

1. Going Underground

Sweat rolled off him. Darkness enveloping, trees creaking in the breeze. Every rustle and squeak from the undergrowth seemingly taking place within millimetres of his ears. Signals raced along nerves with far more vigour and regularity than normal. Surely, at some point, he'd run out of adrenalin.

Who would have known digging a grave could be such hard work? Mind you, a decent spade would have made life a lot easier.

This was a nightmare, so not part of the plan. It made things far more complicated, made getting the money even more important. Fantasies about sun-drenched beaches with palm trees, far from the reach of prosecuting authorities, danced through his mind. They needed to. He wouldn't entertain the alternative.

The hole might be big enough but, as he'd never dug one for this purpose before, he couldn't be certain. More worrying was whether or not this spot was sufficiently secluded for his needs. Would it remain undetected long enough for the money to afford him a getaway. You read in the papers about dog walkers and other nosey bastards discovering murderer's handiwork while "out walking in the countryside". He qualified as a murderer now, hoped it would take more than a casual stroll or a sniffing dog to uncover his handiwork.

He stopped, heart crashing against ribcage in violent protest at the strain it was being put under. Sitting down, he lit a cigarette, putting yet more stress on his physiology as he tried to recover some composure. He looked down at his soiled clothes and filthy hands, wished he'd decided on burning or dumping at sea. The other thing he remembered from newspapers and TV was how tiny fragments of dirt can be traced back to specific areas, how even scrubbing yourself doesn't remove all the particles that might leave a breadcrumb trail for the police. Too late now, he was committed. The longer he took to sort this, the more likely it wouldn't end well for him.

The monumental scale of this fuck up couldn't be avoided. His brother would be furious; always chiding him for his temper, telling him to show more restraint. Should he even tell his brother? Maybe he could keep it quiet. No, his brother was way smarter, the clever one. He'd know something was amiss, and the threat of discovery would be hanging over him if he stayed around. Too much, too stressful, waiting to get caught. If he ran, his brother would need to know why. He'd need his help.

But it wasn't his fault. He never meant to kill anyone. An accident, a reflex borne out of innumerable similar encounters, only more violent, more final than the others. Lucky and unlucky in equal measure.

Was that rain? Oh, good. Just what he needed. Yes, there you go; a few drips, now a steady stream of droplets cascading down. Sure, soft ground, easier to dig, but Christ, he was going to get filthier than ever.

He stood up, flicked his cigarette butt into the hole and got back to digging. The sooner this was over with the better.