

WRONG PLACE WRONG TIME

MY TRUE STORY

DAVID P PERLMUTTER

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Copyright Page

Dedication

Acknowledgements

Contacts

Chapters

Blow

All to Nothing

El Viaje

Brothers in Arms

Champagne and Rosa

Chicken Bones

The Son of Elvis

A Rude Awakening

The Party

Thirty Feet

Paralysed

Midnight Express

Cups and Oranges

The Journalist

The Promise

George Michael

Misery

Questions

Headlines

The Rusty Nissan

Manicured Hands

White Line

Perfumes and Aftershaves

Twenty One Years

Afterword

About the Author

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DEDICATION

My family is such a huge part of my life and I would like to dedicate this book to them.

To Mum, for being the best Mum in the world and for never, ever failing to be there for me when I've needed you. (And boy, have I needed you!) Mum — there aren't enough words to express how grateful I am for your love, your care and your unwavering support.

To my brothers: Gary, Stuart, John and Bobby. We may not see or speak to each other as often as we should, but I want to thank you all for being there for me. I'm proud to call you my brothers, but more importantly, when people say you need just a handful of friends, to me you're 80% of that handful.

To my sister, Susan. Even though you're at least a foot shorter than me, I've always looked up to you. Thank you for the love and kindness that you've shown me over the years and for being my favourite sibling. (Just don't tell the others!)

To my four beautiful and amazing children: Stephen, Lauren, Harry and Ava. I know I haven't always been able to be there for you in person but there isn't a second that goes by when you're not in my thoughts. I want you all to know that I love you very much. Thank you for making your Dad so proud.

To my Dad. You were a complete rock to me during the period that this book represents and for that, I will be eternally grateful. Thank you. Writing this book has brought up so many memories of you; in fact it was your idea, Dad, so here it is! It's been many years since you sadly passed away but I want you to know that I think about you every day.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank all of my family for their support and encouragement throughout my journey of writing this book, but my twin brother deserves a special mention. John designed the cover for the book and I have received so many fantastic comments about it. Thank you, John for being a creative genius.

I'd also like to thank my very patient editor and friend, Elaine Denning, whom without, this book would have not have been possible. She worked her socks off day and night (she has a very strange sleeping pattern) and treated the book like it was one of her own. Thank you so much Elaine!

Finally, thanks to Dan Davies for his invaluable help with formatting the book. It's very much appreciated.

BLOW

It was a cold, bleak February afternoon in London. For the majority of it I'd been stuck in the office and liaising with clients, trying to clinch a sale on a substantial property in the West End. The potential buyer — an arrogant prick with more money than sense — was being particularly difficult, demanding that various items be left in the house before he'd commit to buy. So when the phone rang for the umpteenth time that day and he requested that the hallway mirror be a part of the deal, I almost felt like buying him one myself, just to get the deal in the bag. It had been a week of stupid, unnecessary negotiations and I couldn't wait to get the hell out of there. I called the seller, an attractive middle aged divorcee, and told her the news.

"He wants the hallway mirror"

"Oh."

"If he gets the mirror it's a done deal, Mrs Evans."

I shifted in my chair and threw some letters into my out tray. I could hear her on the end of the phone taking a long drag from her cigarette and pondering the proposition. A part of me knew she was enjoying this; enjoying the control. There were moments throughout the week when I actually thought she had no intention of selling at all and was just enjoying the attention I was giving her. I'd seen it all before and couldn't help but wonder what kind of a wanker she'd been married to.

"It's just a mirror," I told her, taking her file from the drawer.

"But a rather nice one, don't you think?" She took another drag of her cigarette and I clenched my fist, willing it to be over.

"I guess it depends who's looking into it." I flipped through the paperwork, found the prick's phone number and keyed it into the phone. "I think a mirror is only as beautiful as its beholder."

She chuckled, but said nothing.

"He has another appointment with us tomorrow," I lied. "A similar property, just around the corner from you, actually. It's a beautiful place." I tapped my fingers on the desk as Justin, my colleague, tossed his coat over his shoulder. "Mrs Evans," I said, rolling my eyes at Justin, "I really need to give him your decision now. If you lose him it could be..."

"Ok, ok," she interrupted. "He can have the bloody mirror."

"Finally!" I said, hanging up the phone. "I didn't think the cow was gonna crack!"

"Well done, mate," Justin said, striding over to my desk with his hand in the air. I high-fived him with a grin firmly fixed on my face.

"Worked out the commission yet?" he said, heading for the door. Then he laughed. "That was a bloody stupid question, wasn't it? Come on, how much?"

"Five grand, give or take a few quid." It was a great day's work and I couldn't help but smile.

Before I left the office I called Roger, my boss, to tell him the news.

"Well done, Dave," he said. "Good work! Now get the hell out of there and get yourself a pint. You deserve it."

"I'm half way there already," I said, picking up my jacket.

"Well enjoy it." But don't go getting yourself hammered; you've got two more to settle tomorrow."

Half an hour later, I was at The Horse and Crown for a well-deserved pint. It was a small place, but substantially cheaper and more welcoming than its sister pub on the main road, which always attracted the tourists.

I was half way through my pint when Michael slapped me firmly on the back.

"Good to see you mate!" he said, slinging his jacket over the bar stool.

Mike was a good friend and a previous work colleague. We'd met several years ago when London was new to us both; when we were desperately trying to carve out our careers amongst the hardened property executives in the capital. Our grit and determination had paid off though; Mike was now a Business Development Executive with a top London firm and after three promotions I was in a very comfortable place in the same firm we had initially met.

Mike rolled up his shirt sleeves, loosened his tie and took a swig of his beer.

"So, how's life in the fast lane, mate?"

"Can't complain," I said. "Closed on a great deal just now. It took all bloody week — cute owner, prick of a buyer — but just under five k in my pocket."

"Nice one. Tonight's on you then, Dave!"

"Well, I haven't got it yet," I laughed. "I've been running around like a blue-arse fly. I've got two girls off sick so I've been covering their asses as well."

"Flu?"

"Fucking morning sickness."

Mike shook his head. "Man, you're so fucking soft. Didn't I tell you not to hire women?"

The banter continued throughout the evening and as it had been a good few months since we'd last got together, we spent quite a while in the bar chatting about work, who made the most money from our property deals and who'd had the most recent sexual encounters. It must have been after our fourth or fifth pint that we headed off somewhat inebriated to a local Indian.

We ordered our meal and a bottle of red and then proceeded to converse with a couple of girls sitting at the adjoining table. They were sisters as it turned out — Mandy and Jane — and during the course of the meal the conversation became rather flirtatious. At one point Mandy reached over and helped herself to my naan bread, and it wasn't long after that they joined us at our table. The sisters, both young, attractive girls, were like chalk and cheese. Jane was wearing a pin striped skirt suit and had her hair twisted up in a loose bun. She looked every part the PR executive she was. Mandy, on the other hand — a girl running the family horse stabling business in the West Country — was casually dressed in jeans and a t-shirt, with her long hair cascading messily over her shoulders. It was a thrown together look but it worked, and of the two, she was the one I focused my attention on. I liked her; I liked her arrogance and her 'couldn't give a shit' attitude.

The girls ate their meal — and half of ours — and when the bill had been paid it was mutually agreed that we'd head to a bar for a late night drink. As the girls had their car with them too, and had chosen a venue unknown to me, we decided to follow them in mine.

Everything was fine for the first ten minutes of the journey; we were nose to tail for pretty much most of the way, but when Mike rolled a joint and the effects of it had taken their toll, we somehow managed to lose them in the heavy, night-time traffic. We tried to find them and looked everywhere, but eventually admitted defeat. So, with little else to do, and with no desire to end the evening, Mike rolled another joint, cranked up the music and we drove around the streets of West London without a care in the world.

It must have been about half an hour later when I turned into a council estate car park. Feeling pretty invincible by then, I stupidly decided to use the car park as a Formula One racing track. Mike was far too stoned to even acknowledge where we were or what the hell I was doing; he was slumped in the passenger seat with an almighty grin on his face and just enjoying the ride. George Michael was belting out from the stereo, the windows were wound down and a cool, city breeze was keeping me alert.

I'd been driving recklessly around the car park for quite a while when two police cars with sirens and flashing lights headed towards me, stopping me in my tracks. It didn't take a genius to work out that a local resident had obviously called them, not too happy about the roaring engine and wheel spins I'd submitted them to. I quickly put my foot on the brake, turned off the music and held my breath as three coppers got out of their cars and walked towards me. One of them opened my car door and told me to get out. I obliged, and he took me to one side. I looked back at Mike but he was oblivious to it all.

The copper asked for my name, my license and then questioned what I was doing driving so recklessly in a residential area after midnight with a very real possibility of endangering someone.

What could I say? I was stoned, I was drunk. I wanted some fun. He obviously smelt alcohol on my breath because he asked if I'd been drinking.

"Just the two," I lied.

With that, he produced a breathalyser and told me to blow into the tube, and with some hesitation — as I knew I was over the limit and thinking of the consequences that would follow — I took a deep breath and did as he'd asked. After twenty seconds or so I withdrew and waited for the results with my heart skipping a beat. I was sweating profusely and sobered up quickly — very quickly. I was already regretting the night, wishing I was at home. I felt like a complete idiot.

It was just one minute later that my life turned completely upside down. The result was positive.

Almost immediately I was handcuffed, arrested, told my rights and pushed into the back seat of the police car. The drive to the station was spent sandwiched between two of them and from what I can recall I did nothing more than stare into my lap for the entire journey. Upon arrival at the station they took my belongings, fingerprinted me and then led me into a cell. I had no idea what they'd done with Mike, but to be honest, at that point he was the farthest thing from my mind.

ALL TO NOTHING

When the cell door slammed behind me, I walked over to the grubby mattress in the corner and slumped down, holding my head in my hands with my mind racing back and forth over the evening's events. I'd been so fucking stupid. Unable to settle, I stood up again and anxiously paced the floor. It seemed ironic that the cell was about the same size as the box room in the property I'd been negotiating on that afternoon. I thought of Mandy and Jane and how the hell I'd managed to lose them. I'd taken my eyes off their car for a minute — probably less than that — and as a result I was in a fucking police cell. I was scared; scared about what lay ahead, scared about my future.

Nervous exhaustion finally got the better of me and I lay on the mattress, curled up on my side with my arms folded tightly against my chest. The blanket they'd left for me did little to warm me up, but within minutes I was asleep.

It was early morning when the cell door opened. A policeman handed me a cup of coffee, his face expressionless.

"Shit," I muttered, after taking a gulp of it.

"Problem?"

"No, it's fine," I lied, wondering where the sugar was.

Normally by this time I'd have been on my way to the office and even though I detested the hour long drive in the rush hour traffic, I'd have given anything to be behind the wheel of my car right then. No amount of hoping was going to make it happen though.

I was taken to the front desk of the station.

"You'll receive a letter in the post regarding your court case," the copper said as he put my stuff on the desk. "And we'll send you details about how to collect your car."

I nodded, gathered my things and left the station.

Outside, a cold wind wrapped itself around me, and I hurried down the street to the underground. I weaved my way through the hordes of bodies, bought my ticket at the kiosk and boarded the train. It struck me that I hadn't ridden on one for over two years and I certainly didn't want to start then. The thirty minute journey seemed endless and I couldn't wait to get out of there, so when we pulled into the station and I finally got off, it was with some relief that I made the short ten minute walk to my apartment.

As soon as I'd closed the door, I headed straight for the bathroom and turned on the shower. I stripped off my clothes, threw them on the floor and stepped under the water. I'd felt dirty all morning and it was so good to feel the crap being washed away from my body. My breath stank of stale smoke and alcohol and I grabbed my toothbrush to clean my teeth, scrubbing away the filth. As the steam filled the bathroom, I closed my eyes, lifted my face to the water and stayed there until the tension left me.

Wiping away the steam from the mirror above the sink, I was horrified. Fuck, I looked rough. My hair, in desperate need of a cut, was a mess. I pulled my fringe away from my eyes, trying to ignore the widow's peak blatantly staring back at me. Shit, I was twenty seven years old and already starting to recede. My Dad was bald but I'd always thought I'd have years before I'd have to start worrying about that. Perhaps this was the start of it? My sister always said she loved my hair; it was black, straight and shiny, and as long as hers. She said I was handsome, that I reminded her of Micheal Praed, the actor who played Robin Hood.

Others told me that too, but looking at my face that morning, with the day old stubble and lack of sleep, they couldn't have been more wrong.

"Fuck," I shouted. And then "fuck" again. It all suddenly hit me. I looked at myself in the mirror, despising myself. "You fucking, stupid wanker," I said to the person staring back at me.

Once dressed and considerably calmer, I knew I had a few people to speak to, but my first call had to be to my parents. I nervously dialled their number wondering who would pick up. It was Mum that answered.

Somehow I managed to relay the story to her and felt terrible when she started to cry. She told me how stupid I'd been and when the tears subsided she said that I had to phone my boss immediately to explain what had happened.

"Pray that you've still got a job, darling," were her parting words.

I made a strong, black coffee, took a deep breath, and dialled my Manager's direct line.

"Good morning, Roger speaking, can I help you?"

"Morning Roger, it's Dave. I need to see you today. It's urgent, I'm afraid. And..." I hesitated "...it's rather sensitive."

"No problem!" he said, and then paused. "You're not resigning are you?" He laughed; completely unaware of what was to come.

"No," I told him. "Is three ok?"

"Sure, Dave, I'll see you then."

I hung up the phone.

By half past three I had lost my job.

I gave back the car keys and told Roger that the car was in the compound in Camden. I handed back the office keys and was told to clear my desk before close of business that today. As Roger pointed out in the contract he retrieved from my file, any employee who loses their driving licence under the influence of alcohol would automatically, and with immediate effect be dismissed from their position. I was gutted to learn that I'd only receive one month's salary and all the commission due to me — including the recent five grand — was not going to be forthcoming.

Roger thanked me for my services over the past few years, shook my hand and wished me luck for the future.

"Oh, and Dave?" he said, as I was halfway out the door.

"Yes?"

"You're a fucking idiot."

I closed the door behind me, walked down the stairs and out of head office onto the busy London streets. That's the last time I'll leave that building I thought to myself as I negotiated my way through the people and headed down to the underground. I paid for a ticket and boarded the train with the words "you're a fucking idiot" ringing in my ears.

That evening, I visited my parents. They were more upset than angry; they could see how I was feeling and didn't have to tell me what an asshole I'd been. I phoned Mike that evening too, and told him what had happened. He was sorry, but what more could he say? I told him I'd catch up with him soon and finished the call. I really wasn't in the mood for talking.

My court appearance followed within a matter of days which resulted in a twelve month driving ban and a hefty fine. I'd had it all: an excellent career and salary with a smart BMW and a luxury apartment. But I lost everything in one stupid, reckless evening. Not being able to afford the payments on my apartment, my parents suggested that I move back in with them. Although I was more than appreciative of their support, depression quickly set in when it hit me that I'd just kissed goodbye to my salary, my home and the lifestyle I'd loved.

I spent the next few months staring at a TV screen and feeling extremely sorry for myself, refusing to go out and refusing to face up to the situation. I became a complete recluse and hated myself for it.

I needed some breathing space to get away from it all and to re-evaluate my life, so, with nothing better to do, I decided to take some time out. I booked a one way ticket to Spain where I planned to spend the summer. A trip to clear my head seemed like my very best option.

The night before I left, my family arranged a small party for me. Actually, it was more of a get together considering that losing my job, home and driving license wasn't cause to get the party poppers out.

We were a very close family; four brothers and a sister. I had a twin brother, John, but we were like chalk and cheese. He was arty and extremely clever, whereas I was sporty and now, it seemed, fucking stupid as well.

The champagne flowed that night. Okay, I lie, it was sparkling wine, but it was a lovely evening, albeit rather emotional. Just before midnight the family started to say their goodbyes and head for home.

My youngest brother, Bobby, gave me a hug at the door.

"For fuck's sake Dave," he said, "look after yourself, eh? And don't get into any trouble."

"Me?" I replied.

"Yes you, ya bastard. Just be careful."

I smiled. "Course I will mate. Now piss off and leave me to pack."

There were hugs all around from John, Stuart and Gary, my eldest brother. They all wished me good luck and told me to stay in touch. Then followed a huge hug from my sister, Susan. For as long as I could remember I'd always called her Pink, but to this day I have no idea why.

"Please Dave, take care," she said, squeezing me tightly.

"Don't worry Pink, I will," I promised her.

"Good, because you've put Mum and Dad through enough already."

"Yeah, yeah I know."

She leaned into my face and kissed me, then headed down the path after our brothers.

I thanked Mum and Dad for the party and headed to the spare room where I'd been sleeping for the past few months. My empty suitcase was on the bed beckoning to be filled, and just as I was about to start packing there was a faint knock on the door. I turned round to see my Mum standing there.

It couldn't have been easy bringing up six children, but Mum had always been there for us all. She was warm, kind hearted and did all she could to take care of us. You'd have thought that with the demands of having such a large family to look after, her physical appearance may have taken a back seat. But far from it; she was always immaculately dressed. She looked lovely that night.

"Do you need any help, darling?"

I shook my head. "Don't fuss Mum. I can do it. But thanks."

She smiled, nodding her head, and closed the door quietly behind her.

I finished packing and got into bed. Lying there, with my arms behind my head, I was excited about getting out of London and my miserable day to day existence. I thought of the sun, the sea and the sand and of the women I hoped I'd meet. And before I knew it, Mum was knocking on the door the following morning with a cup of coffee — with sugar this time — and a few slices of toast. Every morning without fail she had breakfast ready for me, even though I always told her I could do it myself. She wouldn't have dreamed of letting me do it though, and twenty-one years on, that still brings a smile to my face.

EL VIAJE

My flight was at one in the afternoon and my parents insisted on driving me to Gatwick Airport. I put my suitcase in the boot of the car and we left the house three hours early to make sure I arrived on time. It was pouring down and we thought there would be heavy traffic, especially at that time of the morning. The conversation in the car was light-hearted, interspersed with my parents' concern that I look after myself.

"Please call us as soon as you get there," Mum said.

"Don't worry, I will, "I promised.

I was feeling excited and happy for the first time in months and the journey flew by in a flash.

Once at the airport we said our goodbyes.

"Dave, have a great time," Mum said, "but please be careful, okay?"

I sighed. "Mum, I'll be fine! Stop worrying!" I wrapped my arms around her. "But thanks. I love you."

I pulled away and faced my Dad, knowing he was sure to have some words of wisdom for me.

"Son, have fun," he said. "But behave. Don't do anything stupid."

I nodded.

"Just watch out for the cops," he went on. "Some of them are cunts".

I was a bit taken aback. I'd never heard him swear before. He used the occasional 'sod' or 'bloody' on a particularly bad day, but nothing quite as extreme as the c word. He hugged me and planted a firm kiss on my cheek.

"I'll be fine, Dad," I told him.

I opened the boot, grabbed my case, said my final goodbyes and made my way to the building, turning to wave as I reached the door.

Thankfully there wasn't much of a queue at the check-in desk. An attractive redhead said hello and politely asked for my passport. I handed it over with a smile.

"Do you have any luggage, sir?"

"Here you go," I told her, and placed my case on the conveyer belt. She attached a few stickers and I watched as it disappeared through the rubber flaps.

"Thank you, sir. Your flight will be called in about an hour. Have a good trip!"

"Thanks!" I replied with a grin and a cheeky wink, and made my way to the departure lounge. I was feeling good — very good — and couldn't wait to get there.

Before long I boarded the plane and saw that I had a window seat next to a nice, elderly couple. The captain introduced himself and his crew, and then announced that we'd be arriving in Spain in just over two hours. The weather, he told us, would be twenty eight degrees. Everybody on the plane cheered because outside the rain was hammering against the windows. I thought of my parents momentarily, hoping they'd be safe on their journey home, and as we took off I peered out through the tiny square window and watched the bedraggled airport staff going about their work, trying to shield themselves from the downpour. As the countryside receded into a grey, lifeless sky and the cars on the motorways became nothing more than dots, I smiled. I was getting away from it all and I couldn't have been happier.

After a decent flight, we landed at Malaga Airport with the heat of the late afternoon sun hitting me as soon as I stepped off the plane. We were driven by the waiting bus to the baggage collection area and before I knew it I was passing through passport control. At last; I was in Spain!

I whistled for a taxi and asked the driver to take me to Marbella. To this day I don't know why I ended up there. I was somewhat aware of its reputation (Costa del Crime) but this didn't hold me back. I'd also heard a lot about Puerto Banus, a glamorous place not far from Marbella, and thought it would be worth a look.

The taxi driver told me in broken English that it would take around forty-five minutes to get to Marbella but we actually got there much sooner. I'd heard about the reputation of the Spanish drivers — especially those making a living from airport fares — so I was glad to arrive in the centre of the town in one piece.

I wandered around the town feeling free; as if a huge weight had been lifted from my shoulders. There I was in Marbella, the sun was shining and wherever I looked there were women scantily clad in bikinis and sarongs, strolling around looking beautiful. There were a few casual glances in my direction, a few reciprocated smiles and I felt good. I felt really good.

For my first night I decided to treat myself to a decent hotel as, after all I'd been through, I thought I deserved a bit of luxury. When I noticed a beautiful building in the distance, looming up from within a circle of palm trees and standing prouder than the rest, I made my way there.

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