BEEN HOPING to get away by 5:00, so she could be at the farm in time for dinner. She tried not to show her true feelings when at 4:37 her deputy, Phil Haskins, presented her with a complex twelve-page document that required the signature of a director before it could be sent out to the client. Haskins didn't hesitate to remind her that they had lost two similar contracts that week.

It was always the same on a Friday. The phones would go quiet in the middle of the afternoon and then, just as she thought she could slip away, an authorization would land on her desk. One glance at this particular document and Diana knew there would be no chance of escaping before 6:00.

The demands of being a single parent as well as a director of a small but thriving City company meant there were few moments left in any day to relax, so when it came to the one weekend in four that James and Caroline spent with her ex-husband, Diana would try to leave the office a little earlier than usual to avoid getting snarled up in the weekend traffic.

She read through the first page slowly and made a couple of emendations, aware that any mistake made hastily on a Friday evening could be regretted in the weeks to come. She glanced at the clock on her desk as she signed the final page of the document. It was just showing 5:51.

Diana gathered up her bag and walked purposefully toward the door, dropping the contract on Phil's desk without bothering to suggest that he have a good weekend. She suspected that the paperwork had been on his desk since 9:00 that morning, but that holding it until 4:37 was his only means of revenge now that she had been made head of department. Once she was safely in the elevator, she pressed the button for the basement garage, calculating that the delay would probably add an extra hour to her journey.

She stepped out of the elevator, walked over to her Audi suburban, unlocked the door, and threw her bag onto the backseat. When she drove out into the street the stream of twilight traffic was just about keeping pace with the pinstriped pedestrians who, like worker ants, were hurrying toward the nearest hole in the ground.

She flicked on the six o'clock news. The chimes of Big Ben rang out before spokesmen from each of the three main political parties gave their views on the European election results. John Major was refusing to comment on his future. The Conservative Party's explanation for its poor showing was that only 36 percent of the country had bothered to go to the polls. Diana felt guilty—she was among the 64 percent who had failed to register their vote.

The newscaster moved on to say that the situation in Bosnia remained desperate, and that the UN was threatening dire consequences if Radovan Karadzic and the Serbs didnt come to an agreement with the other warring parties. Diana's mind began to drift—such a threat was hardly news any longer. She suspected that if she turned on the radio in a years time they would probably be repeating it word for word.

As her car crawled round Russell Square, she began to think about the weekend ahead. It had been over a year since John had told her that he had met another woman and wanted a divorce. She still wondered why, after seven years of marriage, she hadn't been more shocked—or at least angry—at his betrayal. Since her appointment as a director, she had to admit they had spent less and less time together. And perhaps she had become anesthetized by the fact that a third of the married couples in Britain were now divorced or separated. Her parents had been unable to hide their disappointment, but then they had been married for forty-two years.

The divorce had been amicable enough, as John, who earned less than she did—one of their problems, perhaps—had given in to most of her demands. She had kept the apartment in Putney, the Audi suburban, and the children, to whom John was allowed access one weekend in four. He would have picked them up from school earlier that afternoon, and, as usual, he'd return them to the apartment in Putney around seven on Sunday evening.

Diana would go to almost any lengths to avoid being left on her own in Putney when they weren't around, and although she regularly grumbled about being saddled with the responsibility of bringing up two children without a father, she missed them desperately the moment they were out of sight.

She hadn't taken a lover, and she didn't sleep around. None of the senior staff at the office had ever gone further than asking her out to lunch. Perhaps because only three of them were unmarried—and not without reason. The one person she might have considered having a relationship with had made it abundantly clear that he only wanted to spend the night with her, not the days.

In any case, Diana had decided long ago that if she was to be taken seriously as the company's first woman director, an office affair, however casual or short-lived, could only end in tears. Men are so vain, she thought. A woman had to make only one mistake and she was immediately labeled as promiscuous. Then every other man on the premises either smirks behind your back, or treats your thigh as an extension of the arm on his chair.

Diana groaned as she came to a halt at yet another red light. In twenty minutes she hadn't covered more than a couple of miles. She opened the glove compartment on the passenger side and fumbled in the dark for a cassette. She found one and pressed it into the slot, hoping it would be Pavarotti, only to be greeted by the strident tones of Gloria Gaynor assuring her, "I will survive." She smiled and thought about Daniel as the light changed to green.

She and Daniel had majored in economics at Bristol University in the early 1980s, friends but never lovers. Then Daniel met Rachael, who had arrived a year after them, and from that moment he had never looked at another woman. They married the day he graduated, and after they returned from their honeymoon Daniel took over the management of his father's farm in Bedfordshire. Three children had followed in quick succession, and Diana had been proud when she was asked to be godmother to Sophie, the eldest. Daniel and Rachael had now been married for twelve years, and Diana felt confident that they wouldnt be disappointing *their* parents with any suggestion of a divorce. Although they were convinced that she led an exciting and fulfilling life, Diana often envied their gentle and uncomplicated existence.

She was regularly asked to spend the weekend with them in the country, but for every two or three invitations Daniel issued, she only accepted one—not because she wouldnt have liked to join them more often, but because since her divorce she had no desire to take advantage of their hospitality.

Although she enjoyed her work, it had been a bloody week. The two contracts had fallen through, James had been dropped from the school soccer team, and Caroline had never stopped telling her that her father didnt mind her watching television when she ought to be doing her homework.

Another traffic light changed to red.

It took Diana nearly an hour to travel the seven miles out of the city, and when she reached the first two-lane highway, she glanced up at the A1 sign, more out of habit than to seek guidance, because she knew every yard of the road from her office to the farm. She tried to increase her speed, but it was quite impossible, as both lanes remained obstinately crowded.

"Damn."

She had forgotten to get them a present, even a decent bottle of Bordeaux. "Damn," she repeated: Daniel and Rachael always did the giving. She began to wonder if she could pick something up on the way, then remembered there was nothing but service stations between here and the farm. She couldn't turn up with yet another box of chocolates they'd never eat. When she reached the traffic circle that led onto the A1, she managed to push the car over fifty for the first time. She began to relax, allowing her mind to drift with the music.

There was no warning. Although she immediately slammed her foot on the brakes, it was already too late. There was a dull thump from the front bumper, and a slight shudder rocked the car.

A small black creature had shot across her path, and despite her quick reactions, she hadn't been able to avoid hitting it. Diana swung onto the hard shoulder and screeched to a halt, wondering if the animal could possibly have survived. She reversed slowly back to the spot where she thought she had hit it as the traffic roared past her.

And then she saw it, lying on the grass verge—a cat that had crossed the road for the tenth time. She stepped out of the car and walked toward the lifeless body. Suddenly Diana felt sick. She had two cats of her own, and she knew she would never be able to tell the children what she had done. She picked up the dead animal and laid it gently in the ditch by the roadside.

"Im so sorry," she said, feeling a little silly. She gave it one last look before walking back to her car. Ironically, she had chosen the Audi for its safety features.

She climbed back into the car and switched on the ignition to find Gloria Gaynor still belting out her opinion of men. She turned her off and tried to stop thinking about the cat as she waited for a gap in the traffic large enough to allow her to ease her way back into the slow lane. She eventually succeeded but was still unable to erase the dead cat from her mind.

Diana had accelerated up to fifty again when she suddenly became aware of a pair of headlights shining through her rear windshield. She put up her arm and waved in her rearview mirror, but the lights continued to dazzle her. She slowed down to allow the vehicle to pass, but the driver showed no interest in doing so. Diana began to wonder if there was something wrong with her car. Was one of her lights not working? Was the exhaust billowing smoke? Was . . . ?

She decided to speed up and put some distance between herself and the vehicle behind, but it remained within a few yards of her bumper. She tried to snatch a look at the driver in her rearview mirror, but it was hard to see much in the harshness of the lights. As her eyes became more accustomed to the glare, she could make out the silhouette of a large black van bearing down on her, and what looked like a young man behind the wheel. He seemed to be waving at her.

Diana slowed down again as she approached the next traffic circle, giving him every chance to overtake her in the outside lane, but once again he didnt take the opportunity and just sat on her bumper, his headlights still undimmed. She waited for a small gap in the traffic coming from her right. When one appeared she slammed her foot on the accelerator, shot across the roundabout, and sped on up the A1.

She was rid of him at last. She was just beginning to relax and to think about Sophie, who always waited up so that she could read to her, when suddenly those high headlights were glaring through her rear windshield and blinding her once again. If anything, they were even closer to her than before.

She slowed down, he slowed down. She accelerated, he accelerated. She tried to think what she could do next, and began waving frantically at passing motorists as they sped by, but they remained oblivious to her predicament. She tried to think of other ways she might alert someone, and suddenly recalled that when she had joined the board of the company they had suggested she have a car phone installed. Diana had decided it could wait until the car went in for its next service, which should have been two weeks ago.

She brushed her hand across her forehead and removed a film of perspiration, thought for a moment, then maneuvered her car into the fast lane. The van swung across after her and hovered so close to her bumper that she became fearful that if she so much as touched her brakes she might unwittingly cause an enormous pile-up.

Diana took the car up to ninety, but the van wouldn't be shaken off. She pushed her foot further down on the accelerator and touched a hundred, but it still remained less than a car's length behind.

She flicked her headlights onto high, turned on her hazard lights, and blasted her horn at anyone who dared to remain in her path. She could only hope that the police might see her, wave her onto the hard shoulder, and book her for speeding. A fine would be infinitely preferable to a crash with a young tearaway, she thought, as the Audi suburban passed 110 for the first time in its life. But the black van couldn't be shaken off.

Without warning, she swerved back into the middle lane and took her foot off the accelerator, causing the van to pull up with her, which gave her a chance to look at the driver for the first time. He was wearing a black leather jacket and pointing menacingly at her. She shook her fist at him and accelerated away, but he simply swung across behind her like an Olympic runner determined not to allow his rival to break clear.

And then she remembered, and felt sick for a second time that night. "Oh my God!" she shouted aloud in terror. In a flood, the details of the murder that had taken place on the same road a few months before came rushing back to her. A woman had been raped before having her throat cut with a knife with a serrated edge and dumped in a ditch. For weeks there had been signs posted on the A1 appealing to passing motorists to phone a certain number if they had any information that might assist the police with their investigation. The signs had now disappeared, but the police were still searching for the killer. Diana began to tremble as she remembered their warning to all women drivers: "Never stop on the freeway."

A few seconds later she saw a road sign she knew well. She had reached it far sooner than she had anticipated. In three miles she would have to leave the motorway for the side road that led to the farm. She began to pray that if she took her usual turn, the black-jacketed man would continue up the A1 and she would finally be rid of him.

Diana decided that the time had come for her to speed him on his way. She swung back into the fast lane and once again put her foot down on the accelerator. She reached a hundred miles per hour for the second time as she sped past the two-mile sign. Her body was now covered in sweat, and the speedometer touched 110. She checked her rearview mirror, but he was still right behind her. She would have to pick the exact moment if she was to execute her plan successfully. With a mile to go, she began to look to her left, to be sure her timing would be perfect. She no longer needed to check in her mirror to know that he would still be there.

The next signpost showed three diagonal white lines, warning her that she ought to be on the inside lane if she intended to leave the freeway at the next junction. She kept the car in the outside lane at a hundred miles per hour until she spotted a large enough gap. Two white lines appeared by the roadside: Diana knew she would have only one chance to make her escape. As she passed the sign with a single white line on it, she suddenly swung across the road at ninety miles per hour, causing cars in the middle and inside lanes to throw on their brakes and blast out their angry opinions. But Diana didn't care what they thought of her, because she was now traveling down the side road to safety, and the black van was speeding on up the A1.

She laughed out loud with relief. To her right, she could see the steady flow of traffic on the motorway. But then her laugh turned to a scream as she saw the black van cut sharply across the freeway in front of a truck, mount the grass verge, and career onto the side road, swinging from side to side. It nearly drove over the edge and into a ditch but somehow managed to steady itself, ending up a few yards behind her, its lights once again glaring through her rear windshield.

When she reached the beginning of the side road, Diana turned left in the direction of the farm, frantically trying to work out what she should do next. The nearest town was about twelve miles away on the main road, and the farm was only seven, but five of those miles were down a winding unlit country lane. She checked her gas gauge. It was nearing empty, but there should still be enough in the tank for her to consider either option. There was less than a mile to go before she reached the turn, so she had only a minute in which to make up her mind.

With a hundred yards to go, she settled on the farm. Despite the unlit lane, she knew every twist and turn, and she felt confident that her pursuer wouldn't. Once she reached the farm she could be out of the car and inside the house long before he could catch her. In any case, once he saw the farmhouse, surely he would flee.

The minute was up. Diana touched the brakes and skidded into a country road illuminated only by the moon.

Diana banged the palms of her hands on the steering wheel. Had she made the wrong decision? She glanced up at her rearview mirror. Had he given up? Of course he hadn't. The back of a Land Rover loomed up in front of her. Diana slowed down, waiting for a corner she knew well, where the road widened slightly. She held her breath, crashed into third gear, and overtook. Would a head-on collision be preferable to a cut throat? She rounded the bend and saw an empty road ahead of her. Once again she pressed her foot down, this time man-

aging to put a clear seventy, perhaps even a hundred, yards between her and her pursuer, but this only offered her a few moments' respite. Before long the familiar headlights came bearing down on her once again.

With each bend Diana was able to gain a little time as the van continued to lurch from side to side, unfamiliar with the road, but she never managed a clear break of more than a few seconds. She checked the speedometer. From the turnoff on the main road to the farm was just over five miles, and she must have covered about two by now. She began to watch each tenth of a mile clicking up, terrified at the thought of the van overtaking her and forcing her into the ditch. She stuck determinedly to the center of the road.

Another mile passed, and still he clung to her. Suddenly she saw a car coming toward her. She switched her headlights to full and pressed on the horn. The other car retaliated by mimicking her actions, which caused her to slow down and brush against the hedgerow as they shot past each other. She checked the speedometer once again. Only two miles to go.

Diana would slow down and then speed up at each familiar bend in the road, making sure the van was never given enough room to pull up with her. She tried to concentrate on what she should do once the farmhouse came into sight. She reckoned that the drive leading up to the house must be about half a mile long. It was full of potholes and bumps that Daniel had often explained he couldnt afford to have repaired. But at least it was only wide enough for one car.

The gate to the driveway was usually left open for her, though on the odd rare occasion Daniel had forgotten, and she'd had to get out of the car and open it for herself. She couldn't risk that tonight. If the gate was closed, she would have to travel on to the next town and stop outside the Crimson Kipper, which was always crowded at this time on a Friday night, or, if she could find it, at the steps of the local police station. She checked her gas gauge again. It was now touching red. "Oh my God," she said, realizing she might not have enough gas to reach the town.

She could only pray that Daniel had remembered to leave the gate open.

She swerved out of the next bend and speeded up, but once again she managed to gain only a few yards, and she knew that within seconds he would be back in place. He was. For the next few hundred yards they remained within feet of each other, and she felt certain he had to run into the back of her. She didn't once dare to touch her brakes—if they crashed in that lane, far from any help, she would have no hope of getting away from him.

She checked her speedometer. A mile to go.

"The gate must be open. It *must* be open," she prayed. As she swung around the next bend, she could make out the outline of the farmhouse in the distance. She almost screamed with relief when she saw that the lights were on in the downstairs rooms.

She shouted, "Thank God!" then remembered the gate again, and changed her plea to "Dear God, let it be open." She would know what needed to be done as soon as she came around the last bend. "Let it be open, just this once," she pleaded. "Ill never ask for anything again, ever." She swung round the final bend only inches ahead of the black van. "Please, please, please." And then she saw the gate.

It was open.

Her clothes were now drenched in sweat. She slowed down, wrenched the transmission into second, and threw the car between the gap and into the bumpy driveway, hitting the gatepost on her right-hand side as she careered on up toward the house. The van didn't hesitate to follow her, and was still only inches behind as she straightened out. Diana

kept her hand pressed down on the horn as the car bounced and lurched over the mounds and potholes.

Flocks of startled crows flapped out of overhanging branches, screeching as they shot into the air. Diana began screaming, “Daniel! Daniel!” Two hundred yards ahead of her, the porch light went on.

Her headlights were now shining onto the front of the house, and her hand was still pressed on the horn. With a hundred yards to go, she spotted Daniel coming out of the front door, but she didnt slow down, and neither did the van behind her. With fifty yards to go she began flashing her lights at Daniel. She could now make out the puzzled, anxious expression on his face.

With thirty yards to go she threw on her brakes. The heavy car skidded across the gravel in front of the house, coming to a halt in the flower bed just below the kitchen window. She heard the screech of brakes behind her. The leather-jacketed man, unfamiliar with the terrain, had been unable to react quickly enough, and as soon as his wheels touched the graveled forecourt he began to skid out of control. A second later the van came crashing into the back of her car, slamming it against the wall of the house and shattering the glass in the kitchen window.

Diana leaped out of the car screaming, “Daniel! Get a gun, get a gun!” She pointed back at the van. “That bastard’s been chasing me for the last twenty miles!”

The man jumped out of the van and began limping toward them. Diana ran into the house. Daniel followed and grabbed a shotgun, normally reserved for rabbits, that was leaning against the wall. He ran back outside to face the unwelcome visitor, who had come to a halt by the back of Diana’s Audi.

Daniel raised the shotgun to his shoulder and stared straight at him. “Don’t move or I’ll shoot,” he said calmly. And then he remembered that the gun wasn’t loaded. Diana ducked back out of the house but remained several yards behind him.

“Not me! Not me!” shouted the leather-jacketed youth, as Rachael appeared in the doorway.

“What’s going on?” she asked nervously.

“Call the police,” was all Daniel said, and his wife quickly disappeared back into the house.

Daniel advanced toward the terrified-looking young man, the gun aimed squarely at his chest.

“Not me! Not me!” he shouted again, pointing at the Audi. “He’s in the car!” He quickly turned to face Diana. “I saw him get in when you were parked on the hard shoulder. What else could I have done? You just wouldn’t pull over.”

Daniel advanced cautiously toward the rear door of the car and ordered the young man to open it slowly, while he kept the gun aimed at his chest.

The youth opened the door and quickly took a pace backward. The three of them stared down at a man crouched on the floor of the car. In his right hand he held a long-bladed knife with a serrated edge. Daniel swung the barrel of the gun down to point at him but said nothing.

The sound of a police siren could just be heard in the distance.

CHEAP AT HALF THE PRICE

WOMEN ARE NATURALLY SUPERIOR to men, and Consuela Rosenheim was no exception.

Victor Rosenheim, an American banker, was Consuela's third husband, and the gossip columns on both sides of the Atlantic were suggesting that, like a chain smoker with cigarettes, the former Colombian model was already searching for her next spouse before she had extracted the last gasp from the old one. Her first two husbands—one an Arab, the other a Jew (Consuela showed no racial prejudice when it came to signing marriage contracts)—had not quite left her in a position that would guarantee her financial security once her natural beauty had faded. But two more divorce settlements would sort that out. With this in mind, Consuela estimated that she only had another five years before the final vow must be taken.

The Rosenheims flew into London from their home in New York—or, to be more accurate, from their homes in New York. Consuela had traveled to the airport by chauffeur-driven car from their house in the Hamptons, while her husband had been taken from his Wall Street office in a second chauffeur-driven car. They met in the Concorde lounge at JFK. When they had landed at Heathrow another limousine transported them to the Ritz, where they were escorted to their usual suite without any suggestion of having to sign forms or register.

The purpose of their trip was twofold. Mr. Rosenheim was hoping to take over a small merchant bank that had not benefited from the recession, while Mrs. Rosenheim intended to occupy her time looking for a suitable birthday present—for herself. Despite considerable research I have been unable to discover exactly which birthday Consuela would officially be celebrating.

After a sleepless night induced by jet lag, Victor Rosenheim was whisked away to an early-morning meeting in the City, while Consuela remained in bed toying with her breakfast. She managed one piece of thin unbuttered toast and a stab at a boiled egg.

Once the breakfast tray had been removed, Consuela made a couple of phone calls to confirm luncheon dates for the two days she would be in London. She then disappeared into the bathroom.

Fifty minutes later she emerged from her suite dressed in a pink Olaganie suit with a dark blue collar, her fair hair bouncing on her shoulders. Few of the men she passed between the elevator and the revolving doors failed to turn their heads, so Consuela judged that the previous fifty minutes had not been wasted. She stepped out of the hotel and into the morning sun to begin her search for the birthday present.

Consuela began her quest in New Bond Street. As in the past, she had no intention of straying more than a few blocks north, south, east, or west from that comforting landmark, while a chauffeur-driven car hovered a few yards behind her.

She spent some time in Asprey's considering the latest slimline watches, a gold statue of a tiger with jade eyes, and a Fabergé egg, before moving on to Cartier, where she dismissed a crested silver salver, a platinum watch, and a Louis XIV longcase clock. From there she walked another few yards to Tiffany's, which, despite a determined salesman who showed her almost everything the shop had to offer, she still left empty-handed.

Consuela stood on the pavement and checked her watch. It was 12:52, and she had to accept that it had been a fruitless morning. She instructed her chauffeur to drive her to Harry's Bar, where she found Mrs. Stavros Kleanthis waiting for her at their usual table. Consuela greeted her friend with a kiss on both cheeks, and took the seat opposite her.

Mrs. Kleanthis, the wife of a not unknown shipowner—the Greeks preferring one wife and several liaisons—had for the last few minutes been concentrating her attention on the menu to be sure that the restaurant served the few dishes that her latest diet would permit. Between them the two women had read every book that had reached number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list that included the words "youth," "orgasm," "slimming," "fitness," or "immortality" in its title.

"How's Victor?" asked Maria, once she and Consuela had ordered their meals.

Consuela paused to consider her response, and decided on the truth.

"Fast reaching his sell-by date," she replied. "And Stavros?'

"Well past his, I'm afraid," said Maria. "But as I have neither your looks nor your figure, not to mention the fact that I have three teenage children, I don't suppose I'll be returning to the market to select the latest brand."

Consuela smiled as a salade niçoise was placed in front of her.

"So, what brings you to London—other than to have lunch with an old friend?" asked Maria.

"Victor has his eye on another bank," replied Consuela, as if she were discussing a child who collected stamps. "And I'm in search of a suitable birthday present."

"And what are you expecting Victor to come up with this time?" asked Maria. "A house in the country? A thoroughbred racehorse? Or perhaps your own Learjet?"

"None of the above," said Consuela, placing her fork by the half-finished salad. "I need something that can't be bargained over at a future date, so my gift must be one that any court, in any state, will acknowledge is unquestionably mine."

"Have you found anything appropriate yet?" asked Maria.

"Not yet," admitted Consuela. "Asprey's yielded nothing of interest, Cartier's cupboard was almost bare, and the only attractive thing in Tiffany's was the salesman, who was undoubtedly penniless. I shall have to continue my search this afternoon."

The salad plates were deftly removed by a waiter whom Maria considered far too young and far too thin. Another waiter with the same problem poured them both a cup of fresh decaffeinated coffee. Consuela refused the proffered cream and sugar, though her companion was not quite so disciplined.

The two ladies grumbled on about the sacrifices they were having to make because of the recession until they were the only diners left in the room. At this point a fatter waiter presented them with the bill—an extraordinarily long ledger considering that neither of them had ordered a second course, or had requested more than Evian from the wine waiter.

On the pavement of South Audley Street they kissed again on both cheeks before going their separate ways, one to the east and the other to the west.

Consuela climbed into the back of her chauffeur-driven car in order to be returned to New Bond Street, a distance of no more than half a mile.

Once she was back on familiar territory, she began to work her way steadily down the other side of the street, stopping at Bentley's, where it appeared that they hadn't sold anything since last year, and moving rapidly on to Adler, who seemed to be suffering from much the same problem. She cursed the recession once again, and blamed it all on Bill Clinton, who Victor had assured her was the cause of most of the world's current problems.

Consuela was beginning to despair of finding anything worthwhile in Bond Street, and reluctantly began her journey back toward the Ritz, feeling she might even have to consider an expedition to Knightsbridge the following day, when she came to a sudden halt outside the House of Graff. Consuela could not recall the shop from her last visit to London some six months before, and as she knew Bond Street better than she had ever known any of her three husbands, she concluded that it must be a new establishment.

She gazed at the stunning gems in their magnificent settings, heavily protected behind the bulletproof windows. When she reached the third window her mouth opened wide, like a newborn chick demanding to be fed. From that moment she knew that no further excursions would be necessary, for there, hanging around a slender marble neck, was a peerless diamond-and-ruby necklace. She felt that she had seen the magnificent piece of jewelry somewhere before, but she quickly dismissed the thought from her mind and continued to study the exquisitely set rubies surrounded by perfectly cut diamonds, making up a necklace of unparalleled beauty. Without giving a moment's thought to how much the object might cost, Consuela walked slowly toward the thick glass door at the entrance to the shop, and pressed a discreet ivory button on the wall. The House of Graff obviously had no interest in passing trade.

The door was unlocked by a security officer who needed no more than a glance at Mrs. Rosenheim to know that he should usher her quickly through to the inner portals, where a second door was opened and Consuela came face to face with a tall, imposing man in a long black coat and pinstriped trousers.

"Good afternoon, madam," he said, bowing slightly. Consuela noticed that he surreptitiously admired her rings as he did so. "Can I be of assistance?"

Although the room was full of treasures that might in normal circumstances have deserved hours of her attention, Consuela's mind was focused on only one object.

"Yes. I would like to study more closely the diamond-and-ruby necklace on display in the third window."

"Certainly, madam," the manager replied, pulling out a chair for his customer. He nodded almost imperceptibly to an assistant, who silently walked over to the window, unlocked a little door, and extracted the necklace. The manager slipped behind the counter and pressed a concealed button. Four floors above, a slight burr sounded in the private office of Mr. Laurence Graff, warning the proprietor that a customer had inquired about a particularly expensive item, and that he might wish to deal with them personally.

Laurence Graff glanced up at the television screen on the wall to his left, which showed him what was taking place on the ground floor.

"Ah," he said, once he saw the lady in the pink suit seated at the Louis XIV table. "Mrs. Consuela Rosenheim, if Im not mistaken." Just as the Speaker of the House of Commons

can identify every one of its 650 members, so Laurence Graff recognized the 650 customers who might be able to afford the most extravagant of his treasures. He quickly stepped from behind his desk, walked out of his office, and took the waiting elevator to the ground floor.

Meanwhile, the manager had laid out a black velvet cloth on the table in front of Mrs. Rosenheim, and the assistant placed the necklace delicately on top of it. Consuela stared down at the object of her desire, mesmerized.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Rosenheim," said Laurence Graff as he stepped out of the elevator and walked across the thick pile carpet toward his would-be customer. "How nice to see you again."

He had in truth only seen her once before—at a shoulder-to-shoulder cocktail party in Manhattan. But after that, he could have spotted her at a hundred paces on a moving escalator.

"Good afternoon, Mr. . . . " Consuela hesitated, feeling unsure of herself for the first time that day.

"Laurence Graff," he said, offering his hand. "We met at Sotheby–Parke Bernet last year—a charity function in aid of the Red Cross, if I remember correctly."

"Of course," said Mrs. Rosenheim, unable to recall him, or the occasion.

Mr. Graff bowed reverently toward the diamond-and-ruby necklace.

"The Kanemarra heirloom," he purred, then paused, before taking the manager's place at the table. "Fashioned in 1936 by Silvio di Larchi," he continued. "All the rubies were extracted from a single mine in Burma, over a period of twenty years. The diamonds were purchased from De Beers by an Egyptian merchant who, after the necklace had been made for him, offered the unique piece to King Farouk—for services rendered. When the monarch married Princess Farida, he presented it to her on their wedding day, and she in return bore him four heirs, none of whom, alas, was destined to succeed to the throne." Graff looked up from one object of beauty and gazed on another.

"Since then it has passed through several hands before arriving at the House of Graff," continued the proprietor. "Its most recent owner was an actress, whose husband's oil wells unfortunately dried up."

The flicker of a smile crossed the face of Consuela Rosenheim as she finally recalled where she had previously seen the necklace.

"Quite magnificent," she said, giving it one final look. "I will be back," she added as she rose from her chair. Graff accompanied her to the door. Nine out of ten customers who make such a claim have no intention of returning, but he could always sense the tenth.

"May I ask the price?" Consuela asked indifferently as he held the door open for her.

"One million pounds, madam," Graff replied, as casually as if she had inquired about the cost of a plastic keyring at a seaside gift shop.

Once she had reached the sidewalk, Consuela dismissed her chauffeur. Her mind was now working at a speed that would have impressed her husband. She slipped across the street, calling first at the White House, then Yves Saint-Laurent, and finally at Chanel, emerging some two hours later with all the weapons she required for the battle that lay ahead. She did not arrive back at her suite at the Ritz until a few minutes before six.

Consuela was relieved to find that her husband had not yet returned from the bank. She used the time to take a long bath, and to contemplate how the trap should be set. Once she was dry and powdered, she dabbed a suggestion of a new scent on her throat, then slipped into some of her newly acquired clothes.

She was checking herself once again in the full-length mirror when Victor entered the room. He stopped on the spot, dropping his briefcase on the carpet. Consuela turned to face him.

"You look stunning," he declared, with the same look of desire she had lavished on the Kanemarra heirloom a few hours before.

"Thank you, darling," she replied. "And how did your day go?"

"A triumph. The takeover has been agreed, and at half the price it would have cost me only a year ago."

Consuela smiled. An unexpected bonus.

"Those of us who are still in possession of cash need have no fear of the recession," Victor added with satisfaction.

Over a quiet supper in the Ritz's dining room, Victor described to his wife in great detail what had taken place at the bank that day. During the occasional break in this monologue Consuela indulged her husband by remarking, "How clever of you, Victor," "How amazing," "How you managed it I will never understand." When he finally ordered a large brandy, lit a cigar, and leaned back in his chair, she began to run her elegantly stockinged right foot gently along the inside of his thigh. For the first time that evening, Victor stopped thinking about the takeover.

As they left the dining room and strolled toward the elevator, Victor placed an arm around his wife's slim waist. By the time the elevator had reached the sixth floor he had already taken off his jacket, and his hand had slipped a few inches further down. Consuela giggled. Long before they had reached the door of their suite, he had begun tugging off his tie.

When they entered the room, Consuela placed the Do Not Disturb sign on the outside doorknob. For the next few minutes Victor was transfixed to the spot as he watched his slim wife slowly remove each garment she had purchased that afternoon. He quickly pulled off his own clothes, and wished once again that he had carried out his New Year's resolution.

Forty minutes later, Victor lay exhausted on the bed. After a few moments of sighing, he began to snore. Consuela pulled the sheet over their naked bodies, but her eyes remained wide open. She was already going over the next step in her plan.

Victor awoke the following morning to discover his wife's hand gently stroking the inside of his leg. He rolled over to face her, the memory of the previous night still vivid in his mind. They made love a second time, something they had not done for as long as he could recall.

It was not until he stepped out of the shower that Victor remembered that it was his wife's birthday, and that he had promised to spend the morning with her selecting a gift. He only hoped that her eye had already settled on something she wanted, as he needed to spend most of the day closeted in the City with his lawyers, going over the offer document line by line.

"Happy birthday, darling," he said as he padded back into the bedroom. "By the way, did you have any luck finding a present?" he added as he scanned the front page of the *Financial Times*, which was already speculating on the possible takeover, describing it as a coup. A smile of satisfaction appeared on Victors face for the second time that morning.

"Yes, my darling," Consuela replied. "I did come across one little bauble that I rather liked. I just hope it isn't too expensive."

"And how much is this 'little bauble' ?" Victor asked. Consuela turned to face him. She was wearing only two garments, both of them black, and both of them remarkably skimpy.

Victor started to wonder if he still had the time, but then he remembered the lawyers, who had been up all night and would be waiting patiently for him at the bank.

"I didn't ask the price," Consuela replied. "You're so much cleverer than I am at that sort of thing," she added, as she slipped into a navy silk blouse.

Victor glanced at his watch. "How far away is it?" he asked.

"Just across the road, in Bond Street, my darling," Consuela replied. "I shouldn't have to delay you for too long." She knew exactly what was going through her husband's mind.

"Good. Then let's go and look at this little bauble without delay," he said as he buttoned his shirt.

While Victor finished dressing, Consuela, with the help of the *Financial Times*, skillfully guided the conversation back to his triumph of the previous day. She listened once more to the details of the takeover as they left the hotel and strolled up Bond Street together arm in arm.

"Probably saved myself several million," he told her yet again. Consuela smiled as she led him to the door of the House of Graff.

"Several million?" she gasped. "How clever you are, Victor."

The security guard quickly opened the door, and this time Consuela found that Mr. Graff was already standing by the table waiting for her. He bowed low, then turned to Victor. "May I offer my congratulations on your brilliant coup, Mr. Rosenheim." Victor smiled. "How may I help you?"

"My husband would like to see the Kanemarra heirloom," said Consuela, before Victor had a chance to reply.

"Of course, madam," said the proprietor. He stepped behind the table and spread out the black velvet cloth. Once again the assistant removed the magnificent necklace from its stand in the third window, and carefully laid it out on the center of the velvet cloth to show the jewels to their best advantage. Mr. Graff was about to embark on the piece's history, when Victor simply said, "How much is it?"

Mr. Graff raised his head. "This is no ordinary piece of jewelry. I feel. . . "

"How much?" repeated Victor.

"Its provenance alone warrants. . . "

"How much?"

"The sheer beauty, not to mention the craftsmanship involved. . . "

"How much?" asked Victor, his voice now rising.

"The word 'unique' would not be inappropriate."

"You may be right, but I still need to know how much it's going to cost me," said Victor, who was beginning to sound exasperated.

"One million pounds, sir," Graff said in an even tone, aware that he could not risk another superlative.

"I'll settle at half a million, no more," came back the immediate reply.

"I am sorry to say, sir," said Graff, "that with this particular piece, there is no room for bargaining."

"There's always room for bargaining, whatever one is selling," said Victor. "I repeat my offer. Half a million."

"I fear that in this case, sir. . . "

"I feel confident that you'll see things my way, given time," said Victor. "But I don't have that much time to spare this morning, so I'll write out a check for half a million, and leave *you* to decide whether you wish to cash it or not."

"I fear you are wasting your time, sir," said Graff. "I cannot let the Kanemarra heirloom go for less than one million."

Victor took a checkbook from his inside pocket, unscrewed the top of his fountain pen, and wrote out the words “Five hundred thousand pounds only” below the name of the bank that bore his name. His wife took a discreet pace backward.

Graff was about to repeat his previous comment when he glanced up and observed Mrs. Rosenheim silently pleading with him to accept the check.

A look of curiosity came over his face as Consuela continued her urgent mime.

Victor tore out the check and left it on the table. “I’ll give you twenty-four hours to decide,” he said. “We return to New York tomorrow morning—with or without the Kanemarra heirloom. It’s your decision.”

Graff left the check on the table as he accompanied Mr. and Mrs. Rosenheim to the front door and bowed them out onto Bond Street.

“You were brilliant, my darling,” said Consuela as the chauffeur opened the car door for his master.

“The bank,” Rosenheim instructed as he fell into the back seat. “You’ll have your little bauble, Consuela. He’ll cash the check before the twenty-four hours are up, of that I’m sure.” The chauffeur closed the back door, and the window purred down as Victor added with a smile, “Happy birthday, darling.”

Consuela returned his smile, and blew him a kiss as the car pulled out into the traffic and edged its way toward Piccadilly. The morning had not turned out quite as she had planned, because she felt unable to agree with her husband’s judgment—but then, she still had twenty-four hours to play with.

Consuela returned to the suite at the Ritz, undressed, took a shower, opened another bottle of perfume, and slowly began to change into the second outfit she had purchased the previous day. Before she left the room she turned to the commodities section of the *Financial Times*, and checked the price of green coffee.

She emerged from the Arlington Street entrance of the Ritz wearing a double-breasted navy blue Yves Saint-Laurent suit and a wide-brimmed red-and-white hat. Ignoring her chauffeur, she hailed a taxi, instructing the driver to take her to a small, discreet hotel in Knightsbridge. Fifteen minutes later she entered the foyer with her head bowed and, after giving the name of her host to the manager, was accompanied to a suite on the fourth floor. Her luncheon companion stood as she entered the room, walked forward, kissed her on both cheeks, and wished her a happy birthday.

After an intimate lunch, and an even more intimate hour spent in the adjoining room, Consuela’s companion listened to her request and, having first checked his watch, agreed to accompany her to Mayfair. He didn’t mention to her that he would have to be back in his office by four o’clock to take an important call from South America. Since the downfall of the Brazilian president, coffee prices had gone through the roof.

As the car traveled down Brompton Road, Consuela’s companion telephoned to check the latest spot price of green coffee in New York (only her skill in bed had managed to stop him from calling earlier). He was pleased to learn that it was up another two cents, but not as pleased as she was. Eleven minutes later, the car deposited them outside the House of Graff.

When they entered the shop together arm in arm, Mr. Graff didn’t so much as raise an eyebrow.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Carvalho,” he said. “I do hope that your estates yielded an abundant crop this year.”

Mr. Carvalho smiled and replied, "I cannot complain."

"And how may I assist you?" inquired the proprietor.

"We would like to see the diamond necklace in the third window," said Consuela, without a moment's hesitation.

"Of course, madam," said Graff, as if he were addressing a complete stranger.

Once again the black velvet cloth was laid out on the table, and once again the assistant placed the Kanemarra heirloom in its centre.

This time Mr. Graff was allowed to relate its history before Carvalho politely inquired after the price.

"One million pounds," said Graff.

After a moment's hesitation, Carvalho said, "Im willing to pay half a million."

"This is no ordinary piece of jewelry," replied the proprietor. "I feel. . . "

"Possibly not, but half a million is my best offer," said Carvalho.

"The sheer beauty, not to mention the craftsmanship involved. . . "

"Nevertheless, I am not willing to go above half a million."

"The word 'unique' would not be inappropriate."

"Half a million, and no more," insisted Carvalho. "I am sorry to say, sir," said Graff, "that with this particular piece there is no room for bargaining."

"There's always room for bargaining, whatever one is selling," the coffee grower insisted.

"I fear that is not true in this case, sir. You see. . . "

"I suspect you will come to your senses in time," said Carvalho. "But, regrettably, I do not have any time to spare this afternoon. I will write out a check for half a million pounds, and leave *you* to decide whether you wish to cash it."

Carvalho took a checkbook from his inside pocket, unscrewed the top of his fountain pen, and wrote out the words "Five hundred thousand pounds only." Consuela looked on silently.

Carvalho tore out the check and left it on the counter.

"I'll give you twenty-four hours to decide. I leave for Chicago on the early evening flight tomorrow. If the check has not been presented by the time I reach my office. . . "

Graff bowed his head slightly, and left the check on the table. He accompanied them to the door and bowed again when they stepped out onto the sidewalk.

"You were brilliant, my darling," said Consuela as the chauffeur opened the car door for his employer.

"The Exchange," said Carvalho. Turning back to face his mistress, he added, "You'll have your necklace before the day is out, of that I'm certain, my darling."

Consuela smiled and waved as the car disappeared in the direction of Piccadilly, and on this occasion she felt able to agree with her lover's judgment. Once the car had turned the corner, she slipped back into the House of Graff.

The proprietor smiled and handed over the smartly wrapped gift. He bowed low and simply said, "Happy birthday, Mrs. Rosenheim."

THE EXPERT WITNESS

‘Damn good drive,’ said Toby, as he watched his opponent’s ball sail through the air. ‘Must be every inch of 230, perhaps even 250 yards,’ he added, as he held up his hand to his forehead to shield his eyes from the sun, and continued to watch the ball bouncing down the middle of the fairway.

‘Thank you,’ said Harry.

‘What did you have for breakfast this morning, Harry? ’ Toby asked when the ball finally came to a halt.

‘A row with my wife,’ came back his opponent’s immediate reply. ‘She wanted me to go shopping with her this morning.’

‘I’d be tempted to get married if I thought it would improve my golf that much,’ said Toby as he addressed his ball. ‘Damn,’ he added a moment later, as he watched his feeble effort squirt towards the heavy rough no more than a hundred yards from where he stood.

Toby’s game did not improve on the back nine, and when they headed for the clubhouse just before lunch, he warned his opponent, ‘I shall have to take my revenge in court next week.’

‘I do hope not,’ said Harry, with a laugh.

‘Whys that?’ asked Toby as they entered the clubhouse.

‘Because Im appearing as an expert witness on your side,’ Harry replied as they sat down for lunch.

‘Funny,’ Toby said. ‘I could have sworn you were against me.’

Sir Toby Gray QC and Professor Harry Bamford were not always on the same side when they met up in court.

‘All manner of persons who have anything to do before My Lords the Queen’s Justices draw near and give your attendance.’ The Leeds Crown Court was now sitting. Mr Justice Fenton presided.

Sir Toby eyed the elderly judge. A decent and fair man, he considered, though his summings-up could be a trifle longwinded. Mr Justice Fenton nodded down from the bench.

Sir Toby rose from his place to open the defence case. ‘May it please Your Lordship, members of the jury, I am aware of the great responsibility that rests on my shoulders. To defend a man charged with murder can never be easy. It is made even more difficult when the victim is his wife, to whom he had been happily married for over twenty years. This the Crown has accepted, indeed formally admitted.

‘My task is not made any easier, m’lud,’ continued Sir Toby, ‘when all the circumstantial evidence, so adroitly presented by my learned friend Mr Rodgers in his opening speech yesterday, would on the face of it make the defendant appear guilty. However,’ said Sir Toby,

grasping the tapes of his black silk gown and turning to face the jury, 'I intend to call a witness whose reputation is beyond reproach. I am confident that he will leave you, members of the jury, with little choice but to return a verdict of not guilty. I call Professor Harold Bamford.'

A smartly dressed man, wearing a blue double-breasted suit, white shirt and a Yorkshire County Cricket Club tie, entered the courtroom and took his place in the witness box. He was presented with a copy of the New Testament, and read the oath with a confidence that would have left no member of the jury in any doubt that this wasnt his first appearance at a murder trial.

Sir Toby adjusted his gown as he stared across the courtroom at his golfing partner.

'Professor Bamford,' he said, as if he had never set eyes on the man before, 'in order to establish your expertise, it will be necessary to ask you some preliminary questions that may well embarrass you. But it is of overriding importance that I am able to show the jury the relevance of your qualifications as they affect this particular case.'

Harry nodded sternly.

'You were, Professor Bamford, educated at Leeds Grammar School,' said Sir Toby, glancing at the all-Yorkshire jury, 'from where you won an open scholarship to Magdalen College, Oxford, to read Law.'

Harry nodded again, and said, 'That is correct,' as Toby glanced back down at his brief – an unnecessary gesture, as he had often been over this routine with Harry before.

'But you did not take up that offer,' continued Sir Toby, 'preferring to spend your undergraduate days here in Leeds. Is that also correct? '

'Yes,' said Harry. This time the jury nodded along with him. Nothing more loyal or more proud than a Yorkshireman when it comes to things Yorkshire, thought Sir Toby with satisfaction.

'When you graduated from Leeds University, can you confirm for the record that you were awarded a first-class honours degree?'

'I was.'

'And were you then offered a place at Harvard University to study for a masters degree and thereafter for a doctorate?'

Harry bowed slightly and confirmed that he was. He wanted to say, 'Get on with it, Toby,' but he knew his old sparring partner was going to milk the next few moments for all they were worth.

'And for your Ph.D. thesis, did you choose the subject of handguns in relation to murder cases?'

'That is correct, Sir Toby.'

'Is it also true,' continued the distinguished QC, 'that when your thesis was presented to the examining board, it created such interest that it was published by the Harvard University Press, and is now prescribed reading for anyone specialising in forensic science?'

'It's kind of you to say so,' said Harry, giving Toby the cue for his next line.

'But *I* didnt say so,' said Sir Toby, rising to his full height and staring at the jury. 'Those were the words of none other than Judge Daniel Webster, a member of the Supreme Court of the United States. But allow me to move on. After leaving Harvard and returning to England, would it be accurate to say that Oxford University tried to tempt you once again, by offering you the first Chair of Forensic Science, but that you spurned them a second time, preferring to return to your alma mater, first as a senior lecturer, and later as a professor? Am I right, Professor Bamford?'

‘You are, Sir Toby,’ said Harry.

‘A post you have held for the past eleven years, despite the fact that several universities around the world have made you lucrative offers to leave your beloved Yorkshire and join them?’

At this point Mr Justice Fenton, who had also heard it all before, peered down and said, ‘I think I can say, Sir Toby, that you have established the fact that your witness is a pre-eminent expert in his chosen field. I wonder if we could now move on and deal with the case in hand.’

‘I am only too happy to do so, m’lud, especially after your generous words. It won’t be necessary to heap any more accolades on the good professor’s shoulders.’ Sir Toby would have loved to have told the judge that he had actually come to the end of his preliminary comments moments before he had been interrupted.

‘I will therefore, with your permission, m’lud, move on to the case before us, now that you feel I have established the credentials of this particular witness.’ He turned back to face the professor, with whom he exchanged a knowing wink.

‘Earlier in the case,’ continued Sir Toby, ‘my learned friend Mr Rodgers set out in detail the case for the prosecution, leaving no doubt that it rested on a single piece of evidence: namely, the smoking gun that never smoked’ – an expression Harry had heard his old friend use many times in the past, and was in no doubt he would use on many more occasions in the future.

‘I refer to the gun, covered in the defendant’s fingerprints, that was discovered near the body of his unfortunate wife, Mrs Valerie Richards. The prosecution went on to claim that after killing his wife, the defendant panicked and ran out of the house, leaving the firearm in the middle of the room.’ Sir Toby swung round to face the jury. ‘On this one, flimsy, piece of evidence – and flimsy I shall prove it to be – you, the jury, are being asked to convict a man for murder and place him behind bars for the rest of his life.’ He paused to allow the jury to take in the significance of his words.

‘So, now I return to you, Professor Bamford, and ask you as a pre-eminent expert in your field – to use m’lud’s description of your status – a series of questions.’ Harry realised the preamble was finally over, and that he would now be expected to live up to his reputation.

‘Let me start by asking you, Professor, is it your experience that after a murderer has shot his victim, he or she is likely to leave the murder weapon at the scene of the crime?’

‘No, Sir Toby, it is most unusual,’ replied Harry. ‘In nine cases out of ten where a handgun is involved, the weapon is never recovered, because the murderer makes sure that he or she disposes of the evidence.’

‘Quite so,’ said Sir Toby. ‘And in the one case out of ten where the gun is recovered, is it common to find fingerprints all over the murder weapon?’

‘Almost unknown,’ replied Harry. ‘Unless the murderer is a complete fool, or is actually caught in the act.’

‘The defendant may be many things,’ said Sir Toby, ‘but he is clearly not a fool. Like you, he was educated at Leeds Grammar School; and he was arrested not at the scene of the crime, but in the home of a friend on the other side of the city.’ Sir Toby omitted to add, as prosecuting counsel had pointed out several times in his opening statement, that the defendant was discovered in bed with his mistress, who turned out to be the only alibi he had.

‘Now, I’d like to turn to the gun itself, Professor. A Smith and Wesson K4217 B.’

‘It was actually a K4127 B,’ said Harry, correcting his old friend.

‘I bow to your superior knowledge,’ said Sir Toby, pleased with the effect his little mistake had made on the jury. ‘Now, returning to the handgun. The Home Office laboratory found the murder victim’s fingerprints on the weapon?’

‘They did, Sir Toby.’

‘And, as an expert, does this lead you to form any conclusions?’

‘Yes, it does. Mrs Richards’s prints were most prominent on the trigger and the butt of the gun, which causes me to believe that she was the last person to handle the weapon. Indeed, the physical evidence suggests that it was she who squeezed the trigger.’

‘I see,’ said Sir Toby. ‘But couldnt the gun have been placed in the hand of Mrs Richards by her murderer, in order to mislead the police?’

‘I would be willing to go along with that theory if the police had not also found Mr Richards’s prints on the trigger.’

‘I’m not sure I fully understand what youre getting at, Professor,’ said Sir Toby, fully understanding.

‘In almost every case I have been involved in, the first thing a murderer does is to remove his own fingerprints from the murder weapon before he considers placing it in the hand of the victim.’

‘I take your point. But correct me if I am wrong,’ said Sir Toby. ‘The gun was not found in the hand of the victim, but nine feet away from her body, which is where the prosecution claims it was dropped when the defendant fled in panic from his marital home. So, let me ask you, Professor Bamford: if someone committing suicide held a gun to their temple and pulled the trigger, where would you expect the gun to end up?’

‘Anywhere between six and ten feet from the body,’ Harry replied. ‘Its a common mistake – often made in poorly researched films and television programmes – for victims to be shown still holding onto the gun after they have shot themselves. Whereas what actually happens in the case of suicide is that the force of the gun’s recoil jerks it from the victim’s grip, propelling it several feet from the body. In thirty years of dealing with suicides involving guns, I have never once known a weapon to remain in the hand of the victim.’

‘So, in your opinion as an expert, Professor, Mrs Richards’s fingerprints and the position of the weapon would be more consistent with suicide than with murder.’

‘That is correct, Sir Toby.’

‘One final question, Professor,’ said the defence QC, tugging his lapels. ‘When you have given evidence for the defence in cases such as this in the past, what percentage of juries have returned a not guilty verdict?’

‘Mathematics was never my strong subject, Sir Toby, but twenty-one cases out of twenty-four ended in acquittal.’

Sir Toby turned slowly to face the jury. ‘Twenty-one cases out of twenty-four,’ he said, ‘ended in acquittal after you were called as an expert witness. I think that’s around 85 per cent, m’lud. No more questions.’

Toby caught up with Harry on the courtroom steps. He slapped his old friend on the back. ‘You played another blinder, Harry. I’m not surprised the Crown caved in after you’d given your evidence – I’ve never seen you in better form. Got to rush, I’ve a case starting at the Bailey tomorrow, so I’ll see you at the first hole, ten o’clock on Saturday. That is, if Valerie will allow it.’

‘You’ll be seeing me long before then,’ murmured the Professor, as Sir Toby jumped into a taxi.

Sir Toby glanced through his notes as he waited for the first witness. The case had begun badly. The prosecution had been able to present a stack of evidence against his client that he was in no position to refute. He wasnt looking forward to the cross-examination of a string of witnesses who would undoubtedly corroborate that evidence.

The judge on this occasion, Mr Justice Fairborough, nodded towards prosecuting counsel. Call your first witness, Mr Lennox.'

Mr Desmond Lennox QC rose slowly from his place. 'I am obliged, m'lud. I call Professor Harold Bamford.'

A surprised Sir Toby looked up from his notes to see his old friend heading confidently towards the witness box. The London jury looked quizzically at the man from Leeds.

Sir Toby had to admit that Mr Lennox established his expert witness's credentials rather well – without once referring to Leeds. Mr Lennox then proceeded to take Harry through a series of questions, which ended up making his client sound like a cross between Jack the Ripper and Dr Crippen.

Mr Lennox finally said, 'No more questions, m'lud,' and sat down with a smug expression on his face.

Mr Justice Fairborough looked down at Sir Toby and asked, 'Do you have any questions for this witness?'

'I most certainly do, m'lud,' said Toby, rising from his place. 'Professor Bamford,' he said, as if it were their first encounter, 'before I come to the case in hand, I think it would be fair to say that my learned friend Mr Lennox made great play of establishing your credentials as an expert witness. You will have to forgive me if I revisit that subject, and clear up one or two small details that puzzled me.'

'Certainly, Sir Toby,' said Harry.

'This first degree you took at . . . er, yes, at Leeds University. What subject was it that you studied?'

'Geography,' said Harry.

'How interesting. I wouldn't have thought that was an obvious preparation for someone who would go on to become an expert in handguns. However,' he continued, 'allow me to move on to your Ph.D., which was awarded by an American university. Can I ask if that degree is recognised by English universities?'

'No, Sir Toby, but . . . '

'Please confine yourself to answering the questions, Professor Bamford. For example, does Oxford or Cambridge University recognise your Ph.D.?'

'No, Sir Toby.'

'I see. And, as Mr Lennox was at pains to point out, this whole case may well rest on your credentials as an expert witness.'

Mr Justice Fairborough looked down at the defence counsel and frowned. 'It will be up to the jury to make that decision, based on the facts presented to them, Sir Toby.'

'I agree m'lud. I just wished to establish how much credence the members of the jury should place in the opinions of the Crown's expert witness.'

The judge frowned again.

'But if you feel I have made that point m'lud, I will move on,' said Sir Toby, turning back to face his old friend.

'You told the jury, Professor Bamford – as an expert – that in this particular case the victim couldn't have committed suicide, because the gun was found in his hand.'

'That is correct, Sir Toby. It's a common mistake – often made in poorly researched films and television programmes – for victims to be shown still holding onto the gun after they have shot themselves.'

'Yes, yes, Professor Bamford. We have already been entertained by your great knowledge of television soap operas, when my learned friend was examining you. At least we've found something you're an expert in. But I should like to return to the real world. Can I be clear about one thing, Professor Bamford: you are not suggesting even for a moment, I hope, that your evidence proves that the defendant placed the gun in her husband's hand. If that were so, you wouldn't be an expert, Professor Bamford, but a clairvoyant.'

'I made no such assumption, Sir Toby.'

'I'm grateful to have your support in that. But tell me, Professor Bamford: in your experience, have you ever come across a case in which the murderer placed the gun in the victim's hand, in order to try to suggest that the cause of death was suicide?'

Harry hesitated for a moment.

'Take your time, Professor Bamford. The rest of a woman's life may depend on your reply.'

'I have come across such cases in the past' – he hesitated again – 'on three occasions.'

'On three occasions?' repeated Sir Toby, trying to look surprised, despite the fact that he himself had appeared in all three cases.

'Yes, Sir Toby,' said Harry.

'And, in these three cases, did the jury return a verdict of not guilty?'

'No,' said Harry quietly.

'No?' repeated Sir Toby, facing the jury. 'In how many of the cases did the jury find the defendant not guilty?'

'In two of the cases.'

'And what happened in the third?' asked Sir Toby.

'The man was convicted of murder.'

'And sentenced . . . ? ' asked Sir Toby.

'To life imprisonment.'

'I think Id like to know a little bit more about that case, Professor Bamford.'

'Is this leading anywhere, Sir Toby?' asked Mr Justice Fairborough, staring down at the defence counsel.

'I suspect we are about to find out, m'lud,' said Sir Toby, turning back to the jury, whose eyes were now fixed on the expert witness. 'Professor Bamford, do let the court know the details of that particular case.'

'In that case, the Queen against Reynolds,' said Harry, 'Mr Reynolds served eleven years of his sentence before fresh evidence was produced to show that he couldn't have committed the crime. He was later pardoned.'

'I hope you'll forgive my next question, Professor Bamford, but a woman's reputation, not to mention her freedom, is at stake in this courtroom.' He paused, looked gravely at his old friend and said, 'Did you appear on behalf of the prosecution in that particular case?'

'I did, Sir Toby.'

'As an expert witness for the Crown?'

Harry nodded. 'Yes, Sir Toby.'

'And an innocent man was convicted for a crime that he did not commit, and ended up serving eleven years in prison?'

The newscaster moved on to say that the situation in Bosnia remained desperate, and that the UN was threatening dire consequences if Radovan Karadzic and the Serbs didnt come to an agreement with the other warring parties. Diana's mind began to drift—such a threat was hardly news any longer. She suspected that if she turned on the radio in a years time they would probably be repeating it word for word.

As her car crawled round Russell Square, she began to think about the weekend ahead. It had been over a year since John had told her that he had met another woman and wanted a divorce. She still wondered why, after seven years of marriage, she hadn't been more shocked—or at least angry—at his betrayal. Since her appointment as a director, she had to admit they had spent less and less time together. And perhaps she had become anesthetized by the fact that a third of the married couples in Britain were now divorced or separated. Her parents had been unable to hide their disappointment, but then they had been married for forty-two years.

The divorce had been amicable enough, as John, who earned less than she did—one of their problems, perhaps—had given in to most of her demands. She had kept the apartment in Putney, the Audi suburban, and the children, to whom John was allowed access one weekend in four. He would have picked them up from school earlier that afternoon, and, as usual, he'd return them to the apartment in Putney around seven on Sunday evening.

Diana would go to almost any lengths to avoid being left on her own in Putney when they weren't around, and although she regularly grumbled about being saddled with the responsibility of bringing up two children without a father, she missed them desperately the moment they were out of sight.

She hadn't taken a lover, and she didn't sleep around. None of the senior staff at the office had ever gone further than asking her out to lunch. Perhaps because only three of them were unmarried—and not without reason. The one person she might have considered having a relationship with had made it abundantly clear that he only wanted to spend the night with her, not the days.

In any case, Diana had decided long ago that if she was to be taken seriously as the company's first woman director, an office affair, however casual or short-lived, could only end in tears. Men are so vain, she thought. A woman had to make only one mistake and she was immediately labeled as promiscuous. Then every other man on the premises either smirks behind your back, or treats your thigh as an extension of the arm on his chair.

Diana groaned as she came to a halt at yet another red light. In twenty minutes she hadn't covered more than a couple of miles. She opened the glove compartment on the passenger side and fumbled in the dark for a cassette. She found one and pressed it into the slot, hoping it would be Pavarotti, only to be greeted by the strident tones of Gloria Gaynor assuring her, "I will survive." She smiled and thought about Daniel as the light changed to green.

She and Daniel had majored in economics at Bristol University in the early 1980s, friends but never lovers. Then Daniel met Rachael, who had arrived a year after them, and from that moment he had never looked at another woman. They married the day he graduated, and after they returned from their honeymoon Daniel took over the management of his father's farm in Bedfordshire. Three children had followed in quick succession, and Diana had been proud when she was asked to be godmother to Sophie, the eldest. Daniel and Rachael had now been married for twelve years, and Diana felt confident that they wouldnt be disappointing *their* parents with any suggestion of a divorce. Although they were convinced that she led an exciting and fulfilling life, Diana often envied their gentle and uncomplicated existence.

About the Author

Jeffrey Archer is one of the world's bestselling writers, having sold more than 120 million copies of his novels and short stories worldwide. He lives in London and Cambridge, England.

Credits

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