

# Burn It!

Part 2



# Charlotte Mayo

An "Adult TV" Novel

## **Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers**

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# **BURN IT!**

## **(Part Two)**

**By Charlotte Mayo**

We didn't drive straight into Gloucester town centre, instead we took a detour and went out into the country. We had found a quiet lay-by the day before which we had identified as a good spot for me to change as it was shielded by trees and we could not be seen from the road. Judith parked up and turned off the engine and the lights.

“Right, let's get you changed,” she said.

Judith went to the boot and got out the holdall which contained the blonde wig, shoes, long-sleeved black jacket and a handbag. I quickly removed the coat and exchanged it for the jacket, then I removed the dark wig and pulled on the blonde one. Judith coiffured and set it with spray. Then I stood outside the car and took the black boots off, holding onto the frame of the car as I slipped into the black court shoes with 4” stiletto heels. It didn't feel too glamor-

ous standing outside in the dark, with the chill wind blowing around my bare legs and up my dress. It was a very cold spring and a residue of snow hung around the grass verges. I got back into the car. Judith coiffured my hair again and re-applied some of the makeup. Then she got the shiny, black handbag from the holdall and gave it to me – once again I checked to make sure that the hotel key was inside. I closed the handbag and took some deep breaths to try to calm my nerves. I was starting to shake. The coke and wine had started to wear off and the enormity of what I was about to do began to hit me. This time I was risking a lot: my girlfriend, my apartment, my job. Back in '78 it had been different; back then I had been a loser who had nothing. We drove off, this time heading in the direction of Gloucester town centre.

On one of our trips to Gloucester we had found a public carpark which was on a side street at the back of a hotel called The White Horse, the same hotel we had checked out earlier in the day. Fortunately, it had stopped raining. Judith pulled up in a small, badly-lit council car park. I noticed her hand was trembling on the gear shift.

“You ready?” she said.

“Yes.” I nodded.

She smelt fresh, innocent somehow, her perfume cut the air and mixed with the air freshener to create an intoxicating aroma – or maybe it was my perfume. I couldn't tell. I stared straight ahead, I tried not to look at her. I didn't want her to see I was also shaking, I was also scared.

“Wait ten minutes, then drive to the Cheltenham Bell,” I said.

“Ok,” Judith said, “good-bye and good luck.”

We couldn't even kiss, we didn't want to draw attention to ourselves although she had backed into a very quiet and secluded space which faced the rear of the hotel. I opened my handbag and took out a pair of

tight black leather gloves. I pulled them on. I took a deep breath, then slowly I opened the car door and clamored off the seat. I stood on the gravel. I straightened my dress, pulled down the sleeves of my jacket, then I walked to the front of the car so Judith could see me. She gave me a thumb's up. I looked good. The great scam had started.

Nervously, I walked across the road and into the back entrance of the hotel, clutching my bag in my left hand. To be honest, I quite enjoyed walking in the high-heeled shoes, feeling the grit of the tarmac under my soles – it was a strange experience. I was amazed how tall they made me appear. In truth, it wasn't a very salubrious hotel and I knew I would attract attention – which, of course, was the whole idea. I walked in through the narrow rear entrance and straight into a large waiter in a dirty, white apron. He approached me.

“Can I help you, Miss?” he asked in a gruff, foreign accent.

My heart skipped a beat, I wanted to run out of the hotel and back to Judith but I wrestled to control of my nerves. I hadn't actually done anything wrong... yet. Even so, I was conscious of my hands shaking.

“I wonder,” I said, trying to calm my nerves. I placed a gloved hand to my throat as if switching if from male to female mode. “Can I phone for a taxi from here? I don't know this town and don't know where the phone boxes are.”

The man smiled. “Sure, Miss, follow me.”

I was glad he did not enquire as to how I had just wafted into the hotel. Surely, I must have come by car? But fortunately, he wasn't curious; if he had been I would just have said that a friend had dropped me off. He took me into the foyer area where another man, of Indian heritage, sat behind a large scratched and worn wooden reception desk.

“Where you wish to go, Miss?” he asked when the waiter explained my plight.

I told him.

He stood up and placed a pad on the counter.

“And what name?” He held a pen over a pad.

“Atherton,” I said, “Elizabeth Atherton.”

“I order you taxi, Miss Elizabeth. Please, perhaps you like a drink in the bar?” His head moved from side to side rapidly.

“Ok, yes, yes,” I said quickly. I could do with a drink to calm my nerves. I touched my hair in what I hopped was a girlish manner. It was amazing how easily I changed to being in female guise.

“I come and get you when taxi is ready.”

“Thanks,” I said. I tottered off towards the bar.

It was quiet apart from a couple playing a board game and three workmen around a table who eyed me up. I smiled at them flirtatiously as I walked to the bar but immediately I felt uncomfortable. What if they tried to chat me up?

I took a deep breath and walked up to the bar and ordered a gin and tonic.

“Ice and a slice?” the barman asked.

“Yes, please.”

Once I had my drink, I decided to move away from the bar and sit at a table. In a way, I was getting good exposure – after all, I wanted as many people as possible to see me in the hotel, though they may have wondered why I kept my gloves on whilst I was drinking my gin and tonic. True to his word, the man, who worked on the reception, came in to tell me my taxi was waiting outside.

I drained my drink and walked out of the bar in my high-heeled shoes. I went down the steep steps and to the waiting minicab.

“The Cheltenham Bell, is it?” the driver said in a whiny West Midlands voice.

“Yes, thanks.”

“Meeting someone there, are you, darling?” the talkative driver continued.

“Yes,” I said. “My boyfriend.”

“Work in Cheltenham, does he?”

“No, he works for a bookmaker, he’s been up here for the Festival.”

“Couldn’t you have stayed with him, rather than at the White Horse? I don’t like to say anything but it’s not got a great reputation.”

I blushed. “It’s only for one night and I couldn’t find anything in Cheltenham at short notice. I only decided to come up last night. I thought I was going to have to work.”

“All the same, I would have thought your boyfriend would have wrangled a stay at The Bell?”

“No, he couldn’t do that, he is supposed to be working.” My voice was husky, Marilyn Monroe-ish. I was pleased with how it sounded but I was getting fed up with the driver’s endless questions. “You know what bookmakers are like – tight as anything. They won’t pay for guests and Peter is only very junior in the company.”

“What bookmaker is it he works for?” The nosey driver asked.

“William Hills,” I said.



“It’s a nice hotel,” the driver informed me. “One of the nicest in Cheltenham and expensive too. Lucky Hills are paying for your boyfriend or it would have cost him a pretty penny, I can tell you.”

“I know,” I said. “I’ve seen the prices.”

Fortunately the cab soon drew up outside the marble, pillared entrance of the The Bell before he had a chance to delve any deeper into my personal life. I undid my purse and pulled out some notes. In return, he gave me a card.

“I’m on until midnight so if you need a lift back then, call me, darling. I’ll be ready and waiting.” He winked.

I thanked him and dropped the change back into my handbag. Fortunately, due to the coldness of the weather, the gloves did not look out of place. After all, there could be no finger prints left in the Bell, or anywhere else for that matter. Once I was ready, I got out of the minicab, walked up the marble steps and into the foyer of the hotel.

The waistcoated concierge smiled to me as I walked in. I returned his smile. I was beginning to feel confident. I was growing into my role. I had passed the first tests with flying colors and had not aroused any suspicion. A young, dark-haired man nodded to me and smiled as I walked through the foyer. God, the floor was unbelievably slippery in those shoes. I felt like I was standing on an ice rink. I could not believe how high they were too – when I had pulled off the Cool Kings Club robbery, I had worn sandals with a high heel but the heel had been square rather than stiletto and they had not slipped about as much as the court shoes I was wearing. I stood for a few minutes and looked around at my surroundings, taking in as much as possible: the other guests moving across the foyer, the men in business suits, the tourists who had just arrived with their suitcases, the Festival goers in their checked green and black jackets and Trilby hats. There were plenty

of hats on show - flat caps and ladies hats with feathers for there were plenty of smartly-dressed women milling around too. It appeared there had been a conference in the hotel and there were a lot of people in business suits. I took a deep breath to calm my nerves and walked up to the reception desk. "Can I help, Madam?" the man on reception asked as I approached the desk.

"I'm just meeting a friend in the bar. I believe he has booked a table for us in your restaurant."

The man stood up, hovered over the desk and pointed to the bar area with a biro. "The bar is along there. I trust your friend won't be long, Madam."

I made to look at the tiny dial of my gold watch, which in fact I could not read.

"I am a bit early," I said. "I'm staying at The White Horse in Gloucester and thought it would take longer to get here than it has."

I walked around the desk and along a short corridor, past the tinted, dark windows of the restaurant area. They cast a brown shadow over the diners. My heart raced, I gripped my handbag tightly. It had been seven years since I had pulled off a similar stunt and it had been less complicated although the actual robbery was possibly easier. I kept thinking of Rich's words - *you're a natural*. Mum had thought the same and even Judith had been surprised at how easily I could morph into an attractive female. At last I reached the bar area. I was about to see Rich again and that excited me. There was no door to the bar, even so I stood under the arch entrance for a few seconds composing myself: legs together, straightened my gloves, touched my hair, pulled down my dress from the sides and my jacket. The bar was busy. Very busy.

A cacophony of laughter and chatter hit me as I waited to make my entrance. I could detect the racing types in their green tweeds; some business men and women were on a jolly from work; a large family

group stood around talking. They were about to go through to the restaurant for a 50<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration judging by the cards and presents which were being given out. I stepped further into the melee – I could imagine everyone watching me, but they weren't. One or two men glanced, one or two women gave me sidelong glances but my walk to the bar in the 4" heels was untroubled.

Finally, I saw him in the corner by the bar, arms spread across a sofa – the one and only Richard *E.* Scrivener. Two men were facing him, Talking animatedly. Rich had his ubiquitous cigarette in his right hand and, as I walked into the bar, he took a long draw on it whilst his eyes followed me. Of course, we had discussed what I would be wearing, the color of the wig, the height of the heels, the dress so he would recognize me instantly. His face drew taut as he drew on his cigarette. His craggy features smoothed for an instant and then he exhaled. A glimmer of a smile flickered on his lips.

I smiled too. I just couldn't help it. I felt elated. All the planning, all the scheming had come to this, We were finally there, in the bar of the Cheltenham Bell Hotel on the evening of Friday, 13<sup>th</sup> March, 1986, the day of Dawn Run's historic win in in the Gold Cup. I noticed that one bottle of wine was already turned upside down in an ice bucket and another bucket contained a second bottle of wine. Rich had the collar of his shirt undone – I clocked the red piping. He looked me up and down, the faint smile never left his face. If the Diamonds had seen it, they would have thought that Rich was just eyeing up an attractive woman. I watched the smoke pour from Danny Diamond's cigar like wood smoke from a bonfire. As I got closer I could hear Bruce Diamond saying,

"I tell you, Rich, by the time you take out your pitch fees and tax to the government, there's hardly anything left. People think bookmakers are rolling in it but we barely scrape by, honest to God. Is that not the truth, Danny?"

Danny agreed that it was. "There's no money in being an independent bookmaker anymore."

Both men had broad Birmingham accents. I felt excited. I had seen my marks – Danny and Bruce Diamond, bookmakers extraordinaire. I was elated.

I pulled up a stool and sat down, very carefully, conscious to pull down my dress and to cross my legs. The barman was attentive.

"What can I get you, Madam?" He asked.

"A spritzer, please," I said. In truth I didn't much care for them but I knew they were a popular drink with the ladies.

"Anything else?" the barman asked as he placed the drink down.

"No thanks, I am just waiting for my boyfriend. I believe he's booked a table."

"What's his name?"

"Hopkins," I said. "Peter Hopkins."

The barman looked at the reservation book he kept by the bar.

"Oh yes, 8pm, all booked in for you, Miss."

That was another Thursday job, reserving a table in the restaurant.

"I hope he arrives before then," I said with a flirtatious smile. "He said to meet in the bar at 7.45."

"I'm sure he'll be here soon," the barman smiled as he spoke.

I took up the drink in my gloved hand and took a few sips of the awful tasting liquid.

Then another customer pressed himself against the bar and I was alone again – legs crossed, sitting on the red vinyl-covered stool, waiting. Nerves had been replaced by excitement. I don't know what it was or why it was, but seeing Rich gave me confidence. I trusted him and felt inspired by him; I knew everything was going to be alright.

So, I was in situ. I just needed the signal from Rich and it was all systems go. I knew that Judith would be outside in the carpark in the hired Ford, having driven to the Bell from the car park in Gloucester. She would be sitting in the car with all lights off in complete darkness, waiting for me to re-emerge from the hotel. All I needed was the signal from Rich. I took a few more sips of my drink. I hoped any uneasiness didn't show.

I didn't like to make it obvious but I kept looking at Rich. Fortunately, he was sitting in my eye line - I knew he had planned that – sofa seats in the corner by the bar. I could hear the boring drone of the Diamond brothers. Suddenly my ears pricked up.

“We've taken about £86, 000 over the three days,” Bruce was saying. “Should have been more but quite a few favorites have won and we got slaughtered by Dawn Run winning today.”

“Well, here's to you, cheers,” Rich said, smiling broadly.

Right on queue, Rich raised his glass and nodded. Just as he did so, a big fat suit, on a company jolly, waddled over and asked me what such a lovely lady was doing on her own?

“I'm waiting for my boyfriend.”

“Stood you up, has he?” Fats said.

“No, I'm early, thank you.”

The barman stepped forward and saved me from Fat's interrogation.

“She’s got a table booked in the restaurant, her boyfriend is a regular here. He’ll be here shortly.” He winked at me.

When Fats had gone, I said to the barman, “Thanks for that. Where’s your pay phone?”

I knew the answer already, in the lobby, by the reception, quite near to the corridor which was marked rooms 101 to 140. The corridor I needed to enter...

He told me, pointing with his finger.

I thanked him and took up my drink; then I picked up my handbag and slipped off the bar stool. I said, “You know, I think I will just powder my nose and give Peter a quick call to see if he’s OK. He’s always late and I’m always early,” I tittered. “They say opposites attract.”

I quite enjoyed playing the coquette. I smiled flirtatiously and stepped through the crowded bar with my drink in one hand and the bag in the crock of my elbow. People moved out of the way to let me go, little knowing I was in fact a man and that rather than going to powder my nose, I was actually going off to commit a robbery. I had the key, I had gotten the signal, there was no going back.

## **Chapter Eight**

As I walked through the bar, I was conscious of many male eyes watching me, as well as some female ones. I wanted as much exposure for “Elizabeth” as possible. I walked easily in the high heels following weeks of practice in the apartment. Even so, the restriction of the tight dress and the feel of the nylons on my bare legs was strange. I had come to the conclusion that it was very uncomfortable being a woman but there was no doubt Rich was right – a woman looked less suspicious than a man. The looks and glances I received from people in the bar told me

that no one thought I was anything other than a genuine woman – an attractive one at that.

*Give your character as much exposure as possible,* Rich had said in one of his many letters. *Milk it, milk it, milk it. Play the diva.*

At the end of each letter was the command, *Burn it!*

What he hoped, and what *I* hoped, was that if the police started looking for the thief, the “blonde woman” would immediately become Suspect Number One. The police would say they were looking for a blonde lady in a sequined dress and loads of helpful members of the public would come forward: the taxi driver, the bar staff at the Bell and possibly at the White Horse and, of course, diners, drinkers and other guests at the Bell. The police would get descriptions, lots and lots of them. So what if one person said, “I thought she was a man!”?

It would be one amongst many descriptions which would describe “Elizabeth” as wearing a black sequined dress, a red dress, a blue skirt and being short, being tall, being slim, being about thirty, being about forty, being about twenty. Descriptions from the general public were notoriously hard for the police to work on.

*Confusion,* Rich had said in one of his many letters, *is the art of the con man’s game.*

And, by being dressed as a woman, the police would have absolutely no idea at all whatsoever what the man underneath the skin of “Elizabeth” looked like. No idea at all. As Rich had explained in one of his numerous letters, had Mum *not* persuaded me to dress as a contestant for the Cool Kings Club robbery, then we would have been caught, no question. The female disguise was genius, right?

CCTV was in its infancy in the mid-Eighties so the rambling and random descriptions of the general public would not be able to be verified. That meant the police could not build up a “journey.” According

to Rich, the police liked to do this – it was their M.O. if you like. They liked to pin the perpetrator to various time slots and locations before and after the crime which is why CCTV is such an invaluable weapon for the forces of law and order, not just in identifying suspects but in being able to say the perpetrator was in such and such a place an hour before the crime was committed and in another place an hour after. A perpetrator will often have an alibi for the time of the actual offense but what about 6 hours before? What about the day before? What about the day after? An honest person needs no alibi but if you want to commit a felony, you need to be able to explain your actions *before* and *after* the event. That was why we had bought Cheltenham Festival tickets and torn off the stubs. Our alibi? Judith and I had been at the races for two days and we had then gone on to Stratford-upon-Avon on an impulse as we had won a bit of money. We hadn't planned that bit, we would say (although in reality we had).

So I made my way through the bar and, as I did so I slipped my spritzer glass onto a table where people were sitting, ready to be collected by the barman along with all the other glasses. The gloves prevented fingerprints being left but I didn't want to take any risks on the lipstick. Sure, the chances were the glass would be washed before the robbery was discovered, but why take risks? Now it was on a table with a number of glasses, guess which one was mine? That was another advantage of being a woman – you could get away with things that were a bit cheeky. A man seated at the table looked at me as I put the glass down but didn't say anything. I made my way into the foyer. I smiled at a waiter, caught the eye of the dark-haired youth on reception, then pushed the door open and went through to the ladies' toilet. It smelt of lavender. The hotel was expensive and the bathroom reflected it with round, art deco sinks with dainty, silver lever taps beside which were cloth hand towels, soaps and hand creams. All the cubicle doors were open – I was alone. I looked at myself admiringly in the mirror. I looked good. I shivered. It was a means to an end. I did not consider my-



self to be a transvestite but it was nice to see an attractive woman in the mirror. I could not understand the idea of those men dressing in drag or being panto dames. The real kick – and I have to confess it was a kick – was that I looked incredibly convincing. I looked like a woman. I was able to convince people I was something I wasn't. Rich could do it through his gift of the gab talents and I could do it through morphing into a woman. I pouted at my reflection, then I took off my gloves which I rested on the sink's edge.

Next I opened my handbag, which I also rested on the sink. I took out a red lipstick and applied it to my lips, then I added a dab of gloss, then I powdered my nose and brushed my hair. To finish, I sprayed on some more perfume. I smelt good. Fresh and fragrant. And most of all, I looked great, better than I had all those years ago when, under my mother's guidance and tutoring, I had undertaken the Cool Kings Club robbery. I smoothed down my dress, placed my feet together. The heels were beginning to ache my ankles but I felt terrific, on a real high. I was no longer nervous. In fact, I was unnaturally calm and relaxed. I had a job to do. I thought of Rich talking to the Diamond brothers. The plan was to try to delay them for as long as possible before they went to their rooms so we could make good our escape. Hopefully, Judith and I would be back in our hotel room by the time they discovered their missing money.

Finally, I took the black leather gloves and pulled them back on. I was careful to only touch my own things so as not to leave any fingerprints anywhere. I was ready. I left the bathroom and walked to a pay phone in the foyer. It was close to the corridor I needed to enter, the one labelled Rooms 101 to 140. I dialed my flat and as the phone rang and rang and rang, I spoke softly into the mouthpiece. I pretended to be talking to my mythical boyfriend, Pete.

“But where are you, Pete?” I beseeched as the phone kept ringing. “I am sitting in the bar and some

fat slob has already tried to chat me up. Please come quickly, please?"

There was nothing like a bit of performance art, even if the punters in the hotel didn't know what the hell was going on: in their midst was a con man and thief – disguised as a woman. In one of his letters, Rich had suggested that if the job went well, there would be others. He was lining up other marks to con or rob – with me dressed as a woman. He knew I was a natural. Perhaps Mum had realized it too.

*The thing with you being a female impersonator, one of his letters had said, is that you can change your appearance at will and from one gender to another which is the best disguise of all.*

He was right. If the cops didn't know if they were looking for a man or a woman, they really were thrown a curved ball. All the rest of the stuff – tall, short, slim, fat, stocky - was meaningless. So much was defined by gender. *Confusion*, that was the word that Rich had frequently used in what I dubbed the "Burn It" letters due to the frequent reprise of that term. Confusion, confusion, confusion, that was the key to the conman's craft.

After a few minutes I placed the phone back on the cradle and left the exposed, grey-hooded booth. I hoped some passers-by had heard me imploring my hapless boyfriend to hurry up. I stood for a minute, my hands at my sides, the short black jacket showing off my enlarged bosom. My blue/black dress sparkled as I took in my trim legs, my slim body, my slender wrists. Judith, when she first had first seen me dressed, had gasped in disbelief. She could not believe I was so convincing. It was a knack and I had it. As I say, I was absolutely not a transvestite and had no wish to be one but I was able to mimic women. I don't know if that was because I had no father figure so I had instinctively copied my mother. I had been illegitimate, the offspring of some brief dalliance my mother had with a renowned womanizer who had

bedded my mother *and* her backing singers *and* assorted other women at the same time.

After my dad, Harry – who I had never met - had betrayed her so brutally, Mum had not had any further meaningful relationships. It had cut her up so badly because she had loved and trusted him: to compound the treachery he had dumped her when she became pregnant with me and her religious family had disowned her. It wasn't easy being a single mother in 1956. It was just me and her against the world – and we'd been close. Very close.

Maybe I had just watched her too much, for I had often seen her getting ready for shows in the house. Sometimes, as she had no family, she would take me to the nightclubs where she was performing where all the other singers would fuss about me and babysit me whilst Mum was on stage. That was the world in which I had grown up – one in which, from an early age, I had been exposed to the female form and had seen women getting dressed and applying makeup. And now, for some reason I could do what most men couldn't – I could act and look like a woman.

I turned on my heel and walked down the corridor to room 104. I walked slowly and with assurance. My heart started to pick up the pace. This was for real. This was it. No turning back. I couldn't look at the even numbers. I walked past Room 101, Room 103, Room 105 and then, opposite from it, was Room 104. A wooden hotel door separated me from £86,000. All I had to do was walk in, pick it up off the bed and walk out. With shaking, gloved hands, I took the key from my handbag. I wondered if the key would fit, if it would turn. A bald-headed man in a suit lumbered passed. He smiled at me, then a couple came past. They wished me a good evening.

My hand was trembling so much I could hardly get the key into the lock. At first, I thought it didn't work but then it was in and I was turning it. Smoothly. Easily. Rich had gotten it right. I felt elated. The door opened. Silently. I slipped inside. I was hit by the

smell of cheap men's aftershave and Brut deodorant. I closed the door and locked it from the inside. I leant against the door, my heart beating, reverberating against the wood. It reminded me so much of the Cool Kings Club raid. I remembered how I had fought to control my nerves as I undid the safe. I had been exposed and could have been caught by anyone coming up the stairs. At least now the door was locked and I had left the key in it so no one could enter.

I turned on the light. It was a twin room. Rich was right. He had seen it for himself, just a peep into the room had been enough - just enough to know that Bruce and Danny Diamond were somewhat careless with money. The winnings were stacked on the bed nearest the door. Neat piles of notes and bags of coins. It had been counted and left: each bundle was of a uniform size and tied with some elastic bands. And, as Rich had also said, an old brown Gladstone bag was on the floor. It was the bag they used on course to store their winnings.

I went to work quickly, fearful that the Diamond brothers may turn up unexpectedly and try to get in. I took up the bag and stuffed the money inside. I stacked the wads into the bag until it was full, then took a carrier bag from my handbag and placed some more wads of notes and the heavy bags of coins into that. In one of his letters Rich had issued a stark warning.

*Only take the money, do not take anything else as it will be traceable.*

Even so, I did look in the two bedside cabinet drawers and found some more loose change and notes which I put in my handbag. It was an adrenalin rush - it pulsed through my veins. I moved as if I was on amphetamines. When I had finished, I walked to the window. I pulled back the orange curtains which had yellow circles on them and shoved open the window. It would not open very far, just far enough. I clocked a lamppost-style light in the car park to the left of the room. It would be a landmark.

It was a struggle at first but I finally pushed the Gladstone bag out into the dark. I heard it plop onto the grass below and then the carrier bag which I had knotted to stop the money from falling out. That was easier. I closed and locked the window and drew the curtain back across; then I turned and looked back at the bed. I took a deep breath. I had committed a crime. And maybe then I felt a pang of remorse. I thought about Danny or maybe it was Bruce - I couldn't remember which - saying they had not made much money. That was a lie but we were certainly lifting their earnings for a few days and they were independent bookmakers, not like the big boys who could afford to lose a few quid. Then the anger kicked in. The anger at how people had treated me all my life. Like in the words of that song *Small Town Boy* by Bronski Beat – *Pushed around and kicked around, always a lonely boy*. That was me. I felt anger at how they had treated my mum too. She was a good singer, she could have made it. She had the talent, she could have been someone. That fueled the adrenalin and I put such stupid, remorseful thoughts to the back of my mind. The Diamond brothers were bullies and they deserved to lose their money. I was entitled to it. Rich, Judith and I had worked hard to get to this point. It was just a case of finders keepers, losers weepers. *Hey, wasn't everyone a thief one way or another anyway?*

I walked back into the room and around the now empty beds. I went to the door and, leaving the light on to help me identify the room from the outside, I unlocked the door and went into the corridor. I pulled the door shut and, with the key in my gloved right hand, I locked it. A guest passed me as I took the key out of the lock.

“Good evening, Madam,” he said.

I smiled a reply. Rich was right – women attracted less suspicion than men. I placed the key back in the handbag and strolled down the corridor and back to the hotel foyer, carrying the bag confidently in the crook of my arm. I walked across the lobby, striding



purposefully in my high-heeled shoes. All the while I was conscious of the eyes of the man on reception watching me go and not because he was admiring me. I had aroused his suspicion. It was past 8pm, the time I had booked the meal for. My boyfriend had not shown up, so what was I doing leaving the hotel? And why was I coming from a corridor with rooms when I wasn't a guest?

But I was guilty of nothing. No crime had been discovered and with guests making enquires at his desk, he was in no position to follow or interrogate me. The elderly concierge was less suspicious, he bowed to me as I left.

"Have a good evening, Madam," he said. He had obviously not realized I had entered the hotel barely forty-five minutes previously.

"Thank you," I replied. He held open a large glass door for me and I passed through it. Then I was out, walking down the steps. It had turned really cold and the wind was blustery. I hoped I did not look too disheveled. I turned right, away from the well-lit driveway that led to the hotel entrance and into the dark carpark. I looked for a room with a light on. There were a number with lights on and there were a number of lampposts too around the perimeter of the carpark. I guessed that room 104 would be one of the first. The path led around the side of the carpark with the rooms on the right. The only problem was that the ground sloped down steeply so that the rooms were slightly lower than the car park. That meant the bags were in a gully and I could not see them. I looked across the car park for Judith's hire car but the car park was in total darkness. I decided to take the plunge and walk down the slope. That was difficult in high heels which penetrated the soft earth but somehow, I got into the gully. I walked along it a bit until I nearly tripped over the Gladstone bag and near it I found the carrier bag.

I lifted the Gladstone bag up and placed it on top of the slope and then did the same with the carrier bag.