

## 2.0.0.2.1: Chapter Two: Psychics and Psychiatrists

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*2.0.2.1.0 Outline: Time-line one ...*

*2.0.2.1.1 Scope: Microscope*

*2.0.2.1.2 Intended Audience: Lovers, job applicants, NOT psychiatrists*



‘Why does that woman keep looking at me every time she mentions equal opportunities?’ Oscar whispered to the young man sitting next to him. They were seated in the spacious atrium of the London headquarters of a big corporation. They were part of a group of ten people, all in smart clothes, pretending to reading annual reports or fidgeting.

The young man looked surprised that Oscar had addressed him. Then he smiled.

‘Isn’t it obvious?’

‘Not really! We look a pretty mixed bunch.’

He looked around at the group. One woman, in particular, caught his eye. The man laughed.

‘Yeh, but you’re the only one who’s really old! You’re the token oldie!’

Oscar was mortified.

‘What? Do you mean, I’m only here to make up the numbers?’

‘Well, yeh! They’re looking for a committed, dynamic, energetic go-getter, not someone waiting for his bus pass. No offence mate!’

Oscar took offence but didn’t reply. He should have guessed when he was pleasantly surprised to be invited onto the management selection weekend. He’d thought it might be fun and a chance to network and get some free food. But now he was annoyed. He was a committed, dynamic, energetic go-getter and he had something most of the others evidently didn’t - experience! Lots of it! He had already learned from his mistakes and could play to his strengths. These kids had it coming, he thought.

‘OK,’ the woman smiled. ‘What we are particularly interested in for this vacancy, as well as general management skills, is initiative and creativity. That’s the purpose of this preliminary session, to assess your originaive abilities. We want people that can solve problems with novel solutions. We need people who can think out of the box!’

‘And don’t use cliches,’ Oscar whispered to his companion.  
‘Did you have a question?’

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‘Why is our recruitment process so complicated?’ Lorraine asked dropping a heavy document onto the CEO’s desk. They sometimes shared a sandwich at lunchtime, having known each other since attending the same school.

‘I hope you’re obeying every instruction in the manual to the letter,’ the CEO winked.

‘All I want is an assistant and it’s taking weeks to sort out. I don’t have time for this game show! Why can’t we just interview people like we used to?’

‘Oh Lorraine, it’s all part of modern management. You knew that when you signed up.’

‘Isn’t management supposed to be about leadership? Where’s the leadership in slavishly following some manual put together by a committee.’

‘I can give you a few pointers, if you’d like, about how to interpret the system.’

‘Please do!’

‘Management is still all about leadership but you have to be more subtle nowadays. You can’t go round bucking the system, at least not openly. The trick is to enthusiastically promote all the documented procedures but then do what you want to anyway. You and I know what we really want is someone with a proven track record. We don’t need someone with “potential” who’s going to screw up every five minutes. Let some other company train up the newbies, we want the finished product now!’

‘But if I follow this procedure it’s a complete lottery who I’ll get! The points system actually favours the least useful candidates. I’ll end up with someone so bad I’ll have to do two jobs!’

‘As I said, be enthusiastic about it, get HR on your side. Just interpret the rules selectively to get the right person. There may be a lot complicated procedures but when read them carefully you realise it’s still mostly down to personal judgment. I’ve done a lot of recruitment over the years and I can tell you, it IS a game show! It’s not about selection at all, it’s really about rejection. Your job is to keep out the losers, the posers and the wannabes! Eliminate all the unsuitable applicants and what is left should be, more or less, alright. These are difficult times and we can’t afford passengers in our business. We don’t need dreamers, schemers or shirkers. I’ve every confidence that you’ll do a great job.’

Lorraine shuddered slightly as she recalled what happened to the last person the CEO expressed confidence in.

‘And I have to pretend I care about the book? That’s the secret, right?’

‘Absolutely! Tell people loudly enough that you’re following the letter of the book and they’ll believe you, even if your blatantly not. No one argues with someone who is really confident. It’s the key to successful management. Talk the talk but do what you like.’

‘Yes, I’m sure you’re right.’

‘I know I’m right. You should count yourself lucky. At least you get to choose your assistant, I’m stuck with a whole management team promoted beyond their competence!’

She picked up the finals crumbs thoughtfully and ate them.

‘How do you mean?’

‘You must know the theory, surely? Someone joins a company and does well so they get promoted. They do well in their new job so they get promoted again. This carries on until they

reach a job that's too much for them. Naturally, they don't get promoted again so they stay there. Of course, it means the management ranks are filled with people who can't do their jobs very well. And that's exactly what I inherited!

'Poor you!'

They both gazed out of the window thoughtfully.

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Oscar was surprised to find he'd finished his multiple-choice tests ten minutes before anyone else. It gave him a chance to glance at his fellow candidate's answers. He couldn't help but feel slightly smug as he realised some of them knew little about language, logic or mathematics. The only paper that he could see, that had similar answers to his own, was Alex's. Alex, who was the woman he had noticed earlier, was older than the other candidates though not as old as him. She glanced at his paper and smiled conspiratorially at him. He felt a twinge of excitement.

After the test, he tried to approach her but the candidates were quickly ushered into a huge, empty office. Frustrated, he glanced in her direction and was gratified to see her she was looking at him. She smiled, causing him to blush.

'OK everyone,' Lorraine said. 'We're now going to test your team and leadership skills. You will be split into teams of three, each with one leader.'

Oscar tried to listen but the words made no sense. He kept looking at Alex.

'OK, Oscar, you're the first team leader. Your team will consist of Alex and Oliver.'

He mentally punched the air and muttered 'YES!' under his breath.

'Excuse me?' Lorraine said, staring at him. 'Do you have a problem with that?'

'No, not at all!'

He smiled cautiously at Alex who beamed back. He didn't notice Oliver's frown.

The teams were each given the task of building a tower out of paper clips. While the other teams argued about group structure, responsibility, tactics and strategy, Oscar quickly got his team working on different ways to connect the clips so that they didn't fall apart. While the other teams argued about how to do the task, Oscar's started building their massive tower. With a few minutes left, Oscar's team's tower reached half way to the ceiling. All around, while towers collapsed into ragged shiny piles, candidates argued about who's fault it was. Oliver quite forgot his resentment at not being a leader as he gazed in wonder at their shiny Eiffel Tower, the only one left standing.

'Yes, that's very impressive,' Lorraine said coolly. 'Though it was really a test of team building and group dynamics rather than engineering.'

Someone sniggered.

‘OK,’ Lorraine said. ‘Your next task is to test your creativity. This will be an individual exercise so you can go back to where you were sitting before.’

Everyone moved except Oscar and Alex who glanced nervously at each other.

‘Right, your task is to think up a marketing campaign for a new product. It’s a snack food. We are looking for something innovative so use whatever creativity techniques you need to. There are pens and paper for story-boarding, mind-mapping, lateral thinking, whatever. If you feel the need to go for a walk or a drink or whatever, it’s up to you. Just don’t talk to anyone else please.’

The two hours they were given slipped by too quickly. Oscar grew desperate. A new snack food seemed so trivial compared to Alex. Five minutes from the end he finally had an idea. It dropped into his head while he idly doodled around Alex’s name. He looked up to exchange a nervous glance with her.

‘Right,’ Lorraine said with a malicious smile. ‘Now each of you has to give a five minute presentation to sell us your idea. This will also be a test of your presentation skills. Oscar, you’re first.’

Oscar, completely unprepared, felt numb as he stood up and Lorraine pressed a marker pen into his hand. He looked round at the audience, some grinning, others nervous. He could see many busily preparing a presentation for their turn. His mouth felt dry as he stood dumbly staring at his distracted audience.

‘Well?’ Lorraine asked.

Alex smiled encouragement and he felt better.

‘OK,’ he said, dropping the marker pen. ‘This is my idea. We run a competition with a very simple question that almost anyone can answer. The prize, that most people will get, is a voucher to buy the snack online. The snack won’t be available any other way, so it will be an exclusive offer. Voucher holders will be entitled to buy as many bars as they like with discounts for bulk. The idea is to make people who haven’t got a voucher jealous. They will, however, be able buy the vouchers from holders. In addition, voucher holders will be able sell the snacks on if they like. Prices will be low due to reduced distribution and sales costs.’

There was silence as the whole audience gazed at him. Then Lorraine spoke.

‘Yes, very interesting though I think there are far too many unknowns to make it practical. Oliver, you’re next.’

Oliver looked nervous as he took Oscar’s place.

‘OK everyone, listen up!’ He said. ‘This is going to be the hottest campaign you’ve ever seen for the hottest snack in the universe! We’re going to use a celebrity! Now, I know you’re thinking so what. So here’s the twist! We get a celebrity to do something they are NOT famous for. So a famous footballer will be cooking. A TV presenter will sing. A politician will have to tell the truth.’

A titter of nervous laughter fluttered round the room.

‘Yes, very good,’ Lorraine said, smiling broadly.

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Gwen approached the alley that led to her flat with the usual anxieties. She looked around to make sure no one was following her as she approached the gloomy defile. She nearly jumped when a middle-aged man came striding out of it suddenly, carrying a large, dirty flowerpot. He looked harmless, so she continued, shaken, into the alley. There she was surprised to see a large pot plant, minus pot, sitting forlornly by the path. She breathed a sigh of relief. The man was only a fly-tipper.

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Oscar arrived early the following morning for the second day of the selection process. He was hoping to get time to talk to Alex after she had left in a hurry the night before. He wondered, gloomily, if she was going to meet her boyfriend or husband. As he took a coffee from the machine in the atrium he saw her coming along the corridor and felt his heart pounding.

‘Hi,’ she said, nonchalantly.

‘Hi,’ he replied, nervously.

They both smiled and moved into the waiting area. A small tree hung over the settee where they sat.

‘So, what were you ....’ he started. ‘I mean, it’s the proper interviews today. Are you nervous? I know I am.’

‘You bet! This is the big one.’

‘I’ve put together a list of key words to get in, you can share it if you like.’

‘What are they?’ She smiled.

‘Oh, you know,’ he replied breathlessly. ‘The usual stuff that everyone spouts these days. Innovative, problem solver, task-orientated, team player but ...’

‘But can work unsupervised if required!’ She interrupted. They laughed.

‘That’s exactly what I was going to say! There’s more, too, like good inter-personal skills, great communicator, planning, organised, decisive, results-driven. Are there any I’ve missed?’

‘Strategy? Strategic thinking is very big these days. And there’s proactive. Or is it probiotic?’

She laughed and put her hand over his. It felt hot and light.

Lorraine walked into the room and approached them smiling.

‘I’m glad you two are here first,’ she said in a low conspiratorial voice. ‘We’ve got the results of yesterday’s assessments back and I’m afraid we won’t be taking either of your applications any further. So you’re free to go now and enjoy the rest of your day. I’d just like to thank you both, on behalf of the company, for your interest in this position.’

Alex stared at her open-mouthed. Oscar stared at Alex, stunned.

‘You’re kidding!’ Alex said, angrily. ‘Why couldn’t you have told us this last night. We’ve come all this way in this morning for nothing!’

‘I’m very sorry but I only got the results this morning. It takes a long time to get all those tests assessed. People don’t appreciate just how big a task it is organising a recruitment exercise like this. I’ve been in since seven.’

‘So how many other people are going to be sent home this morning?’

‘I’m not really at liberty to discuss that.’

‘Really? Well, how can I put this? If you don’t tell me I’ll go a tribunal about this whole recruitment exercise.’

‘On what grounds?’ Lorraine asked, dismayed.

‘Do you want a list?’

Oscar gazed at Alex. He was awestruck.

‘OK,’ Lorraine said, flustered for once. ‘But you must promise not to go a tribunal.’

‘Sure, I promise!’

‘OK, it’s just you two who are going today but I never told you that.’

‘Just us two! Why on earth should ...’

‘No point getting upset,’ Oscar interrupted, grabbing her arm and standing up. She looked at him, anger in her eyes. She stared at his hand intently until he pulled it away.

She stood up slowly and glared at Lorraine.

‘Come on,’ she said. ‘Let’s go.’

She took Oscar’s hand and pulled him towards her. They left the building hand in hand.

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‘What are you having?’ Ed asked nervously.

‘The pasta, I think,’ Gwen replied, also nervously.

‘Good choice!’

They studied their menus, while each stole glances at the other. The restaurant was dark, warm and full. The tables were small, each decorated by a candle.

‘So what do you do?’ She asked. ‘I can’t believe I haven’t asked you yet. Nothing embarrassing I hope!’

‘That depends,’ he replied. ‘What do you think about psychiatrists? Before you say anything, I know some people get nervous around us but I can assure you I’m not trying to analyse you in any way.’

She dropped her menu which fell noisily, knocking over her empty wine glass. She picked it up again slowly and hid her face behind it as if she trying to read it in the low light.

‘That’s interesting,’ she said. ‘Are you having starters?’

‘Maybe just some garlic bread, what do you think?’

‘What’s schizophrenia?’

‘Pardon?’ He looked stunned.

‘You heard!’

‘I don’t usually like to talk shop when I’m socialising. It’s so boring, don’t you think?’

‘I’d really like to know!’

‘Well, I suppose ... it’s not easy to be precise about these things. Did you have anyone in mind?’

‘No, I’m just fascinated! It’s not often I get to talk to an expert.’

‘Well, there are delusions and hallucinations. Then there is disorganised thinking and a variety of other symptoms can present which vary and ...’

‘So what is cancer?’

‘What?’ He looked stunned. ‘What’s that got to do with schizophrenia?’

‘Nothing, I’m just interested!’

‘You seem to be getting very intense Gwen,’ he said putting his hand on hers. It felt very hot. She pulled it away.

‘So are you going to tell me or not?’

Ed breathed in hard. It felt like an interrogation.

‘Look, I told you, I’m a psychiatrist, not a doctor. I’m no expert in general diseases.’

‘You must know. Don’t they teach you any general medical knowledge?’

‘Well, I do pick things up, of course. I believe that cancer is uncontrolled cell division. There are lots of kind of cancer, of course, affecting different organs but ...’

‘My great aunt had schizophrenia!’ She interrupted.

‘Oh, I’m so sorry. It must have been very distressing. Did she have cancer too?’

‘No, why do you think that? The psychiatrists controlled her with drugs.’

Ed looked round nervously. No one was listening.

‘Um, I’m sure you mean they controlled the disease, not her, as ...’

‘Why did you define schizophrenia in terms of symptoms while you defined cancer in terms of what it actually is? No one has any idea what schizophrenia is, do they?’

‘Well, there is some controversy as to the exact mechanism but ...’

‘I vowed, after she died, that I’d never knowingly speak to a psychiatrist ever again. My mother calls you lot witch doctors! Seems a little harsh on witch doctors to me!’

‘Look, Gwen, I’m sorry if your aunt had any bad experiences things have changed a lot in recent years. There are modern treatments that ...’

She stood up and pushed her chair away. A waiter, who had been approaching, turned and walked away.

‘I’m sorry, I’m not hungry anymore.’

Ed stood up, too.

‘Do you want to go home?’

‘Yes!’

‘Can I give you a lift?’

‘No thanks!’

She strode out of the restaurant leaving Ed gasping like a fish.

‘Can I get you anything?’ The waiter asked.

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The office was quiet apart from the hum of traffic outside. When the phone rang, Gwen looked round for Oliver. She groaned as she remembered he had the day off. Reluctantly she answered it. It was Ed.

‘Why are you phoning me?’ She asked. ‘I thought I made it plain I didn’t want to talk to you again?’

‘No, you didn’t, you just stormed off without giving me a chance to explain.’

‘OK, what don’t you understand about the idea that I never want to talk to a psychiatrist as long as I live?’

Yes, I understand that and respect your decision though I would like, if I may, just to correct a few mistaken impressions you obviously have about psychiatrists. We’re really not as bad as you think and ...’

‘Not interested! Frankly, you can sod off! Are you stalking me?’

‘No, I’m absolutely not stalking you. Is two phone calls stalking nowadays? The truth is, I am a bit anxious for you and the aggressive attitude you have towards health care professionals. I’m worried you may have Hartlaub’s Syndrome.’

‘You’re kidding, right?’ She replied, stunned.

‘No, I’m deadly serious. It can be quite a serious condition if left untreated. I’d be willing to examine you for free, if you’d like.’

‘Yeh, I bet you would. Call me again and I’ll call the police! Now go to hell!’

She slammed the phone down, shaking. The office was quiet apart from the hum of traffic outside.

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‘Is that Hannah?’ Oliver asked of his mobile. ‘Good! It’s about your application to work at Ascot Productions.’

He stopped to hear the thrilled gasp from the other end.

‘The thing is,’ he continued. ‘We’re doing informal interviews first just to sift through the many applicants we’ve had. I’m sure you’ll understand this is a popular job so we need to do some filtering. However, you’ll be glad to hear you’ve got through the first two sifts. So, I was wondering, would you be free next Thursday afternoon at midday?’

She sounded excited.

‘That’s great,’ he said. ‘Do you know the Brown Swan Hotel. We’re doing informal interviews there over lunch if that’s alright.’

After the call he noticed a fellow commuter was giving him an odd look. He glared at the woman.

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'I can see a green door. Does a green door mean anything to anyone?'

Gwen sighed. She'd told everyone who would listen that bringing a medium into her TV programme wouldn't work. But it seemed they had to go through the whole ghastly disaster before they would accept she was right.

'I think there's a green door leading to the attic, isn't there?' The cameraman said, excitedly. 'Yes, there is!' The sound man agreed. 'Shall we go and have a look at it?' 'No,' Gwen said, frostily. 'We'll finish filming here.'

The medium smiled at her. Gwen had tried her best to goad the medium into walking away but so far nothing had worked.

'Does the name Ted mean anything to you?' She asked, innocently, of Gwen.

'No!' Gwen snapped.

'I know someone called Ted,' the cameraman said. They all turned to stare at him.

'Have you been feeling stress at work recently?' The medium asked.

'Yes,' the cameraman replied, glancing at Gwen.

'He's telling me you have a difficult job. Others don't appreciate how difficult it is but you don't like to complain. You like to read a lot and learn more about the world. You have a strong sense of right and wrong. You have enormous potential that others don't appreciate. You are an independent thinker who only accepts others' opinions when they provide evidence. You suffer with your back from time to time.'

'Well, yes,' the cameraman said, looking sheepish. 'You're absolutely right. That's amazing! So you can really see Ted?'

Gwen groaned inwardly at looked at the ornate wooden ceiling.

'Yes, he's here and he has a message for you.'

'We are supposed to be looking for ghosts to do with this castle,' Gwen said, irritably. 'This isn't a psychic voicemail service.'

'Can't we just hear the message first?' The cameraman asked anxiously. 'It could be important.'

'I doubt that somehow but go ahead, if it will get you back to work!' Gwen said. The medium smiled ingratiatingly at her.

'OK dear, the message is this. Did you once live in a red brick house?'

'Yes, I did! I didn't know Ted knew that, it was before I met him.'

'He can see more from the other side. He says you were very happy there?'

'It was when I was a kid. I guess I was happy.'

'He says you should go back and visit the red brick house to remember when you were happy. Then you will realise how far you've come in your life! It will put your current problems into perspective.'

'Wow! That's amazing! Is there anything else? Anything from my uncle Rory?'

'No that's it, except Ted says your uncle is fine. He watches you and he's smiling at you right now.'

'Wow!'

Gwen looked at her crew in disgust.

‘Can we get on now?’ She asked. ‘Time is money people!’

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‘I thought you were a sceptic,’ Gwen said to the cameraman as they packed up.

‘I never said I was a sceptic, I just said I needed convincing evidence to change my mind.’

‘And you were convinced by that stuff?’

‘Well what she said was pretty amazing. I can’t see how she can have known all those things about me.’

‘Maybe she didn’t! Most of them could apply to anyone!’

He looked at her, surprised.

‘I think you’re very difficult to impress! I think the individual things may have been general but put them altogether and it was pretty impressive.’

‘You’re kidding, right? What about all the stuff I’ve shown you over the years about the natural causes behind ghost and UFO sightings?’

‘Yeh, you were probably right about those but this is different. Everyone has to decide for themselves. It doesn’t mean I don’t respect your opinions but I have my own too!’

‘You’re telling me that you’ve gone from sceptic to believer in one afternoon?’

‘What about her contacting my uncle Rory then, how do you explain that?’

‘She never mentioned your uncle until you did!’

‘I think you’re wrong about that but I won’t argue. Anyway what about all the stuff she came up with about Sir Roger who’s supposed to haunt the East Wing. There was loads of detail about names, places, events, absolutely specific. She couldn’t possibly have known any of that stuff. None of us even mentioned him!’

‘It’s all on the castle website!’

The cameraman looked deflated for a second.

‘Well maybe but we’ve no proof she ever saw it.’

‘Oh good grief!’ Gwen moaned.

‘OK then, what about when she gave you that message from your great aunt. I could see you were impressed with that.’

‘That was just for the cameras. The script said I had to look impressed. Frankly, I wasn’t! My great aunt wasn’t called Ethel, she didn’t live in Surrey and she certainly didn’t have a happy life!’

The cameraman smiled slowly.

‘Still, she’s seems happy now, eh!’

*2.0.2.1.10 Outline: Time-line two (6 months later) ...*

‘Why is our management strategy so



complicated?’ Lorraine asked dropping a heavy document onto the CEO’s desk. They sometimes still shared a ciabatta and latte at lunchtime.

‘I hope you’re obeying every instruction in the plan,’ the CEO winked.

‘If I did I’d never get any work done at all.’

‘How’s the Spongotok marketing going?’

‘Fine. I’ve pretty much finished the plan. I’ll be in a position to talk to the agency next week.’

‘Before you do,’ the CEO said, sipping her coffee. ‘I had an idea the other day. I was thinking we don’t do enough direct marketing on the internet. Not many companies in our sector are exploiting that route, we could steal a march on them.’

Lorraine felt a pang of pain. She could see months of her work threatened.

‘Well, we don’t use the internet much because we have established distribution channels. They’re expensive so we should use them as much as possible.’

‘But is that a good enough reason to use them all the time? I mean, what if we used them less and negotiated a cheaper contract? Then we could approach an internet channel for new stuff. It could work out cheaper.’

Lorraine was feeling dizzy.

‘But it’s an untrodden path. We don’t know anything about that route. We could lose our way and take a real bath!’

‘Innovation is the key to success. Adapt and survive!’

‘Once bitten, twice shy! I mean, we had that disaster with our web site last year.’

‘Nevertheless, I’d like you to look into it.’

She took a single sheet of A4 from her desk and handed it to Lorraine who read it, bemused. The words swam into each other before her eyes.

‘Get me some figures,’ the CEO continued. ‘Then we’ll give it six months and see how it works out. Don’t worry, I’ll take full responsibility. Look it over and see what you think.’  
‘I will!’

She left a half-finished ciabatta as she wandered, dazed out of the office staring at the paper. She read every word several times as if trying to extract some extra meaning from each. She couldn’t understand how a business proposal could be so short.

As she reached her desk, she stared suspiciously at Oliver. There was something familiar about the proposal. It reminded her of something Oliver had once suggested. It was at that exact moment that she decided he had finally outgrown his usefulness. She was tired of the way he failed to respect her. She was tired of his objections to every job he ever gave him. She was tired of his annoying smile. He looked up and grinned at her. She smiled back.

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‘I’ve got a brilliant idea!’ Alex said, excitedly. ‘Why don’t we start our own company?’

One of the things Oscar liked most about Alex was her boundless enthusiasm, but this idea

made him anxious. He knew in his gut the pitfalls of owning a company.

‘Well, I ...’

‘Think about it!’ She interrupted, sitting on his lap. ‘Let them stuff their crap jobs, we’ll work for ourselves. One day we could be millionaires.’

‘In theory but ...’

‘But what? You’ve got the experience, I’ve got the idea and the capital, where can it go wrong?’

‘What idea?’

She thrust a newspaper clipping into his hands. He started reading but she grew impatient.

‘It’s about this rich footballer,’ she said. ‘He was separated from his brother at birth and told a reporter about it. This man read the article and spent the next two years tracking the brother down while lawyers and private investigators failed. The footballer paid this bloke one hundred thousand pounds! Imagine it, a tenth of a million quid! If we just do ten jobs like that and we’d have a million quid!’

‘Yeh but, it would take twenty years at that rate and ...’

‘There are two of us so it would only take half that time!’

‘Well, maybe sweetheart, but what do we live on until we get paid? And where do we find clients willing to pay that sort of money? And how do we ...’

‘You’re being very negative!’ She frowned.

‘No, I’m just being practical. Like you said, I have some experience of this and ... did you say you had capital?’

‘Yeh.’

‘If you’ve got money, why do we live like this? Couldn’t we just spend the capital instead and live a better life?’

He looked around at his flat. The springs in the settee had gone, leaving a hole under one seat. Only two rings on the cooker still worked and they were both wearing warm clothes to avoid using the heating.

‘It’s family money and I can only use it for a business project. That’s the stipulation.’

‘I didn’t know your family had money. I’d never have guessed it.’

‘Well, they don’t like to flaunt it. They’ve never gone in for flash cars and big houses. They like to live low profile.’

‘Even so, what do we know about tracking people down?’

‘There’s the internet and stuff! Don’t give up before we’ve even started.’

He looked at her pleading eyes and knew he would give in eventually.

‘OK, let’s see if we can put together a business plan then we’ll have it reviewed professionally. And then we can go to your folks and see what they say. What do you say to that?’

She leaned forward and kissed him.

‘I love you!’ She whispered.

2.0.2.1.21 Time-line three (6 more months later) ...



Gwen felt nervous. She hadn't seen Oscar in a while. She felt him several times before he actually entered the restaurant. Each time she turned, expecting to see him but it was someone else.

When he did come in, he saw her at once and smiled. She felt butterflies in her stomach. She looked down at her menu as he approached so that he wouldn't see her blush. He leaned over and kissed her on the cheek.

Gwen felt more relaxed as they chatted. The years they'd been apart melted away. She listened as he told her about some idiot who had ripped off his idea. She sympathised as he explained how he was going to pursue the matter, even through the courts. She admired his tenacity and enthusiasm in the face of a life that had not gone as planned. She reached forward, held his hand and smiled indulgently as he harangued fate.

'But that's not even my biggest problem,' he said.

'You're kidding! It seems pretty big to me.'

'The thing is, I'm getting married.'

Gwen spilled her drink over the table. The wine left cerise stain on the white tablecloth. A waiter arrived quickly to clean up the mess. Once the fuss was over they continued their conversation.

'I shouldn't have broken it to you like that,' Oscar said. 'The fact is, I'm torn. I don't know whether to go ahead with it or not.'

'If in doubt, don't that's what I always say.'

'But it's not as simple as that.'

'What's the problem? Are you waiting for a better offer?'

'No, it's nothing like that. I'm mad about her but the thing is, her uncle. He's Alec Meadson.'

'What THE Alec Meadson, the bank robber.'

'Yep, the very same!'

'But he's reformed now, surely. Hasn't he got a degree in sociology? I saw him on TV once.'

'Yes, I know that but ...' He sighed.

'Have you met him, what's he like? It would be fascinating to meet a famous criminal.'

'Yes I have met him. He seemed surprisingly normal but ...'

'You're afraid it's in the genes, is that it? You don't know how your kids might turn out.'

'No, it's not that. Alex is sweetness itself. She's as straight as a die. I doubt she's ever had a parking ticket. You'd like her.'

'Really?' She said trying not to sound sarcastic.

'The thing is, she wants us to start a business together and, as you know I've got no money so she's putting it all up.'

'What's wrong with that? I think the days of men being too proud to accept gifts from women are long gone. If she wants to use her savings ...'

‘It’s not her savings. She’s been out of work for a few years. She says it’s family money!’

Gwen was puzzled for a second and then had a thought.

‘Oh! And you think it might come from ...’

He looked at her gloomily as her voice faded.

‘Exactly!’