

ASSASSIN

Calder woke late, the flat was cool. He padded through to the main room and looked down on the other apartments. No one nowadays seemed to use curtains. The fat fool below still had the takeaway and the hi fi in the same position. The owner was constantly re positioning the equipment and there were signs of engineers' equipment in boxes. The add-on balcony housed a rusty barbecue and a pile of wholesale Becks' beers. Late some evenings (with his own lights out) Calder would sit with a glass of wine and look down on the fools re-arranging the equipment.

There was a sound from the corridor, the letter box- strange, the mail was in the lobby in locked mail boxes. The blue envelope he recognised. Hand made paper, not exactly scented but reeking with quality. He went to the office and brought back a small scanner which had the effect of an x-ray. Just paper, he opened the envelope. A short note- "need your services, will drop in soonest, Brynford". Not unexpected but why had Brynford-Jones eluded security and CCTV just to deliver a note- his spook traits from the old days?

There would be a call. A contact, another elimination. His other work; the true vocation of the other true vocation. He divided his time. He dressed: character is everything. Fawn chinos, grey roll top, deck shoes from Chicago. First some window shopping in Fitzrovia, then to Museum Street for the architectural prints, then across the road. He had not seen the great Court, the new addition but he had to see it despite the tourists. The "wrong" marble, pink if you would believe it- with the flying Stanstead roof. What a scenario! In spatial/temporal presentation.

An elegant muse in an elegant environment. He noted the take away tourists and the constant snappers. He slid away to the cast sculpture room to ease the intrusion. He left the tourist-infected museum and went back down Museum Street. Earlier he had made some arrangements, some nods and winks to various pieces but the prices were high and he was really showing the flag. The problem with dealers is that you had to know more than they do to get a good price. Knowledge-references is all-sweat it out in the provinces. If you must but that is time consuming. Fool a goodish dealer and obtain much more satisfaction.

Time for the colour pigments. The shop- should be a house- dated from the 1840s and possibly the stock. He ordered several- umber, lazuli, cerulean, both base earth and chemical compounds. He would mix them himself with modern chemicals but the base power could only be obtained here. Leaving, with the small packets, he felt as if a 100 years' ago he had stocked up with laudanum and some variations for one's lady of the night.

He retreated to the Museum Tavern. Unchanged for 100 years now in the awful American guides as undiscovered and original. Very little seating. He perched on a stool. He unwrapped the volume on Rembrandt's prints, reminded himself on the technology of the etching process. The stool was uncomfortable but it gave him an interesting aspect for observation of the clients. Two Americans were engaged in mutual adulation. One possibly in his 70s was absorbing the adulation of a younger college type. Professor and son? Student fawning? Calder thought some work might be evident as one of them went downstairs. He slid off the stool and followed. The

American professor acted as if the ship was in a squall, grasping the rails as if terrified of the motion. Calder did the half nelson and trousered the bulging wallet. He rammed the body to the WC and gave him enough lump to put him out. He washed his hands and adjusted his hair. He returned to the bar and went back to his page.

The younger American became more agitated, gesticulating to the barman. Another pint, annoying the regulars. From his vantage point, Calder was watching a movie. In an earlier time, Hogarth could have had his stool and etched the gin palace. The younger American lurched to the top of the stairs descending to the WC. Calder pretended to check a reference and then swept out.

The American stumbled about shouting all the ineffective insults he could to the barman who threw him out. The locals returned to their broadsheets and catalogues.

Calder entered a small hotel bar, ordered a gin and tonic and retreated to the mens' room. With surgical gloves, he separated the plastic and cash. The rest in a plastic bag. Later, walking back across the South Bank, the plastic bag went into the river. The gloves to a bin. Past London Bridge, the long straight to the Tower. In and out near the Tower, the cobbles and the walkway. He climbed to the Tower and looked back on St. Katherine's Dock. A lot of lights on a Tall ship. Crossing the bridge, he was aware of the night illuminations. It was not yellow sodium of streetlights, nearer the white of halogen but with a bluish tinge. This was either a new light source or a subtle optical filter in floodlights. He weaved towards the centre of the bridge. The blue of the lighting merged with the approaching dawn. There was a residual orange from the restaurants to the South side.

Calder continued across Tooley Street, he was weaving but the traffic was light. He converted his unsteadiness to a balletic avoidance of the traffic lights his arms akimbo as if he could sail into the world to avoid red, amber and green.

Down two streets. The dawn catching the tops of loft conversions. The entrance to his apartment, the key, a red flash, a green flash, click, the door opened. The developers had planted a giant palm in the patio area. Awful green illuminated the triffid amongst the chrome and glass of the four-storey atrium of the lobby. He ascended the glass cage. The corridors were hot, a distinct difference to his cold flat. Another plastic device to gain entry. But there was crack of light, a beam of orange. He reacted: the gauze of the evening's drinking receding and he drew out the 9mm berretta. Not great in terms of accuracy not as good as a 38 for solid effect, but efficient in this sort of situation.

Inside he stepped out of the deck shoes and padded to the main room. He knew the boards squealed. The room was fully lit and Brynford-Jones was settle din the black sofa. He lowered the gun as Brynford-Jones held out his hand in a welcoming expression.

“Don't wave that thing about old man- could wake up the neighbours. They need to be at their desks in half an hour”

Calder moved to the glass table. Brynford-Jones had made an espresso and Calder took out the metal magazine and put the gun on the table. Brynford-Jones relaxed having seen the distance between the magazine and the automatic. He explained the

job to Calder. An assassination. Just a job. The method to be discussed. But the result to be expected.

They had worked together before. Calder did not like the “old boy’ approach but was amused by the fact that facilities, cash, keys and even the odd boat could be provided at the drop of a note in the safe house letter box. He found out later that the Italian restaurant he frequented was almost a staff canteen for the people that employed Brynford-Jones. In the future his veal valdistano could be credited to future contracts.

The hit would be s similar apartment. Funds would be available to cover the new apartment, the killing field, the removal of evidence and the relocation. After a while, and the facts noted, they talked.

“ I saw the Rembrandt show today, the late etchings the dark ones”.

B-J shifted slightly interested at last.

“The four states, the aging as the plates wore on?”

“Yes, the prints were so dark, under wiped, almost deliberately dark”

In another state, this would be a dining room, in this state the conversation dried as

B-J moved to a small metal case from under the glass coffee table.

“All the kit, old boy, nice new IR kit, the ‘scope should be straightforward, send us an invite for the next show, still got the ketch?”

“Down at Shad Thames, need some work on the hull but the studio is fine”.

The visitor made some clucking noises and left a paper with some details. Calder switched off the lights and embraced the dawn. It was the best tonic for him. He could observe the fools around him, make plans and evaluate action. The next painting would have to wait, at least he had the materials. The elimination of people he did not know, the cleaning up by unknown elements, the periods of silence, the sudden call to arms, was something he was used to. The sudden appearance of strange gadgets, new equipment. In the past he had acquired the technical side, and there was no need to understand the philosophy. People in his field did what was asked of them. He was buying time, dividing time. Each operation had a sense of closure, a period of service and of gain. A life ended, retreat and a new painting. A longer period, a set of endings, a new exhibition.

The next two days were occupied with observation and timings; he noted that a rubbish barge went under the Tower at two o'clock each morning. An amusing scenario if he had fewer resources. A tip of the body bag from the white van. The new apartment was rented for him, the usual envelopes passed and the usual arrangements made. In a similar way to his apartment it overlooked the others, but this time the intended was a floor below in clear view. By night, behind wooden slatted blinds, he assembled the new equipment. A long silenced barrel, an infrared night sight and a heavy tripod. A sensor was connected to a transmitter then to his

small laptop. Over the next few evenings he tested the kit. The intended would wander around their flat, drinking reading and watching TV slumped on a sofa. The laptop would give a remote view, the position of the sight beam and an option to fire.

By means of testing he fired the sensor a number of times, freezing the image and checking the area of hit. He could fire from anywhere which was what he intended. In another way this was a trial run, an experiment with the equipment but still there was a job to be done. He laid some charges in the kitchen linked them to the remote devices. The arrangement made, he walked to the wharf with the laptop in a scruffy leather portfolio.

From a corner table in a large modern bar, he regarded the Thames, always moving, navigation by lights, timing of flashes on the buoys, tide races, ebb and flow. He would be moving soon- in the old ketch. The whole studio. He would move between seasons and the employment. He would keep the apartment. It would be a base, somewhere to drink coffee after the visits to the exhibitions, somewhere to receive the blue envelopes and the instructions. He clambered onto the deck of the ketch. The tide was low. A metre of slime on the side of the dock. The metal ladder corroded beneath the waterline. He set up the gas stove for the hot water. The laptop in the aft cabin. He could see the new apartment through the porthole. He called up the image of the intended and the release command of the explosives. He would have a double alibi

He checked the canvasses in the hold he had proofed them against the damp but it was a cold place to work. He would be visited soon, cover of course, perfection in all things and location. With the coffee, he observed the two images, the end of a person and the end of the evidence. With the small tracker ball he cross-skirted the image. The man tired and with a drink, was slumped on the sofa. He made the connection. The glass shattered and the man's body contorted in death. As the shattered glass settled, the man did not show life. He moved to the remote detonator and fired the charges. He could see the explosion from the aft porthole. There was a severe flash and then some clouds of steam as a remote fire control kicked in, all the evidence removed.

He would have to buy some milk in the morning. The laptop in the leather portfolio. A tap on the roof and a foot fall on the ladder. His dealer the bringer of wealth, the consumer of his real work. More coffee and more arrangements to be made.

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