



# ROBERT GODDARD

HIS CLASSIC BESTSELLER

## Name to a Face



## About the Book

When Tim Harding agrees to do a friend a favour by bidding for an antique ring at an auction on his behalf, he is unaware of the secrets tied up with it - secrets that date back three hundred years.

But the ring is stolen before it can be sold, and a shocking murder follows. Harding is quickly thrown into a web of conspiracies surrounding the ring's origins. As he draws closer to the heart of the mystery, he comes across a young woman he is certain he recognizes, even though they have never met.

But as he goes in search of her identity, his life begins to fall apart. Somewhere, a perilous truth awaits him, coupled with a terrible realization: those who uncover that truth cannot be allowed to live ...

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NAME TO  
A FACE

Robert Goddard

## PROLOGUE

They will never ignore him again. They will never patronize him as they have too often of late. Nor will they ever forget him. They will not be allowed to. Fame and scholarly acclaim will see to that; fame - and a place in history. They will not be able to refuse him a fellowship now. They will offer him one. They will beg him to accept one. They will come crawling. And for all their slights and condescensions ... he will pay them back.

Godfrey Shillingstone smiles to himself and sips his brandy. He gazes contentedly into the dying fire that has warmed the room where he is taking his solitary ease and reflects that he could hardly be more obscurely located or more thoroughly disregarded than he currently is. But soon, very soon, that will change. His certainty on the point has made these past days of waiting bearable. Several more must elapse before he can be on his way. Those he can also bear, savouring as he does the thought of what awaits him in London. When his discovery becomes known, his circumstances will be transformed. His life will at long last become what it should be. His labours will be rewarded. His ambitions will be fulfilled.

He drains his glass and rises from his chair. The clock in the hall strikes the half-hour as he does so. The house is otherwise silent, save for the smouldering sputter of the logs in the grate. He moves the fire-guard into position and takes up his candle. There is no sense in waiting for his host and hostess to return from their engagement. They

will have nothing of the slightest interest to report. What passes for society at this intellectually impoverished toe-end of the kingdom holds no appeal for Godfrey Shillingstone, the soon-to-be-widely-celebrated antiquarian.

This, though, was no more the reason he declined to accompany the Revd Dr and Mrs Borlase to the Treweekes' supper party than the one he disingenuously offered up: a migrainous headache. The truth was quite otherwise, as he is happy to acknowledge, albeit only to himself. He recoiled from the notion of being separated by any appreciable distance from the great treasure he has recently laid hands upon. As far as the Borlases are concerned, it is a crate of geological specimens that he has lodged under lock and key in one of their outhouses, pending shipment to London, and he has no intention of disabusing them of the notion. Its true nature will be revealed when the time and place are right. Its true nature will be his to unveil when - and only when - he is ready to do so.

Shillingstone steps out into the hall, closes the drawing-room door behind him and turns towards the stairs. Then he stops. A breath of air before bed, perhaps? A reassuring tug on the chain securing the outhouse door? The idea is suddenly irresistibly appealing. The children and their maid are asleep. There is no one to remark his coming or going. He sets down the candle on the table beside the clock and heads towards the front door.

The night is breezy and mild; a fullish moon flits between fast-moving clouds. An owl hoots in the woods above the house as he pulls the front door softly shut behind him. The whisper of the wind in the trees makes for a soothing sound. The world about him is at peace. All is as it should be. He feels happier than he can ever recall feeling. And he suspects that in the weeks and months that lie ahead he will feel happier yet. He smiles to himself. He walks along to the corner of the house and on round the

circular lawn at the head of the drive towards the stable-yard.

He is halted abruptly before he is halfway to his destination by a noise that is neither bird nor breeze. His smile yields to a frown of puzzlement. There is the noise again: the creaking of a hinge somewhere in the yard ahead of him. And another noise follows it: the clink of a horse's harness. His puzzlement turns to anxiety. He strides hurriedly forwards.

The scene reveals itself as he passes through the gateway into the yard. He is pulled up short by his own incredulity. The door of the outhouse where he has stored his great treasure is open; a lamp burns within. A man he does not recognize - short, thin, meanly dressed - stands by a horse, clutching its bridle, in front of the open doorway. Two other figures can be seen beyond in the lamplight, stooping over an object Shillingstone *does* recognize, very clearly - all too clearly.

'Stop,' he cries, recovering himself and plunging across the yard. 'Stop at once.'

The man by the horse looks round at him, his face in shadow. The horse whinnies. The animal is wearing a pack-saddle. They have come prepared. There can be no doubt of their intentions. It is the fulfilment of a fear Shillingstone has considered irrational - until now. The two men within stand upright. One of them releases his hold on the rope fastening the crate and steps forward, letting the lamplight fall upon his face, deliberately, as it seems to Shillingstone in that moment, boldly, brazenly.

'Tozer.' The stupefaction audible in Shillingstone's voice is not to be wondered at. Jacob Tozer is the estate steward, who dwells with his wife and children in the cottage adjoining the yard. His assurance several days ago that there was only one key to the padlock he supplied to secure the outhouse was obviously a lie. He possessed a second

key all along and must even then have been planning to use it.

'Mr Shillingstone,' Tozer responds, his gaze open and unabashed, his tone drained of all his customary subservience. 'You ought to be abed at this hour.'

'Who are these people? What is the meaning of this?'

'The meaning's clear, I should've reckoned. As for my friends here, they're folk you took no heed of when you'd have been wise to. They've come to take back what you should never have formed the godless purpose to steal in the first place.'

'I stole nothing. I had formal sanction from Lord Godolphin to—'

'There's a mightier lord than the noble earl whose business we're about, Mr Shillingstone. And we mean to carry it through. You shouldn't have come out here.' Tozer shakes his head in evident regret. 'You really shouldn't.'

'Unhand my property this instant or I'll see you all hanged as common thieves.'

Tozer and his two mute companions do not move. Shillingstone glares at them each in turn, clinging to the hope that he can browbeat them into submission while stifling as best he can the growing conviction that for them there is no turning back.

'Give this up now, Tozer. Send these men away. Leave the crate where it is. Lock the door and give me the key. Then perhaps I'll consider saying nothing to Dr Borlase of your conduct tonight.'

'You'll *consider*?'

'Yes. I will.'

'No need to trouble yourself so far, Mr Shillingstone. No need at all.'

There is the faintest nod of Tozer's head in the direction of the man holding the horse. Then, too swiftly and too darkly in the jumbled shadows for Shillingstone to forestall, the man moves, in a darting lunge. The blade of a knife

gleams fleetingly in a shaft of lamplight, then strikes home, the force of the blow and the weight of his assailant's body behind it flinging Shillingstone against the open door of the outhouse. As it swings back behind him, he falls.

He is on the ground, the cobbles hard and moist beneath him, before the realization that he has been stabbed forms as an organized thought in his brain. And Tozer's hand, rough and hard-sinewed, has clamped his mouth shut before he can cry out for help. There is no pain yet, but something hot and liquid is flowing between his skin and his shirt, something he knows, though can barely believe, is his own blood.

'This is your doing,' rasps Tozer, staring down at him. 'Yours, not ours.'

Shillingstone tries to raise himself on his elbows, but already he is as weak as a kitten and cannot seem to draw breath. He is helpless in Tozer's grip, helpless to do other than look blearily up into the shadow-wreathed face above him. He does not know where the other two men are now. He scarcely knows where he is himself.

'What did you hope for from this, Mr Shillingstone? Fame and fortune? A page to yourself in the history books? It's not to be. No one will ever know what you tried to force the world to hear. Or why you had to die tonight at our hands. No one will care. You'll be forgotten. And so will we. But we don't mind. You do, but we don't. There's the difference between us. Your secret is safe with us. You have my word on that. My solemn word.'

Blood is filling Shillingstone's lung. Death is tracing its cold, mocking fingers around him. He cannot breathe. He cannot move. He cannot think. He can sense only loss - and encroaching darkness. The glory he so keenly anticipated is beyond his grasp. The life he aspired to is out of his reach. The world leaves him as he leaves the world - without a word.

Tozer lowers Shillingstone's head to the ground, closes the dead man's sightless eyes, crosses himself and stands up. He turns to his companions. 'Hurry,' he urges them, pointing to the crate. 'There's much to do.' Then he glances down at Shillingstone's body. 'More now than ever.'

# ONE

FEW OF JARDINIERA'S clients lived in Monaco, for the simple reason that few residents of the principality possessed a garden. The high-rise apartment blocks jostling for a tax-free footing on its expensive square kilometre of the Côte d'Azur left little room for the landscaped riots of greenery to be found in the grounds of villas to east and west.

An exception to this rule was, however, one of Jardiniera's best clients. Barney Tozer was in fact rather more than a client, having bought himself a slice of the company and with it the implicit right to prompt attention whenever he required it. He had also bought himself, at a price Tim Harding should only have been able to guess at but actually knew to the last eye-watering zero, the penthouse apartment in one of the most prestigious blocks in La Condamine. Thanks to the sheerness of the rock face against which the block had been built, the penthouse came complete with its own garden, perched at the level of the next road above, commanding a fine view of the yacht-crammed Port de Monaco and the sparkling blue vastness of the Mediterranean.

An electronically operated shutter-door set in the high stone rear wall of the garden gave access to a double garage, sparing its owner the need to squeeze his four-wheel-drive giant into the communal garage in the block's basement and allowing Harding to drive his Jardiniera truck in off the road after entering the four-digit code he

had been trusted with on the number-panel attached to the entryphone.

Harding was a well-built, broad-shouldered man in his late forties, brown hair bleached blond enough by the sun to camouflage the streaks of grey, skin so deeply tanned that his blue-grey eyes sparked brightly, frown-and smile-lines more or less equally pronounced on his evenly featured face. Gardening for a living had kept him physically fit, but something in his gaze, something wounded and wary, suggested that people had always been a greater mystery to him than plants.

He parked the truck on the hardstanding in front of the garage and climbed out into the cool, clear, light-filled air as the shutter-door completed its well-lubricated descent behind him with a reassuringly solid clunk. Harding was dressed for work, in jeans, boots and skiing jacket, although he happened to know that no soil would be turned or shrub pruned this morning. He happened to know, but was obliged to pretend he did not. Which was only one of the reasons for the discomfort he felt.

The morning was fine but chill. Winter and spring were still taking turns this early in the year, even on the Riviera, where the locals seemed to regard anything other than warm, settled weather as a personal affront. It was a quiet time for Jardiniera. Many of their clients were away. Most of the gardens they tended were ticking over gently, with little need of anything beyond routine maintenance. Harding knew he would be unable to plead pressure of work as an objection to doing what was going to be asked of him. He knew, in fact, that he would be unable to raise an objection of any kind. Even though some instinct he suspected he ought to heed told him he should.

Barney Tozer was on the terrace beyond the swimming pool, leaning back against the balustrade that guarded the drop to the roadway far below. He was in the middle of a phone conversation and did no more than raise a hand to

acknowledge Harding's arrival. This was no surprise. He was a man who spent so much time on the phone that his right shoulder was permanently lower than his left, giving his whole body a slightly skewed, misshapen appearance. He was about the same age as Harding, but did not look so well on it, a substantial paunch filling out the loose sweater he wore above baggy trousers and deck shoes, his thinning hair cropped short, a second chin wobbling beneath his jaw as he spoke. But the obese and gleaming watch lolling on his wrist hinted at the other kind of pounds he had acquired an excess of over the years, not to mention the euros, dollars, yen and Swiss francs. He was, Harding needed no reminding, a seriously wealthy man.

There was a vagueness about the source of this wealth. Barney Tozer's company, Starburst International, dealt in timeshare properties and the luxury end of the holiday market, but Harding had always found it difficult to believe that such business could yield profits on the scale its chairman and managing director's lifestyle suggested it did. Harding was no expert, of course. He knew that. And he knew there were other factors complicating his relationship with Barney. One of those was that he actually liked the guy. Barney was a generous, affable, garrulous, down-to-earth Cornishman who hardly fitted the tax-exile stereotype. He and Harding had become drinking buddies over the last couple of years - friends, for want of a better word, though there were in truth too many secrets between them to make it quite the right word.

Harding crossed the modest but manicured lawn and made his way slowly round the pool to where Tozer was standing, scanning the lemon trees and hibiscuses as he went to confirm that they were looking well, even though he knew his host would be unlikely to notice their condition unless they shed their leaves and died in front of him. The phone call was ending in murmured farewells. By the time Harding reached the terrace, it was over.

“Morning, Tim,” said Tozer, slipping the phone into his pocket and smiling broadly. ‘Hope you haven’t had to make too much of a detour to fit me in.’

‘Not at all. There’s a villa on Cap Martin I’m going to visit this afternoon. I might be in line for quite an ambitious landscaping job there.’

‘Your speciality.’

‘Well, it’s supposed to be.’ So it was, although general care and maintenance accounted for more and more of Jardiniera’s business. ‘Anyway, what can I do for you, Barney?’

‘Come inside. We can talk over coffee. Unless you fancy something stronger.’ Tozer winked over his shoulder at him as he headed towards the patio doors leading into the apartment.

‘Coffee’s fine, thanks.’

‘Have it your way.’

But Harding was not going to have it his way. That he already knew. Forewarned was not in this case forearmed.

‘Carol’s at the beautician,’ Tozer explained as they traversed the huge, modishly furnished lounge en route to the kitchen. ‘Seems to spend more and more time there. Says that’s a sign of middle age. Could be a sign of covering up for torrid sessions with a gym-freak toy boy, of course. How’s a husband to know?’

‘I expect she really is at the beautician, Barney.’

‘Yeah?’ Tozer smiled back at Harding. ‘You’re probably right.’

He was right. There was no doubt about it. The real doubt surrounded the question of whether Barney knew why Harding could be so certain on the point. And that doubt seemed to have been growing recently, to a degree guilt alone could not explain.

‘Black, no sugar?’ They had reached the kitchen, fitted out like the lounge in the very latest style and its most expensive version.

'Please.'

Tozer flicked a couple of switches above the slate worktop. A kettle roared into life. A grinder devoured a hopperful of beans. In less than a minute, the coffee was brewing. Tozer lit a cigarette during the interval, not troubling to offer one to Harding, a confirmed non-smoker.

'Planning something new for the garden, Barney?'

'Hardly. That's Carol's province.'

'I just thought—'

'I didn't ask you round to discuss bloody pot plants.'

'No. I guessed not.'

'I bet you did.' Tozer looked thoughtfully at him through a plume of cigarette smoke. 'What's old Barney up to now, hey? What bee has he got in his bonnet?' He chuckled, pushed down the plunger on the cafetière and poured their coffees, adding sugar to his own. 'Let's sit down.'

They settled round a corner of the large table at the far end of the room. Harding sipped his coffee, which was as excellent as ever - Colombian, he reckoned. Tozer flicked ash into a wooden ashtray the diameter of a dinner plate and glanced at his watch. There was in the movement the first hint of nervousness on his part.

'I'm ever so slightly pushed for time, actually, Tim. Tony's due in an hour. We're off on a 'forty-eight to Abu Dhabi.' Tony Whybrow, who had occasionally and somewhat half-heartedly joined them on their periodic boys' nights out, was Starburst's finance director and the only other representative of the company Harding had ever actually met. 'Work, work, work, hey?'

'But money, money, money.'

'Yeah. Anyway, like I say ...' Tozer took another puff at his cigarette and started on the coffee. 'Fact is, I need to ask you a favour.'

'Go ahead.'

'Thing is ... Have I ever mentioned my brother?'

Had he? Harding had asked himself exactly that question during the drive from Villefranche. 'Well, I know you have a brother, so ... either you or Carol ...'

'Humphrey. Humphrey and Barnabas, hey? Bloody stupid names. But Barney's OK. Suits me, so I've been told. As for Humphrey, I used to call him Humpty when we were children. He's five years older than me. I couldn't get my mouth round the sound, see? And then there was the nursery rhyme. So, I thought Humpty was ...' Tozer shrugged. 'Funny.'

'Where does Humphrey live?'

'Humph. That's what I settled for in the end. He's still stuck in Penzance.' Tozer's roots in west Cornwall had definitely been mentioned to Harding, more than once. 'Have you even been to Penzance, Tim? I can't remember if I've asked you.'

'Neither can I. But, yeah, I have. For what it's worth. A family holiday in Cornwall when I was ten. We stayed near Land's End. Sennen Cove. Must have gone through Penzance, but all I can recollect is a view of St Michael's Mount. Does that count?'

'Bet it rained a lot.'

'It did, as a matter of fact.'

'No surprise there.'

'So, this favour ... has to do with ... Humph?'

'Yeah. A narrow-minded misery-guts if ever there was one. But ...' Tozer gazed past Harding into some unfocused vision of his childhood. 'He is my flesh and blood.' His face creased into a rueful smile. 'Worse luck.'

'And ...'

'He's asked for my help. My ... personal help. That's some kind of world record, so I don't want to disappoint him. But it would mean I'd have to go to Penzance. Right away.'

'And you have business in Abu Dhabi?'

'Oh, that could be postponed. No, no. That's not the problem. It's a ... tax thing.' Tozer lowered his voice, as if, despite the fact that there was no one else in the apartment, he was worried about being overheard. 'I've used up my ninety-one days in the UK this fiscal year. I can't set foot in Penzance, or anywhere else in the old country, before April sixth. It's a no-no. An absolute no-can-do. But Humph'll just think I'm making an excuse if I turn him down because of that.'

'You will have to turn him down, though, won't you?'

'As it stands, yeah. But ... there's such a thing as cushioning the blow. What I really need ... is for someone to go in my place.' Tozer smiled cautiously at Harding. 'Know anyone who might be available?'

Harding returned the smile. 'You mean me?'

'It'll only take a few days. A week at most. I'll cover all your expenses. You can even bill me for your time at garden maintenance rates. It's the quietest time of the year for you anyway. Look on it as a second Cornish holiday. You might get better weather this time round.'

'I can't just drop everything and—'

'Come on. You're always singing young Luc's praises. I'll bet he could cope without you for a month, let alone a week.'

That much was undeniable. Luc could always be relied upon and would probably relish the extra responsibility. 'Well, maybe. But you haven't told me what Humph wants help *with* yet.'

'It's no big deal, believe me. It just needs ... handling properly.'

'Wouldn't Carol be a better choice?'

'She can't stick Humph at any price. And vice versa. It'd be better to turn him down flat than send Carol. But it has to be somebody I can trust, obviously. And you'd be surprised how few of my so-called friends I *do* trust. But

there is you, Tim.' Tozer stubbed out his cigarette and looked Harding in the eye. 'You should be flattered.'

'Well, I am, of course. But ...'

'I still haven't told you what's involved.' Tozer grinned. 'Have I?'

## TWO

'YOU'RE GOING, THEN?' said Carol, breaking the post-coital silence into which they had descended. Sex had failed to distract her for long from the subject of the strange mission Harding had agreed to undertake on her husband's behalf. It was in Harding's mind also as he lay in bed with her at his apartment in Villefranche late that afternoon. It could hardly not be.

Theoretically, of course, he could have joined Carol at the penthouse after Barney's departure for the Gulf. In some ways, it would have been more convenient, as it might often have been in the past, given the frequency of Barney's absences. But some scruple neither cared to put into words had always deterred them. The apartment in Villefranche was their territory. And they did not stray from it.

'I thought you might be able to talk your way out of it.'

'Not a chance.'

'How hard did you try?' Carol propped herself up on one elbow and squinted slightly as she stared at him. Her face was still faintly flushed from their exertions and her highlighted brown hair tousled, but the lubricious twinkle he had been pleased to notice in her eye earlier had turned to a steely gleam.

'As hard as I could in the circumstances. You know there was no way I could turn him down.'

'I suppose not.' Carol sighed and flopped back down on the pillow. 'And what *exactly* does he want you to do?'

'I've already told you.'

'Told me some of it, you mean. I want to hear the whole thing.'

'OK. His uncle - their uncle, Barney and Humph's - died just before Christmas.'

'I know. Uncle Gabriel. Lived in Penzance in a house full of junk.'

'Junk - or valuable antiques. Take your pick. The locals will be able to next week when the contents are auctioned. It appears Barney's uncle specified in his will that's how his possessions were to be disposed of. No bequests to relatives. No opportunity for them to help themselves to a memento of the old boy. Just ... everything to the highest bidder. Proceeds to charity ... or somesuch.'

'Nice.'

'There was a feud between him and Barney's dad. You know about this too?'

'Not really. Their dad died before I met Barney. And he doesn't say much about him. Or his mother. Anyway, what family doesn't have its feuds?'

The question reminded Harding how little he really knew about Carol. Not to mention how little *she* knew about *him*. Their affair was sustained by need and habit. Neither had ever used the dreaded L word and they were unlikely to start now. 'Well,' he pressed on, 'feud there was, over the usual sort of stuff. Gabriel was the younger brother. He never married. Barney's dad—'

'Arthur,' Carol interrupted matter-of-factly. 'His name was Arthur. And Barney's mum was called Rose.'

'Right. OK. Arthur and Rose. They started out their married life in Arthur's parents' house, which they took over completely when the old folks died. At that point, Gabriel asked Arthur for something their dad had supposedly promised him but hadn't actually left him in his will. Arthur didn't believe any such promise was made. He refused to hand it over, causing a lot of bad blood. And then

... it went missing. Stolen by Gabriel, according to Arthur, though Gabriel denied it. There was no proof he'd taken it. It was hardly the sort of thing Arthur could go to the police about. Result? They fell out big time. Never exchanged another word, at any rate not a civil one. Gabriel didn't even attend Arthur's funeral. Went on denying theft, perhaps because he didn't regard it as theft. But he *had* taken something. That's certain. Because Humphrey's spotted it among the lots to be auctioned.'

'And what is it?'

'Barney said he'd let Humph fill me in.'

'You mean you don't get to find out unless you go.'

'That's one way to look at it. Humphrey wants Barney to supply the cash to make sure he can buy back whatever it is, no matter what he has to bid for it. Humphrey's poor as a church mouse, apparently.'

'Poorer. You should see where he lives. Barney's tried to help him, but ... they're another pair of brothers who don't get on.' Carol rolled over and propped her chin on Harding's shoulder. She gazed at him, her brow furrowed in thought. 'Barney's told me nothing except he needs you to go to Penzance to sort something out with Humph for him. Why the secrecy, I'd like to know. I mean, why does some old argument about a family heirloom matter so much?'

'I'm not sure it does. Barney's happy enough to stump up the cash. He just wants me to nursemaid Humphrey during the auction and make sure he doesn't do anything stupid beforehand.'

'Such as?'

'Try to steal the thing back, I suppose.'

'Well, he's crazy enough for that. I wish you luck.'

Harding grinned. 'Thanks.'

'There's something funny about it all, though. Why's Barney so set on *you* going?'

'He said you can't abide Humphrey.'

She nodded ruefully. 'That's true.'

'And he said he could trust me.'

'Did he?' Carol closed her eyes. 'Oh shit.'

'Don't let it get to you.' Harding raised his head and kissed her. 'It's a good thing he does, you know.'

'Yeah.' She opened her eyes again. 'I know.'

'I'll go, make sure Humphrey's on his best behaviour, hold his hand at the auction, then leave him beaming over the spoils and jet straight back here.'

'Sounds easy.'

'No reason why it shouldn't be.'

'Maybe not. But ...' She chewed her lip as her mind dwelt on the evident mystery of her husband's thought processes. 'How did Barney react when you told him you'd been to Penzance in August 'ninety-nine?'

'He didn't bat an eyelid. But, then, why should he? It's just a coincidence that I paid my first visit to the town since childhood the same summer you floated into his life. It's not even a very big coincidence. Lots of people visited Penzance in August 'ninety-nine to see the eclipse. And it wasn't there he met you, anyway, was it?' As Harding knew, Carol had been running a café in the Isles of Scilly when she had first encountered Barney Tozer in the summer of 1999, with life-changing consequences. Meanwhile, Harding's wife, Polly, had been dying slowly of cancer. Their journey to Cornwall to witness the total eclipse on 11 August that year had been her last journey of any kind before the final decline. The day after the eclipse, they had taken a helicopter trip to the island of Tresco. But Carol's café had been on its larger neighbour, St Mary's. Coincidence stretched only so far.

'It's strange, though, isn't it?' Carol mused. 'The idea that you and I could have met then, in Cornwall, rather than four years later and a thousand miles away.'

'Not quite a thousand. And nearer five years than four.'

Carol sighed heavily. 'Do you have to be so literal?' She pushed back the sheet, sat up on the edge of the bed and stretched. 'I'm going to take a shower.'

Harding watched her cross the room, rubbing a muscle in her back as she went. He called to her as she reached the open doorway. 'Hey.'

She stopped and looked over her shoulder at him, frowning slightly. 'What?'

'You're beautiful, you know.'

'Oh yeah? All over? Or just in parts?'

'Do a few slow pirouettes and I'll give you a part-by-part assessment if you like.'

'Fool,' she said, laughing lightly as she headed on towards the bathroom with a sashay of her hips.

Harding stayed where he was, staring up at the ceiling, across which the lowering sun cast a golden triangle of light. He listened to the hiss and spatter of the shower and wondered if he had been right to deceive Carol as he had. It had been as much as anything an instinctive lie. To have told the truth would have raised too many questions openly between them. Why had he not mentioned the August 1999 trip to Barney? Why had Carol so evidently not mentioned it either? And why was she so bothered by the prospect of him going to Penzance now, at her husband's bidding?

Harding did not really know why he had held the information back. It had something to do with Carol's reaction the first time the subject had cropped up. It had disturbed her. There was no doubt about it. The coincidence - slight as it was - had troubled her. And it still did.

It also had something to do with Polly and his eagerness to suppress the active recollection of their final few years together. He would never have returned to the scene of their last holiday of his own volition. But it was a chance to come to terms with his past, to prove he could cope with

the memories the trip was bound to revive. He had moved to France to escape those memories. And he had succeeded. Now he would discover how complete his success really was.

## THREE

HARDING FLEW TO England two days later. Luc drove him to Nice Airport in time for the early-morning flight, assured him coping in his absence would be *'pas de problème'*, then roared away in the Jardiniera truck at a speed that suggested he for one would be enjoying the interlude.

Harding had not told his parents, siblings or any of his friends back home that he was going to be in the country. Already, for reasons he could not properly analyse, there was something faintly furtive, if not secretive, about the trip.

The flight was two hours, shorn to one on the clock by the change of time zones. But a coach ride to Reading, a long wait at the station and a train journey to the far end of the West of England main line swallowed most of the rest of the day. It was five o'clock on a dull and windless Friday afternoon when the train pulled into Penzance.

Harding had already adjusted by then to the thinness of the light, the altogether greyer tone of his homeland compared with the crystalline brilliance of the Côte d'Azur. He and Polly had driven down from Worcestershire, so there were no reminders of their trip in the manner of his arrival. But his first glimpse of St Michael's Mount out in the bay as the railway line curved to meet the shore a couple of miles short of Penzance was the first of what he knew would be many tugs at his memory.

They had stayed in a b. and b., which Harding was not sure he could find even if he wanted to. This time, with

Tozer covering his expenses, he was putting up at the Mount Prospect. It was a short taxi ride to the hotel's lofty perch up a narrow side street on the eastern fringe of the town. And there again, in the view from his room, was St Michael's Mount, afloat in the grey plane of the bay.

Unpacking took no more than a few minutes. He was travelling light, physically at any rate. He phoned Carol and they talked so warmly and casually that he could almost believe he had imagined her anxiety about the trip. She said she was missing him already, which could not really be true, given how irregular their assignments were. Barney was due back the following morning. She said nothing about missing him.

'Met Humph yet?'

'No. I'm going round there now.'

'Brace yourself. He's not what you'd call the sociable type.'

It was a warning Harding had already absorbed. He consulted the street map of Penzance he had bought at the station and set off.

On his way through reception, he spotted a copy of the local weekly paper, *The Cornishman*, lying on the counter. He took it into the deserted lounge and leafed through the property supplement to the auctions page. There it was, as he had anticipated, prominently advertised.

ISBISTER & SONS  
AUCTIONEERS AND VALUERS  
HOUSE CONTENTS SALE  
TUESDAY 21ST FEBRUARY - 10AM  
Viewing: Saturday 18th February 10am - 4pm and  
Sunday 19th February 12 Noon - 4pm  
At HEARTSEASE, POLWITHEN ROAD, PENZANCE  
We are favoured with instructions to SELL by  
AUCTION as above  
CHINA, GLASSWARE, JEWELLERY, BOOKS,

PAINTINGS, STAMPS, COINS, BANK NOTES,  
TOYS, MODELS, FURNITURE, LINEN AND  
GENERAL HOUSEHOLD EFFECTS

The summarized list of items filled the entire column. Gabriel Tozer had evidently been a formidable hoarder, accumulating more crockery, cutlery, wineglasses, clocks, watches, cufflinks and old books than any single man could plausibly need. The tin soldiers and 00-gauge train sets hinted at a childhood collecting mania which the first-day covers and Georgian guineas implied had been carried on into adulthood. But had he really wanted to give a mob of strangers the pick of his gramophone records and walking sticks and the run of his house while they made their choices and marked up their catalogues? The answer, baffling as it was, appeared to be yes.

It was dark by the time Harding left the hotel, and colder than he had expected. He turned up the collar of his coat, descended to the shore road that ran alongside the railway line and followed it through the fumes of sluggish traffic to the roundabout where it met the bypass at the eastern edge of town. The adjacent superstore was doing a brisk trade. The weekend was taking its customary British shape.

Beyond the roundabout lay an industrial estate and the heliport from which he and Polly had flown to Tresco. Wedged in among the warehouses was a jumble of stark, white-rendered, low-rise flats and maisonettes. A more dismal contrast with a penthouse in Monaco could hardly be conceived. Such were the widely different domiciles of the brothers Tozer.

Humphrey had a first-floor flat overlooking the heliport, reached by a flight of wooden stairs. There was a light showing through the tissue-thin curtains, but a response to Harding's stab at the doorbell was a long time coming.

The man who eventually opened the door was faintly recognizable as a relative of Barney Tozer, but only because Harding knew him to be a relative. Humphrey Tozer was several stones lighter than his brother, gauntly thin and grey-skinned, with lank, greasy hair and a sad, sullen gaze. He was wearing decrepit hornrimmed spectacles and a drab outfit of darned sweater, frayed shirt and trousers worn to a grubby sheen. His head twitched slightly to an irregular rhythm as he stared at Harding, breathing audibly and exuding a sharp, sour reek.

'Mr Tozer?' Harding ventured.

'I'm Tozer, yeah.' The voice was low and gruff and hesitant.

'Barney sent me.'

'Barney?'

'Your brother.'

Tozer's lip curled into a sneer. 'I didn't ask him to *send* someone.'

'He couldn't come himself.'

'Why not?'

'Tax problems.'

The sneer became a strange, twisted little smile. 'That's a good one.'

'Can I come in?'

'What for?'

'To talk. About the auction.'

Tozer contemplated the idea for ten or twelve slow seconds. Then he said, 'All right. Since you're here.'

Tozer led the way down a short hallway and into the lounge. It was a small room and would have been cramped if it had contained even a reasonable quantity of furniture. As it was, Humphrey Tozer's domestic comforts amounted to one armchair, a pouffe, a television, a table with two hard chairs and a bookcase of largely empty shelves. A clock stood on the mantelpiece above the unlit gas fire, but there were no ornaments and just one picture on the wall,

over the clock: a framed Constable print. A rumpled copy of *The Cornishman* lay on the table, next to a jumbled stack of what looked like several months' worth of the paper's back copies. It felt colder to Harding inside the flat than it had out. He doubted if refreshment, or even a seat, was likely to be offered him.

'Who are you, then?' Tozer asked, frowning at him from the middle of the room as Harding lingered in the doorway.

'A friend of Barney's. Tim Harding.'

'A friend? Not an employee? Not a ... dogsbody?'

'As it happens, I'm here to help.'

'How are you going to do that?'

'Barney's told me all about the auction and why you want to buy one of the lots.'

'All about it? I doubt that.'

'Enough, then. He's been in touch with the auctioneers and opened a credit account. We can bid whatever we need to.'

'We?'

'Like I said, I'm here to help.'

Tozer took a step towards Harding. His gaze narrowed. 'I might have known Barney would find some way of wriggling out of his responsibilities.'

'He's hardly doing that. He's effectively giving you a blank cheque.'

'Giving his old school chum Clive Isbister one, you mean. I asked Barney for more than money. I asked for his presence, here, in his home town. And even he'd have to admit I've never asked him for—' Tozer broke off and gave a contemptuous snort. 'I'm like the dog at the banquet, aren't I? I'm supposed to be grateful for whatever scrap gets tossed my way.'

'Look, Mr Tozer, I—'

'Don't want to be here? I'll bet you don't. Doing Barney a favour, are you? Or just doing what he tells you to do?'