



SNAPPED IN CORNWALL

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CHAPTER ONE

Life always seemed to catch Rose Trevelyan by surprise. She constantly told herself that now she had passed forty she might occasionally try to be a bit more organised: ever since her early twenties, when she wrongly considered herself to be a mature adult, nothing had gone to plan.

But no matter how prepared she had been, she could not have guessed at the consequences which arose out of a meeting later that day.

Another perfect day, she thought, as she gazed out of her window at the ever-changing view of which she could never tire. It was early but already the sun was rising higher in an unrelieved expanse of blue which held no traces of the thundery clouds which had rolled around the bay the day before. The much-needed rain had not

come. The sea shimmered and already Rose could feel the heat building up.

She squeezed a grapefruit and drank the juice while she made coffee and one slice of toast which she took outside to the wrought-iron bench. The crumbs she gave to the house sparrows who had nested in a hole in the masonry in the side of her shed.

At nine thirty she loaded her equipment into the back of the Mini, a car small enough to negotiate the narrow and awkward angle of the drive, then headed down the hill.

Crossing Newlyn Bridge she slowed at the bus stop to offer a neighbour a lift. She received a shake of the head and a mouthed 'No, thanks'.

Penzance was busy, far busier than it had been for many seasons, which was good for local trade, including her own. Yet it was always a relief when the tourists had gone home and things reverted to normal.

On the dual carriageway Rose accelerated, noticing the slow response to her foot on the pedal. The car needed what her father called a 'blow-out'; a long run, he claimed, was good for the engine. It was also time she had the Mini serviced.

Her destination was Gwithian. Rose turned off at the roundabout in Hayle and silently repeated the directions she had been given by her client. Mrs Milton's house was off the beaten track, but easier to find than she had been led to believe.

As she turned in through the gate Rose saw that the

cultured voice she had heard on the telephone was well suited to the property. Both exuded power and money. Rose would have preferred to be photographing or painting the scenery but the bills had to be paid.

She parked to the side of the house; Mrs Milton would not want a rusting yellow Mini in the forefront of the photographs. Seagulls wheeled silently in the air currents as she walked the thirty or so yards to the front door and the occasional chirrup of a cricket was the only sound to break the otherwise perfect silence. Heat rose from the drive and melting tar sucked at the soles of Rose's espadrilles. Her cotton shirt was damp between the shoulders.

From here, the sea was no more than a distant sparkle. A few stunted trees, bent to the direction of winter gales, stood in the grounds. Beyond lay nothing but sand dunes, their grass-tipped peaks motionless. Rose's critical eye took in the building. It was two-storeyed, solid, built with local granite and pleasing to look at. But the hanging baskets and tubs spilling over with purple lobelia and pink and purple pelargoniums were too garish against their starker surroundings.

There had been no response to the slamming of the car door and all the windows were closed. Rose wondered if she had made a mistake with the date. She rapped the metal knocker loudly and waited.

A middle-aged woman in an apron opened the door. She had a grim expression and a no-nonsense demeanour which seemed to suggest she had better things to do

than admit strangers. ‘Yes?’ She screwed up her eyes suspiciously.

‘I’m Rose Trevelyan, the photographer. Mrs Milton’s expecting me,’ she said, wondering why she felt obliged to offer an explanation.

‘You’d better come in then. Mrs Milton’s in the lounge.’ She opened a door to the right of the wide hall and, if she did not quite announce Rose’s presence in the way of an eighteenth-century footman, it was the next best thing. The door was shut firmly as the woman left.

‘Mrs Trevelyan, I’m very pleased to meet you. You were highly recommended.’ Gabrielle Milton did not say by whom, she simply extended a hand adorned with four rings. Rose took it and realised that, from where she had been sitting, her client could not have failed to notice her arrival.

‘Would you like some tea or coffee, or a cold drink, before you start?’

‘Nothing, thanks, I’m fine.’ Rose smiled. She did not want to waste time indulging in small talk. The sooner the job was done the sooner she could get on with the things she enjoyed. ‘Would you like to tell me exactly what you want?’

‘Of course.’ Gabrielle Milton bent to pick up a long-haired cat which was curled on a settee. Rose watched her supple movements and tried to estimate the size of the price-tag which had once hung on the kaftan affair she was wearing. Mrs Milton obviously took great pains

with her make-up and her hair, which was dark and coiled on top of her head. But she was not vain, Rose realised: no attempt had been made to disguise the grey strands above her ears. Surprisingly, her skin was pale and clear. Mrs Milton had not moved down here simply for the benefit of the sun.

‘This is Dilys. Ridiculously named after my mother-in-law.’ Gabrielle smiled self-mockingly and Rose was sorry she had refused the offer of a drink. She suspected she would enjoy the other woman’s company. However, she guessed what was coming next. Pets were worse than children when it came to photographing them. ‘I’d like her in the picture, if it’s possible. On the terrace wall, I thought.’

‘Of course.’

Outside, Rose set up her tripod, chose a wide-angle lens and adjusted the focus of her camera. ‘OK, I’m ready. Put Phyllis where you’d like her.’

Gabrielle did so, stroking the soft fur and murmuring an endearment which seemed to work because the cat arched and stretched, then curled up in the sun. ‘It’s Dilys, actually.’

‘Sorry.’ Rose decided to take the shots head on, not a view she normally favoured but one which would achieve a good balance. To one side of the house were several palm trees of differing heights, to the other, slightly set back, was a creeper-covered outhouse. She used various exposures and half a roll of film: there had to be something there which would please her client. As

the shutter clicked for the last time there was a slight movement. Dilys had disappeared.

Mrs Milton required a hundred and fifty copies for personalised Christmas cards, first having toyed with the idea of Rose sketching the house. She told Rose they had only been in Cornwall for seven months and thought it would be a way of letting their friends see where they lived – ‘without actually having to invite them down.’ Unlike the people Gabrielle was used to mixing with, Rose had struck her as calm, a soothing person to be with, one in whom you could confide. Her mistake, she realised, had been to fill her life with people to relieve the boredom and futility of her own life in the city but who, in turn, bored her further.

She would, she thought, as she opened her book later, like to talk to Rose Trevelyan, to have her as a friend.

But Gabrielle Milton never got the chance.

The small amount of air that was circulated through the open car windows was warm and offered no real relief. Rose was tempted to pull in at the first pub with a car park and treat herself to a lager and lime but decided against it. Procrastination had been her downfall on other occasions. She had, she realised, felt a little uneasy in Mrs Milton’s company although there seemed no reason for it. She smiled, remembering David’s words. ‘You’re more superstitious than the Cornish,’ he had told her.

‘You should know, you’re one of them,’ she had

replied, laughing, but flattered because it was another sign of acceptance into a part of mainland England which was like no other. The climate, the people and the way of life were more reminiscent of southern Europe.

The sky was no longer blue but white and hazy. Heat, shimmering above the road surface, made the tarmac appear to undulate, mirage-like. There were few pedestrians about; locals would be at work, and holiday-makers were already on the beaches enjoying two weeks of what Rose had all year round.

She did a mental calculation of outstanding jobs. If the weather remained hot she would work outside, leaving the developing of the Milton film until one evening because the darkroom was stifling in the daytime. Five new views were required for a postcard company for whom she worked freelance and Barry Rowe had asked when he could expect some new watercolours which he would reproduce for his greetings card firm. The photographic work paid the bills, but it was painting Rose loved. However, she had learnt early on that although she was good it was impossible to sell enough paintings to make real money.

Rose decided to take the car home. It was too hot and too busy to remain in it longer than was necessary. The Promenade was packed as couples and families enjoyed a light sea breeze, a breeze which now gently lifted the loose strands of hair around Rose's face and cooled her burning cheeks.

She parked in her driveway, facing the wall, on the

off-chance that it might rain later. The Mini was a bad starter when the engine was damp. Once the camera was unloaded and the gear back in its cupboard, Rose picked up a sketchpad and left again, on foot. The walk to Mousehole took just under half an hour and the road, at times without a pavement, held a continuous stream of traffic. Every visitor went there at some point of their holiday, delighted with the narrow rabbit warren of streets, none forbidden to traffic, which formed the ancient fishing village.

The local bus was making its complicated manoeuvre in order to be facing the right way for its return journey to Penzance. It was full, with passengers standing. Leaning against the harbour rails, the overflow from the pub stood with drinks in their hands. There was a smell of grilling fish as she passed the restaurant window.

On the far side of the village, and high above it, was a vantage point from which Rose had decided to sketch. Views of Mousehole and Newlyn were always popular but she tried to vary them as much as possible.

Absorbed in her work, she hardly noticed the time passing and only when she saw how far the sun had moved round did she decide to call it a day. Besides, she was thirsty, having forgotten to bring a flask, and her stomach told her it was time to eat.

Cars were crawling back along the road, their drivers slowing to admire the curve of Mount's Bay. They would return to hotels and guest houses to shower away the

sand and salt before a drink and dinner. Rose, too, would do the same.

Laying the four sketches she had made on the kitchen table, she felt pleased with the results. Now complete with pastel watercolours they were just what Barry had said he wanted. It was one more job out of the way.

Rose let the jets of water run over her body for ten minutes, easing her joints, stiff from the long walk, then she washed her hair. Clad in a robe, with her head wrapped in a towel, she went downstairs to open the white wine she had put in the fridge that morning and which she sipped as she prepared a salad to go with a salmon steak.

Dennis Milton left his office carrying his suit jacket folded over one arm. As soon as he was in the street he jerked his tie to one side to loosen it and undid the top button of his shirt. London, in a heat wave, was unbearable. Gabrielle didn't know how lucky she was.

He made his way through the crowds in Regent Street and joined the throngs in Piccadilly. The traffic, at a standstill, allowed him to cross the road against the pedestrian lights. The air was filled with diesel fumes belching from buses and the sound of irate taxi drivers' horns. He turned the corner and found relative peace in the bar of the Duke of Norfolk.

Dennis was meeting a colleague with whom he was in the habit of having an early evening drink. He did not like to admit that since Gabrielle had become

ensconced in Cornwall what used to be a couple of pints now usually developed into quite a session. At least he no longer had to rush home to change for one of the numerous social events his wife used to arrange. She seemed to have slowed down, he thought as he raised his hand in greeting, to be content with her own company.

‘Usual, Dennis?’

He nodded.

Gordon Archer summoned the barman and asked for a pint of bitter. ‘How’s it going? Haven’t seen much of Gabrielle lately. Isn’t she coming up for a spot of shopping, or the theatre? I would’ve thought she missed being in town.’

‘What?’

‘Your wife, old son. Doesn’t she miss the city? Mine would, I know that.’

‘No. She loves it down there. She’s taken up all sorts of new hobbies. Besides, I can take her any of life’s luxuries she can’t get locally.’

Gordon glanced at him quizzically. Had he detected a hint of vituperation in Dennis’s tone? ‘Anything the matter?’

‘No, nothing. Difficult day, that’s all.’

‘Drink up then, we’ll have another. This heat’s getting to everyone.’

Dennis tried to smile and contribute to the conversation but he was worried. He had heard that his firm were after young blood, that those not coming up to scratch were to be given the elbow. It was silently implicit

that target figures were not simply to be reached, but exceeded, if employees wished to retain their positions. They were only rumours, but rumours in the music business in which Dennis worked were usually founded on certainty. Of course, he had been with the firm long enough for there to be the offer of a substantial redundancy settlement – there was no question of his being dismissed – but it would mean living on Gabrielle’s private income and he was not sure he could cope with that. At fifty it was unlikely he would get another job. Ageism, he thought, was more rife than any of the other isms but no one seemed to take up the cause. Probably because they’re past it, he silently but cynically said to himself. The solution would be for him to move to Cornwall where they could survive on less money. The house was paid for – not by himself – and they could sell the London flat. At least he and Gabrielle had reached the point where they could survive a whole weekend without their discussions degenerating into a slanging match.

‘My shout,’ Dennis said, seeing Gordon’s glass was empty. He took some keeping up with.

‘I don’t know how you do it, up and down every weekend. Is it worth it, all that travelling?’

‘It is to me. The golf’s good, the air’s clean and the scenery is terrific. And there’s the added advantage of mild winters.’

‘I still say it’s a hell of a way to go for it. Why not Surrey or Sussex like the rest of us?’

Dennis shrugged. He could hardly say that was precisely why it wasn't the south coast, nor did he explain how relaxed he was able to be once he had crossed the Tamar. Tired of Gordon's company and especially of the way he denigrated his wife, Dennis left early. No matter how annoyed with her, he would not dream of speaking to anyone about Gabrielle the way Gordon did about Helen.

He was still not used to the emptiness of the flat when he returned in the evenings. The large house in Wimbledon had been sold once their son, Paul, left home. It had always been too big but they used to entertain at home more in those days, instead of in restaurants, and they had wrongly assumed there would be more children. Gabrielle's sudden decision to buy a place in Cornwall had come as a complete surprise but Dennis could hardly tell her how to spend her money.

He missed her. Even when they argued she was company and now he saw less of her he realised that, paradoxically, he had enjoyed their rows, that life had never been dull. Certainly it was better than Maggie's farcical compliance. She was a fool if she thought he didn't see through her.

The cleaning lady had restocked the freezer but there was nothing which tempted him enough to bother to cook. Dennis poured a stiff drink and added a splash of soda, then sat down, resting his head against the back of the leather settee, welcoming its coolness. He put his

involvement with Maggie down to what people chose to call the male menopause and now he was sorry he had let it go on so long. Maggie was sending out messages he did not want to receive and he was not sure how to end the relationship. She was single and independent and, initially, she had been fun to be with, but Dennis felt he was being drawn into a trap. Maggie, he sensed, would very much like to replace Gabrielle.

The telephone rang and his hand holding the drink jerked. He had been on the point of falling asleep. Another bad sign: too much booze and not enough food.

‘Hello, darling. I’m surprised to catch you in.’

‘Gabrielle.’

‘Are you all right?’

‘Fine. You?’

‘Yes. Look, I thought I’d better let you know I’ve organised the Christmas cards from this end. Tell Fiona, or she’ll go to the usual people.’

Christmas cards? Christmas was four months away. But Gabrielle was right, his secretary Fiona took rather too much upon herself, to the extent once of buying a silver and crystal rose bowl she thought suitable for his wife’s birthday present. Dennis would not have chosen it himself but felt obliged to reimburse her. If he was given the push, would Fiona be out of a job as well? Gabrielle was telling him something about some photographer she had commissioned.

‘How much is that little lot going to set us back?’

‘No more than if you get the usual printers to do them.’

It's not like you to question me over money, Dennis. I don't waste it, you know that.'

'I know. I'm sorry. I'll ring you tomorrow. Take care.'

Dennis replaced the receiver. Tomorrow was Thursday and he had agreed to take Maggie out. Perhaps he ought to ring her now and cancel. Surely she'd get the message if he did it often enough.

Then Friday. How he looked forward to it these days. Gordon was wrong, he loved the four and a half hour journey, relaxing on the train with a drink and a sandwich, the evening paper and a book. It was a kind of no-man's-land, between the city and work and the slow, easygoing atmosphere of Cornwall. He had a regular booking on the Golden Hind from Paddington which reached Redruth just after ten. Gabrielle met him in the car – Dennis had no need of one in London – and dropped him back for the first train on Monday morning.

He would, he decided, make it up to her this weekend, take her out somewhere special, maybe, instead of playing golf.

With a wedge of Stilton and a couple of crisp breads serving as his evening meal he poured one more drink and took it with him to bed.