

Hawkins: Chasing Shadows.

Beryl Buxton

Part One

The sign read 'Hawkins Agency', but not very clearly, for the gold lettering was badly faded and had practically merged into the dull green background. The door to the agency was situated in a small back street in a quiet section of the business city.

James Harland sighed as he surveyed the door on which the paint was as badly faded as on the sign. So this was his inheritance: And only last week he had heard that Bernie Tall from his college days had inherited a sweet three million pounds from his uncle; that Charlie Sweeney now owned and managed Mid-Northern Tire Company, so with the good news of fortunate friends raising his expectations he had hurried down to inspect his own legacy. 'Thank you, Uncle John.' he thought ruefully as he pushed open the door. And it even squeaked a small protest from ancient hinges.

The inside seemed just as neglected as outside. There was a small reception area which contained a desk, filing cabinet and a door, which presumably, led to the main office. The only relief from the air of resigned dinginess which pervaded the place was in the bright colors of the clothes of the girl who rose to greet him as he entered.

“Good morning,” she smiled pleasantly. “Can I help you?”

James looked at her approvingly. “I hope so,” he answered cheerfully. “I hope someone can help me, because,” he looked around and shook his head, “I think I shall need a lot of help.”

The girl smiled again, but less expansively this time, and looked efficient and inquiring. Actually, behind the cool exterior, she was wondering why this place seemed to attract such strange types. Perhaps, she reflected, it was because it was quietly tucked away from the main thoroughfare. Why, only last week there had been that man who had wanted her to find him a full grown aspidistra because, he said, aspidistras reminded him of his favorite aunt and he was lonely. He had also been a little drunk. And it was very hard now that John Hawkins was not.... she thrust away the thought and the sadness it brought and gave her full attention to the young man who was now staring about him with an amused smile on his lips.

“Well, If we knew just what it was you required, perhaps we could help you,” she said briskly. He turned to her and chuckled. “If I knew what was required perhaps I might even help myself.”

She smiled wanly back at him. Oh, it was definitely going to be one of those days, she sighed inwardly.

“Is that the door to the office?” he asked, and without waiting for her reply, he strode

toward it.

“You can’t go in there.” she said, recovering from her surprise to quickly move into his path. Which was a bit silly, she realized immediately, for he was at least six feet tall and he seemed as broad as a house as he towered above her. He gazed down at her with amusement. She stared defiantly back at him, although she didn't feel half as defiant as she looked.

“My name is James Harland,” he informed her helpfully.

“And I'm sure that’s very nice for you, but you still can't go in there,” she said doggedly. How she missed John Hawkins: if only he were here now.

“I can see that they haven't kept you very well informed,” James laughed. "Didn't Uncle John ever mention me?”

“Mr. Hawkins never.....” she paused. Harland? She seemed to recall, very vaguely, something about a Harland. John Hawkins had spoken once or twice about a nephew: a restless, thoughtless, ne'er do well was how he had described him. But a cheerful soul. John had chortled, and the only one in the family with the courage to do exactly what he wanted to do. Which, according to John Hawkins, was precious little.

James brought her out of her reverie as he thrust a letter into her hand.

“This is from Uncle John's trustee's. It will explain everything while I take a look around.” And he stepped around her and went into the office, leaving her feeling rather foolish and a little indignant.

The office was not much bigger than the reception area outside. In front of a high, wide window was a desk accompanied by two chairs, a battered old safe was pushed into a corner, and that, as far as furnishing was concerned, was that.

James sat in the chair behind the desk and swiveled around. At least the chair was comfortable, he thought idly. “Lord of all I survey.” And he smiled because all that he surveyed did not induce a very lordly feeling, quite the opposite.

He tried the drawers in the desk and they were all empty, as was the safe when he looked there, having found the keys on the desk. The whole place seemed cold and bare, and that didn't seem like Uncle John. James felt a little depressed. He had been very fond of his uncle, but this place did not hold a trace of his pleasant, slightly eccentric character. It was just an empty room and James did not find it very welcoming.

He was deep in thought and frowning slightly when the girl entered. She placed the letter on the desk and stood silently looking down at him. It was a few moments before James became aware of her presence and when he did he started and smiled guiltily.

"I'm sorry, I was miles away. Thinking of Uncle John," he apologised. "Though why I should I don't know, there is nothing here to remind me of him." he added.

"That was your uncle's idea," she explained. "He wanted to leave the place exactly as he had found it twenty years ago, so he left instructions that everything was to be removed. Everything," she emphasized. "Although, if I had known it was to be you taking over I might have kept a few things. He had one or two items another man might have found interesting." And she colored slightly.

"I'll bet he did," James grinned. "Have they been packed away or sold?"

"They went up for auction, the proceeds to go into the business,"

"Good. And what other instructions, if any, did he leave, Miss....?"

"Ormonde, Sally," she introduced herself.

"Were you ever called Sandy?" he asked interestedly.

"No. Why?"

"Your hair color. You would have been called Sandy if you were a boy." James informed her.

"But I'm not a boy, and I never have been," she said helpfully, a little defiant still because she suspected that he was amusing himself.

"No. I don't suppose you ever were," he agreed. "Now, about further instructions."

"None, really. Except that the business is to stay the same, and the name is to remain unaltered."

"What is our business, by the way? And how is it?" he inquired."

Sally shrugged her shoulders. "Anything and everything, I suppose. And it's not very good at the moment."

"If it ever has been good." James remarked, glancing around the room.

"Your uncle managed. And enjoyed it." Sally said loyally.

"He could enjoy anything. And just what type of agency are we? Why isn't it on the sign and in the adverts?"

"Ah. Your uncle maintained that if we gave the agency a specific title, such as employment, marriage, or detective, we should only receive one type of customer, but if we just left it as Hawkins Agency everybody would, or could, come to us."

"And did it work?"

"Only too well," Sally answered wryly. "Your uncle wouldn't know from one day to the next whether he would be digging ditches or working as a butler in a stately home."

James chuckled delightedly. "They sound like the sort of situations that John's muddled

thinking would lead him into. Now, is there anything else that I should know?"

"I don't think so. Oh, yes. Your uncle paid me six months salary in advance and asked me to stay for that length of time."

"And will you?"

"Of course: I promised," Sally said indignantly.

"Of course," James nodded, looking pleased about it.

"I'm glad your salary is paid, I wish mine was," he added sadly.

"You'll have the money from the auction soon," she told him.

"Any idea how much that will be?" he asked.

"No." she answered shortly.

"Pity. Well, Sandy....."

"Sally," she interrupted warningly.

"....it looks as though we are working together. And the first thing I think we should do is have a cup of coffee. Do you think you could manage that?"

"Yes, I'll take the money from the petty cash. And that's down to fifty pence now," she added as she saw his interest.

"Then let's hope the auction money comes through soon."

Sally hoped so too, as she walked to the nearby café. She had no idea what James Harland had been doing lately, if anything, but she could see that it had not been paying him very well. It was interesting, if slightly disturbing, to have an employer who had even less money than herself. She only hoped that he was prepared to work for his money. But she need have no worries on that score, as she found on her return.

"Ah. good. You were quick. We will just have time to drink this before we leave," James greeted her.

"Leave?" she asked, puzzled.

"Yes. There was a 'phone call while you were out, Brown's Brushes, we are to go to their demonstration stall in Willmer's store. Quick work, eh?" He was pleased with himself. "But I daresay you've done dozens of the things, or similar," he added.

"Me? I've never done anything like that in my life," Sally exclaimed.

"But you must have done things like this with Uncle John," he insisted.

"Your uncle always worked alone. I am a receptionist," she said pointedly.

"But you've got to come. They asked for a man and a girl, a pretty girl, and I don't know any other pretty girls," James said persuasively.

“No.” Sally was adamant.

“Yes. They want a couple and we are a couple. Besides. I haven't the faintest idea what to do,” he admitted.

“Neither have I. And I'm not going to be ordered about.” she stated angrily, banging her cup down. “I shall leave now.”

James surveyed her gravely. “So much for your promises,” he said sadly. “Your six months didn't last very long, did it?”

“I didn't know then what it would entail,” she flared at him.

“A promise is a promise under any circumstances. But I understand. I release you from your promise.”

“That's very generous of you, but it's not for you to release me from anything. I didn't promise you anything. And I'm never likely to.” She paused and James could see that she was wavering. He assumed his saddest expression and waited silently.

“I'll help you just this once,” she said finally.

“Good girl, let's go.” James said delightedly.

“But I don't know what good I shall be. I know nothing of demonstration stalls,” she wailed as he took her arm and hurried her out of the office before she could change her mind.

“We can learn together,” James said cheerfully.

The demonstration of Brown's Brushes was easy, simple, foolproof, in fact. Or so a representative of Mr. Brown would have James and Sally believe. The stall had been erected to bring to the unsuspecting public's attention a new, revolutionary electric shoe brush and polisher, which sprayed the polish and shined perfectly with absolutely no effort from the wearer of the lucky shoes.

“Well, that seems easy enough,” James smiled. They had been shown how to use the electric 'Blackit' brush by the representative before he had hurried off on other, more important business: It was his tea break. There was just a hint of relief in James' voice as he leaned nonchalantly against the frame of the stall and waited for their first vict..... customer.

“I'll reserve my judgement,” Sally said, eyeing Brown's 'Blackit' brush with suspicion.

“Oh, come now,” James laughed. “It's really very simple, a child could use it. Why, with a little practice even you should be able to manage it. Yes, ma'am,” he said, moving toward a customer and away from Sally before she could think of a suitable retort. The customer was a large, fur coated

lady of obvious wealth. Sally noted the lady's petulant mouth with a feeling of foreboding. James prattled on about the merits of the 'Blackit' brush and finally convinced the woman that a demonstration was necessary. She settled herself in the chair provided and lifted one foot for James.

“Think it would be wiser to take off her shoes,” Sally whispered as James picked up the brush.

“Just leave it to me,” he murmured confidently, patting her arm condescendingly. The demonstration was, to Sally's surprise and relief, a complete success. The woman gazed admiringly at her sparkling shoes and commented favorably upon Mr. Brown's 'Blackit' brush.

“Yes, madam, a marvelous little machine.” James remarked snugly. He was holding the machine and he gave it an affectionate little pat, which was unfortunate, because he patted the starter button. A fine spray of black shoe polish squirted slowly, but very effectively, all down the front of the woman's snow white blouse. James dropped the machine in horror and left it jiggling merrily about the floor as he hurriedly produced a handkerchief and tried to wipe away his mistake. For this piece of thoughtlessness he received a resounding slap across his left cheek.

“I beg your pardon,” James stammered, red-faced. “I never thought - I mean....” But the woman was not listening to his excuses, she was too busy airing her complaints at the top of her voice to her rapidly increasing audience.

“The manager,” she was demanding hysterically.

“Where is the manager?” Sally had retreated into the furthest, and most dimly lit, corner of the stall. From there she had watched events with an embarrassed horror. She watched the manager appear; a large stern faced man with the air of a criminal court judge about him, and she shuddered. There would be no sympathy for them from that quarter, she decided wearily.

James was completely demoralized. He stood with bowed head as his former customer and 'Blackit' admirer raged to the manager about 'that infernal machine' and the incompetent idiot who operated it. In fact, James looked so defenseless that Sally felt compelled to push her way forward to his assistance.

“It Was purely accidental.” she explained to the stern faced manager as she picked up the 'Blackit' brush.

“My colleague merely patted the machine like this.” She imitated James' action. But the machine was heavy, too heavy for her to hold in one hand. It slid slowly from her fingers. She grabbed at it despairingly, but too late. The manager's stern face contorted into a howl of pain as the machine; activated by the fall, danced it's merry jig over his toes and sprayed polish up his trouser leg. Sally backed away in alarm as the man spluttered angry threats and stumbled out of the way of the insane

'Blackit' machine. Sally felt her arm taken firmly and someone propelled her roughly through the laughing onlookers. She was quite convinced it was the police and that she had been arrested. Once clear of the crowd she looked up to see the face of her arresting officer. James stared solemnly down at her.

“I think,” he said, glancing quickly around, his eyes sparkling with boyish laughter. “we had better make a run for it.” And they did. Sally hanging grimly on to James' sleeve as they made a swift, undignified, but very effective exit.

They arrived back at the agency fifteen breathless minutes later, sally closed the door firmly and leaned thankfully against it. “Never, never will I be able to set foot in that store again,” she declared. “And as for you, James Harland....”

“What you need is a nice cup of coffee,” he interrupted hurriedly as he slipped through the door and back into the street, preferring to take his chances in the hostile outside world than to stay and listen to what he was 'And as for.'

When he returned with the coffee Sally was in a much calmer frame of mind. She received the coffee he offered with a disdainful sniff and studiously avoided looking at him.

“As you tried to point out to the manager, it wasn't really my fault,” James began diffidently after three minutes of silence.

Sally glared at him.

“Well, perhaps it was,” he amended quickly. “But really, such a fuss over a little thing like a dirty blouse. It could easily be washed.”

Sally gave him another withering look.

“No? Then I would have bought her another one,” James said stoutly. “At least it was only her clothes the 'Blackit' blacked, it didn't tango all over her feet.”

“I have never been so embarrassed in all my life.” Sally said quietly. “It was utterly humiliating and I shall never appear in public in your company again. Never!” She turned away abruptly as if to terminate the conversation.

The telephone rang.

James looked at it, then at Sally.

She shook her head. “You can face the music,” she said with relish.

James picked up the 'phone. “Yes?” he inquired tentatively. But it wasn't an angry call

from Willmers, Sally realized with disappointment as she watched James' face brighten considerably.

He Picked up a pen and hastily scribbled on the pad before him, then replaced the receiver with a pleased air.

“Another customer,” he informed her cheerfully.

“Really?” Sally said disinterestedly, and turned away to busy herself with some papers on her desk.

James looked at her thoughtfully for a few moments, a puzzled frown slowly being replaced by a scheming little smile. He composed his face and cleared his throat.

“Miss Ormonde,” he started formally and that threw her off her guard immediately, “I realize that this morning must have been quite a strain for you and I think you should take the rest of the day off. Also, I would appreciate it if you would allow me to make my apology over dinner tonight. I thought the Paladin Club.....?” he finished questioningly.

“Well, I...you...,” Sally was completely at a loss.

“Please,” he insisted.

“I...very well. And thank you,” Sally smiled. She was thinking how pleasant he was after she had been so unkind. There might well be a spark of decency in the man after all.

“No, thank you,” James said gallantly. He tore from the pad the page that contained his telephoned instructions (Major and Mrs. Smith. Eight o'clock, Paladin Club.) and pushed the pad towards Sally. “If you will write down your address I will pick you up at seven-thirty.” And he smiled disarmingly.

Sally smiled back. For some reason she felt a small tingle of premonition. She accused herself of harboring vexations and sternly dismissed her uneasiness. Which was unfortunate.

The Paladin Club was one of the most fashionable nightclubs in town. It was plush, expensive, but informal and discreet, and from her seat in a corner booth Sally had seen at least six famous show business personalities relaxing as she was. As a waiter removed the remnants of an excellent meal, Sally sighed contentedly and smiled across at James, or rather, the back of James' head, for he had turned and was staring at a couple seated two tables away. Sally frowned. James, she had noticed, had been paying considerable attention to this pair all evening. And she did not find it very complimentary!

“Friends of yours?” she asked sweetly.

“Eh?” James Whirled around and stared at her with some confusion “Friends? No, not at all,” he laughed, a little forcedly.

“I’m not surprised,” she said, still sweetly.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized. “I haven’t been very good company for you this evening.”

“You certainly haven’t,” Sally agreed calmly.

Out of the corner of his eye James could see the couple he had been Watching leave their table and make their way toward the gaming room.

“How would you like to visit the gambling den?” he asked lightly, standing in anticipation of her answer.

“No, thank you,” Sally answered.

“You will enjoy it.” James took her arm and helped her from her chair.

“I don’t want to enjoy it,” Sally said, sitting down again.

“You do.” James insisted. taking her arm again.

“I do not,” Sally answered stubbornly. “And I will not.”

“You’ve got to,” James said desperately as he watched the pair he was so interested in disappear into the gaming room.

“Why must I? And why do you want to follow that couple?” Sally demanded.

James sighed and sat down resignedly. “They are Major and Mrs. Smith. You might have noticed the necklace that Mrs. Smith was wearing?”

Sally nodded. “Rather vulgar, but very expensive,” she pronounced.

“Very,” James agreed. “That’s why we are guarding it.”

Sally stared at him in amazement. “Guarding? Do you mean that we are working? Agency work?” she demanded to know.

“I knew you wouldn’t mind,” he said pleasantly, helping her up from her chair. This time she was too taken aback to sit down again.

“You...are....despicable,” she fumed in a low voice as he guided her across the room.

“Please don’t thank me now,” he murmured, smiling down at her. Inside the room James pushed a pile of gambling chips into her hands and, after a brief glance around, led her to a roulette table at which the major and his wife were seated.

“You play and I’ll watch,” he instructed her quietly. Sally stared at the whirling wheel, the bouncing silver ball, the numbers and colored squares beneath glaringly bright lights, and she tugged his sleeve urgently.

“I don’t know how to play.” she whispered.

"It's easy. Just place your chips on the number you think will win," he told her impatiently. She did as she was told.

"No, not all of them," he panicked, as she placed all her chips on number five square. But it was too late, the bet was laid and the wheel was spinning.

"We are now broke," James groaned, watching the wheel with loathing.

"You should be more explicit," Sally said defensively. The wheel slowed down, the ball bounced and jumped and settlednumber five!

"Well I'll be blowed!" James said in amazement.

"Have we won?" Sally asked anxiously. As if to answer her question the croupier pushed a pile of chips towards her, thirty-eight times as many as she had staked.

"Good girl," James said pleased. But the win had its disadvantages. The major's wife had glanced up and recognized James as the man who had been staring at them all through dinner. She whispered something to her husband, who looked up and nodded grimly. Meanwhile, Sally had placed another handful of chips on number seven and had won again. James stood behind her admiringly.

"What's the next number?" he asked eagerly, ignoring Major and Mrs. Smith for the moment.

"None," said Sally firmly, deciding it was a silly game and that she was bound to lose if she continued playing.

"One it is," James said, mishearing, and placed a pile of chips on number one square.

"I said none," Sally repeated. "Oh. Sorry. Thought you said one," James said. disappointed.

"That's a quarter of our winnings gone," she accused him.

"Not necessarily. We haven't lost yet," James pointed out.

"You're not the only one who can play this game, you know." The ball stopped on number nine.

"We can't expect to win every...." James stopped. The major and his wife had gone. He glanced around the room, there was no sign of them.

"Come on." James scooped up the chips that they had won, he hurriedly cashed them in and then rushed Sally out into the car park. Across the wide tarmac space the major and his wife were also hurrying, glancing apprehensively over their shoulders as they did so.

"Ah, there they are," James said with relief as he spotted them. I'll just ask them where they are off to now."

"Just a minute," he called, striding towards his charges. They didn't wait a minute. In

fact, they didn't even wait a second, they took to their heels and ran towards their car.

“Extraordinary people,” James observed as the car roared quickly away.

“Well, I suppose we had better follow them, it's what we are being paid to do.”

Sally and he jumped into the car that he had hired for the evening and they roared off in pursuit.

The chase was fast and furious. On reflection, Sally thought that James, even though he was driving a car strange to him, would most probably have caught up to the major in another few minutes. If the police car had not stopped them!

James started to explain to the policeman why he had been driving so fast, but it sounded so melodramatic, even to his own ears, that he began to fear that he might be accused of drunkenness. So did Sally. She nudged him firmly in the ribs as a warning to keep quiet and James accepted her silent advice and received his ticking off meekly.

“We will never catch the major now,” James said when the policeman had finally driven away. “Would you like to return to the Paladin and try your luck again?” he asked hopefully.

“I would not,” Sally answered. “I just want to go home before you land me in any further trouble.” James stopped the car in front of Sally's flat. He counted out the money they had won and gave her half. Then he took a few notes from her. “For expenses,” he explained.

Sally took the money back from him. “I've been on agency business all evening” she told him cheerfully. “Let the agency bear the expenses.”

“I shouldn't think we'll get any expenses,” James said glumly. “We did lose our clients,” he reminded her.

“You lost the clients, so you can lose the expenses,” she laughed. “Goodnight.”

But they hadn't lost their clients, as they found out next morning when James 'phoned the major's secretary to explain about the previous evening.

“Good morning, Mr. Blackwell, please.” There was a pause and Sally watched a frown arrange itself on his face. “But surely he does. I spoke to him only yesterday. Some business we were to undertake for the major. Of course I'm sure I have the right number. Major Smith, yes. That won't be necessary.” And James put the 'phone down hurriedly.

“Trouble?” Sally asked anxiously.

“I don't know.” He looked puzzled. “Shouldn't think so. Practical joke, perhaps.”

“For heaven's sake! Will you stop talking riddles and tell me.”

“But it is a riddle. It seems that neither the major nor anyone connected with his office employed us yesterday.”

“Then who were you hounding last night?” Sally asked in dismay.

“Heaven only knows,” James said. “But we were lucky they didn't report us to the police. That would have been even worse than the Wilmer fiasco.”

“Nothing could be as bad as Wilmers,” Sally shuddered. “And those poor people! They were out for a pleasant evening together, expecting a nice quiet night out, when you come sleuthing sinisterly around. They must have been terrified!”

“Steady on!” James protested, stung by her accusing tone. “I don't usually go around hounding people, you know. Although I can see that it might look that way to you,” he conceded, seeing the doubting expression on her face.

“oh, it does look that way, very much,” she said fervently. “And your worst victim is this poor girl who works with you!”

“Well, my poor girl, I can promise you a morning of blissful peace and quiet because I have to go out; and I may even be gone for the whole day. But I'll try my best to get back to you,” he added sarcastically, as she smiled broadly at the thought of his absence.

“Do try your hardest to get back early. Then I can be sure that you will be late!” she called after him. He shook his fist at her as he closed the door behind him.

Sally's morning of tranquility lasted just over an hour, then the door opened and James entered grinning happily. Sally closed her eyes and wished desperately; but when she looked again he was still there. And worse, so was his happy expression, which alarmed her more than any look of anger or hate could ever do.

“No!” she said emphatically.

“But I haven't asked you yet,” he protested.

“Ah-ha!” So you were going to involve me in another of your hare brained schemes.

“Don't ask me, I've refused.”

“Very well. But I'd have thought you would have enjoyed Jamaica. It's not often one gets the chance to work abroad. Still, I don't think I'll have any trouble finding someone to accompany me.”

Sally looked at him distrustfully. “Jamaica,” she repeated, disbelievingly, but with just a hint of doubt in her voice.

“Nice Place. Sea, sand, very exotic, pity you don't want to go.”

“You're not going to Jamaica,” she said firmly. She stared hard at his sad and innocent

face. "Are you?" she asked pleadingly.

"No, I'm not. But it would serve you right if I was." he backed warily away as she picked up a heavy marble paper weight and raised it threateningly. "Don't you dare, we have a very important agreement, and you won't be able to go without me."

"I'm not going anywhere with you. Except Jamaica, perhaps, or somewhere similar. So go away from me until you have arranged it."

"This is silly. We're going to be late." He passed her coat from the rack.

"We are going to a wedding," he explained. "And you like weddings. Every woman likes to go to a wedding. Don't you?"

"I don't. You go, I'll stay here. It will be safer for me that way. With you around, the best man will probably end up married to the bride's father!"

"You are needed. Do hurry, there isn't much time. And if you won't go voluntarily, then I shall carry you out," he threatened.

"You wouldn't dare!" She looked into his eyes and she wasn't so sure. She sighed resignedly. "If it's that important to you, I'll go to your Wedding. I know I shall be sorry," she predicted wearily. But Sally didn't regret her decision, she was glad she had decided against her better judgment. They were met at the registry office by a blushing, shy young man with a pronounced nervous stammer, and his equally nervous looking bride to be.

"Are we in time?" James asked the young man, who nodded happily and led them into the registrar. It was explained to Sally that the young couple were Donald Weston and Carol Maws, and that their best man and maid of honor had been involved in a slight accident. No one had been hurt but the accident meant that they would not be able to make the appointed time for the wedding. James, who had been passing when Carol had burst into tears on receipt of the bad news, had offered to help.

"Sandy and I..."

"Sally."

"...are only too glad to help. Actually, it's our business helping people. Hawkins Agency, at your service," James informed the flustered pair. Carol blushed violently and lapsed into silence. Donald nodded enthusiastic agreement.

"Don't know what we should have done," he echoed, glancing nervously around.

"Are you expecting someone else?" James asked him.

"No. Not at all. No one else to expect. At least, I hope not," he finished cryptically. Sally sat next to Carol, who pulled continuously, nervously at her gloves. There seemed to be an air of tension that was out of proportion for the occasion. It was as if, Sally guessed shrewdly, the accident

had been the last straw that almost, but not quite, thanks to James, had been disastrous. Whatever her troubles Carol's face wore a set, determined look, and Sally's heart went out to her. This was no morning for worries: She reached out and tucked a loose lock of hair away from Carol's face.

“Oh dear, does it look too awful?” Carol asked, raising her hand to her hair. “I wish there had been more time.”

“You look lovely,” Sally reassured her honestly.

“Mr. Weston, Miss Maws.” Donald jumped violently at the sound of their names being called by the registrar's assistant. Sally took Carol's hand.

“What ever is troubling you can wait for a little while. The world can manage itself on your wedding day. You just concern yourself with the only people who really matter.”

Carol nodded and her eyes filled as she looked at Donald, who seemed to grow calmer and more self assured under her gaze.

“Thank you, Sandy,” Donald said, as Carol slipped her hand inside his arm. Sally couldn't correct him for the feeling that had welled up inside her.

James took her hand, squeezed it gently, “It's very kind of you. I don't know what we should have done...”

And Hawkins Agency followed the young couple into the flower filled registrar's office.

“That was nice of you, James, to concern yourself with those two,” Sally said, as she waved Donald's car away.

“Entirely selfish. I adore weddings,” he answered flippantly. “I can't resist the opportunity to gloat over some poor chap who is even more unfortunate than myself.”

“There was obviously something worrying them. I wonder what it could be,” she mused, falling in step beside James and strolling through the sun bright streets.

“And don't suggest last minute nerves,” she warned.

He laughed loudly. “Well, I felt nervous and it wasn't my wedding.”

“No, seriously, it was something more than that, much more.”

“It's not our business” James said brusquely. “And I don't think they will allow it to interfere with their honeymoon.”

“Men! You are so basic. There are other things to marriage, you know.”

“I agree. And I don't think that they will allow these other things to interfere with their honeymoon either,” he said, tongue in cheek.

He glanced at his watch and frowned. “My punctuality is becoming a nuisance. I am

rapidly becoming known as the late James Harland. I'll have to leave you to make your own way back to the office," he apologized. "I have, or had, an appointment. See you in about an hour." he waved, threaded his way across the traffic jammed road, and disappeared down a side street.

Sally strolled leisurely through the lunch time streets, stopping at her favorite home bake shop to pick up something for her lunch. She bought the lunch time edition of the local paper from a corner paper seller, who grinned broadly, if somewhat crookedly,

As he commented on the sun's ability to bring all beautiful things into the open. Sally received the compliment smilingly. It was a beautiful morning and she felt vaguely dissatisfied and reluctant to return to the confines of the office. She glanced idly at the headlines of her newspaper as she walked. And stopped dead in her tracks!

Staring back at her from the front page was the face of James Harland, a police artist's impression, crude but unmistakable; alongside James' portrait was another, a girl, herself! The two pictures were captioned by one word in large, black, frightening letters: **TERRORISTS.**

Part Two

Sally folded the paper, glancing guiltily around as she did so. Now the brightness of the day was her enemy as she hurried toward the safety of the agency. She felt as if a hundred eyes were staring her, as if fingers were being pointed accusingly. TERRORIST. TERRORIST. The word seemed to thunder and rolled around her, following even when, controlled by panic, she started to run.

She reached the agency and slammed the door behind her. Inside was cool and dimly lighted, and there was safety from prying eyes. Calmness and reason returned with the feeling of safety. Terrorists? Just who were they supposed to have terrorized? She spread the now crumpled paper on the desk, smoothed out the pages and sat down to read it fully.

The report concerned a Major Smith and his wife, whose car had been forced off the road by unknown assailants. Mrs. Smith had been thrown clear when the car had crashed, and the major had been able to free himself and crawl away from the wreckage. The man and woman who had caused the crash had proceeded to fire pistol shots into the petrol tank of the crashed car, causing it to explode. They had then driven away at high speed, apparently satisfied with their night's work and unaware that their intended victims were unhurt, except for a few scratches, and severe shock in Mrs. Smith's case.

The victims had been able to identify their assailants because they had noticed their interest earlier in the evening. The reason for the attack was not known, but the major had recently been involved in a large military exercise that had uncovered the headquarters and secret arsenal of a militant organization known as the U.F.L.F. It was believed that the cowardly, and vicious attack on the major had been a reprisal attack by this organization.

The police had launched a massive manhunt to track down the armed and extremely dangerous pair.

Sally leaned back and shuddered with relief. So that was it: The misunderstanding could easily be explained away. She felt like laughing aloud at the absurdity of it all. Terrorists indeed! But she did not feel like laughing when she thought of the horror the major and his wife had faced the previous night. She reached for the telephone with the intention of calling the police and clearing things up immediately. She paused with the receiver in her hand, then replaced it slowly. A gleam came into her eyes as she thought of James' reaction to the news. He should suffer, she decided. It was all his fault and he deserved a shock as sharp as the one she had received. He had tangled their lives up in this situation, let him sort it all out.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon when James strolled into the agency. He found Sally

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