

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

No Security

by Garf Collins

Deep in his favourite fantasy, Miles Barnard nodded as the office boy placed yet another lead beside his typewriter. He adjusted his green eyeshade as he returned to pounding out a story on his trusty Remington. The work of an investigative journalist was never...

“Miles. Miles! You’re not listening. Amanda Crowshaw, the daughter of the owner of the Grand Hotel, is marrying Hugo Bolton, the son of our local MP, this afternoon. A quarter-page with photo. It’s got good local appeal.”

“OK. I’ll get on to it,” Miles replied to Steven Trobson - the editor/senior reporter/marketing manager of the *Bradport Post*.

Brought back sharply from imagining himself in the glory days of the newspaper industry, he looked gloomily around the cluttered Portakabin which now formed the entire premises of the paper. His illusion about his role had been boosted by his previous week’s story. He had been sent to cover a council meeting. The opposition told him of a discrepancy in the waste disposal account. His piece, titled *Is this the iceberg of the tip?*, had given rise to some angry correspondence about the council in the letters page. Miles, inspired by his cinematic heroes, had imagined that this scoop could be the start of a brilliant career.

Sitting at the back of St Margaret’s Church, Miles was already keying his piece into his laptop. *The organ burst into life as the beautiful bride...* While he typed, he reflected

that it was the same old story. He could almost create it from a standard fill-in-the-blanks article.

In the silent moment, as the couple stood together at the altar, he overheard a whispered conversation in the lobby.

“I can’t believe he’s going through with it. They say he’s supposed to have got married while he was working in the States.”

This could be my very own Watergate, Miles decided, as he eagerly began an online search. As he looked through the results, he heard the vicar ask, “First, I am required to ask anyone present who knows a reason why these persons may not lawfully marry, to declare it now.”

I couldn’t say anything without more evidence, he thought while continuing to scan the long list.

He had to stop himself from shouting out in triumph when he read;

In a quiet ceremony, Teresa Ann Leblanc and Hugo Franklin Bolton were married in a civil ceremony in...

That’s it. There can’t be many people with that name. Too late to speak up now, though.

Miles hurried from the church as the vicar announced, “In the presence of God, and before this congregation, Amanda and Hugo have given their consent and made their marriage vows to each other...”

Back at the paper’s meagre HQ, Miles set about confirming the facts of his story. He called the number of the local MP, Doug Bolton. As he expected, there was no reply, so he left a message saying he had important questions about his son’s wedding. Then he sent an email to the MP’s agent:

A Hugo Franklin Bolton was recorded as marrying one Teresa Ann Leblanc in Las Vegas two years ago. Can you confirm that this was not the son of our MP? There is no record of that marriage being dissolved.

Miles Barnard – investigative reporter for the Bradport Post.

He then completed his report on the wedding. In anticipation of the denial he expected, he included a *but there are questions to be answered...* section giving the details he had unearthed of the marriage.

After sending the report to the editor, he sat back and placed his feet on the desk, dreaming of the syndication of his story in all the major dailies.

An hour later, Steven Trobson burst through the door. Miles stood up, expecting to receive his editor’s congratulations, but, instead, Steven shouted, “What on earth are

you doing? I've heard from Bolton's agent about some cock-and-bull story you are peddling. Don't you realise that eighty per cent of our readers are strong supporters of our MP, and, for good measure, the Grand Hotel is our biggest advertising customer? If there's any truth in that rumour, they're not going to hear it from the *Bradport Post*. That would be asking for trouble."

The following evening, Steven was attending a Rotary Club meeting, only half-listening to the address by the MP, Doug Bolton. He had been feeling dissatisfied about his veto of Miles's story, even though the paper's precarious financial situation demanding that commercial decisions must come first. The fact that Bolton was the speaker and Charles Crowshaw was in the meeting added to his consciousness of his capitulation.

"Handy having the meeting in my hotel," Charles said, as the meeting was breaking up. "Steven, come and have a drink with Doug Bolton."

The three gathered in a quiet corner of the lounge. After an awkward silence, Doug Bolton said, "I think the marriage went off very well Charles. The reception here in your hotel was first class."

"Yes, it was good - despite some unfortunate rumours about Hugo," Charles replied, looking uneasily at Steven. "I'm grateful Steven that you put that reporter of yours in his place. He's got too cocky for my liking. First making waves with the council and now this."

"Well, it's undercover at the moment," Steven replied, but there needs to be an explanation. The implication for their marriage otherwise is" He trailed off, not wanting to use the word 'bigamy.'

"Don't worry about that," Bolton said. The young fool did get mixed up with some hussy, and even pretended to marry her, but it wasn't legal, so he's in the clear. I've sorted it out with the woman."

After a few more minutes of conversation about local affairs, they prepared to leave. As he shook Steven's hand, Charles said quietly. "By the way, I'm starting a new marketing campaign. Obviously, I will want some full-page ads in the *Post*."

Walking back along the promenade, Stephen thought about how he had sunk to his current situation. He remembered with pride the many stories he had written as a crusading journalist. Many swindlers, philanderers, or just plain hypocrites had been skewered by his stories. But he had got lazy and drunk too much. He had been forced to realise his marketability had faded. Since then, it had been a spiral downwards through the provincial press.

I might as well jump off this pier, he thought. When Charles was bribing me with his advertising deal, I realised I really have sold out.

After brooding for many minutes, with sudden resolve, Steven turned and hurried away from the pier. As he strode through the door of their office, he said, "Miles, Glad

you're still here, I've changed my mind. There's more to your story than you thought. He only pretended to marry that girl. Keep digging but stay away from Bolton and Crowshaw. When you're ready, we'll publish and be damned."

Miles, who had been back in his daydreams of publishing glory, could hardly believe what he was hearing.

"What! Pursue the Bolton story - no restrictions?"

"Yes. I've had enough of those self-satisfied bastards. They think they can run this town to suit themselves."

After he had been told of the conversation in the Grand Hotel, Miles decided to contact Hugo Bolton's supposed first wife.

If she thinks she was genuinely married, she'll be going under his name now, he thought, but, realising he had her previous name, it was easy to find her on Facebook, although the account had not been used for many months. From the photos on there, he identified a club she seemed to frequent. He called and spoke to the manager.

"Oh! Terry Leblanc. Sure, she worked here."

"Can you tell me how to contact her?"

"Sorry I can't do that."

"But I'm calling from the Mexican lottery," Miles answered, hoping the accent he had put on would be convincing. "If I can't trace her, I won't be able to tell her about the \$1,000,000 she has won. I'm sure she'd thank you for helping me."

At the thought of a commission from a grateful lottery winner, the manager gladly obliged.

Miles phoned the number he had been given. He was delighted when a woman answered.

"Sorry to disturb you, Ms LeBlanc. I'm calling from Bradport in the UK. Does the name Hugo Bolton mean anything to you?"

"It might do. Who wants to know?"

Miles explained his role and the fact of Hugo's wedding.

"That dirty rat. Him and his father can go to hell as far as I'm concerned. They tried to keep me quiet by paying for my baby, but the payments have dried up. So no fucking silence either."

"I didn't realise there was a child."

"No. I guess he wouldn't have been boasting about it. When I told him I was pregnant he said it was an accident and we would have to do something about it. I said it takes two to make an accident and you're the one who was coming too fast."

"And then what?"

“He said he would marry me and organised the so-called ceremony in that place at the top of the Strip in Vegas, but he fixed it so the papers weren't legit. Now he's pissed off and I'm left with his baby. I'm definitely not going to keep quiet anymore.”

“Ms LeBlanc. That has been very helpful. I'll do all I can to assist you. Can you send me a photo of you and the baby please?”

A week later, Miles sat amidst a pile of screwed up printouts. He was trying not to land his boss in too much trouble. Suddenly he had an idea. He typed the piece for the following week's paper to go with the photo he had received.

Scurrilous Attack

Terry Leblanc (26), an American woman from Dallas, has spoken to the Post, claiming that she had a child with Hugo Bolton. In addition, she alleges that he deliberately misled her into believing they had married. Afterwards, she claims, she found out that the marriage was a sham with no legal validity.

The Post condemns this attack on the son of our esteemed MP, recently married to the daughter of the owner of the Grand Hotel. We will not rest until we have rebutted the lies from this publicity-seeking troublemaker.

Now that's a story with long legs, thought Miles, as he sent the draft to his editor.

The day after publication, Miles was sitting in his usual relaxed posture at his desk. He still often daydreamed in black and white, but now he had taken to making up the film-scripts. He was about to respond to an expression of everlasting love by Ava Gardner when Steven arrived.

“Well, far from us being damned, things are definitely looking up. So much interest in our story that I've had to order two thousand more copies. An old buddy from the Mail rang me too. He saw the article online and wants an exclusive.”

“You're not going to give it to him, I hope,” said Miles fearing loss of control of his story.

“No. No. I've said that we'd feed him our articles exclusively and he's agreed to pay thirty thou a time. They'll do anything for a bit of political scandal.”

“I'll speak to Terry Leblanc again, but after we see how it develops locally.”

Meanwhile, as she descended the cliff path on her regular run, Amanda thought, *I'll call into the Grand and pick up some documents to work on at home.*

While there, seeing a copy of the Post, she decided to check up on the wedding venue advert she'd placed. On the facing page was Miles' 'Scurrilous Attack' article.

Aghast, she rushed into her father's office, clutching the paper. "Did you know anything about this?" she said as she threw the paper down on his desk."

"Calm down. I'm sure he's right. It's just someone looking for ten minutes of fame. Bolton said he was dealing with it. I'm sure he'll be able to sort it out."

After Amanda had left, far from convinced by the story, Charles rang Doug Bolton. "You've seen the Post, I suppose. I thought you said you had bloody well sorted that girl out. I've just had Amanda in here very upset. Also, several members of the Conservative Association committee have rung me asking if you are the right man to take us into the next election. I've done my best to protect you but if you can't fix it...."

In the week following, many emails for the letters page arrived about the 'Scurrilous' article. Some expressed support for the Boltons and urged action to expose Terry Leblanc's story as a baseless attack. But others were of the 'no smoke without fire' variety which demanded that Terry be given a fair hearing.

As they prepared the next edition, Steven called across to Miles, "Don't forget the special feature on the D-Day Landings. 70 years ago this Friday. Check we've got the local veteran story. After you've set those letters, can you input the property ads I've just sent you."

As he updated the master copy for that week's Post, one of the ads caught Miles' attention. 'A nicely presented house for sale,' It read. 'Completely, refurbished inside and out. A change of plans by the owners leaves this very nice family house vacant for immediate possession.'

There was something about this that awoke Miles' interest. "I wonder. Could it be?" he said as he rang his friend at the selling agent."

Rachel Crowshaw picked up the Bradport Post in the usual delivery to the Grand Hotel with a selection of dailies. She was horrified to see the headline 'BLEAK HOUSE,' next to a photo of her daughter's house. It reported that it was for sale after an abrupt decision by Amanda to put it on the market. It went on;

This unfortunate turn of events follows the scurrilous attack on Hugo Bolton by Terry Leblanc as we recently reported. The Post says that now is the time for Hugo to speak up and refute this malicious attack.

She hurried into Charles' office.

"Charles. You must do something about this. Amanda had a blazing row with Hugo after last week's piece about that awful girl. It must be a lot worse than I thought because she's put the house up for sale. After all that work to get it ready for them. She obviously believes the story."

"I've done all I can for now. I talked to Bolton this morning, and he's agreed to send Hugo out to Dallas again to work on some of his projects. That'll keep him out of the

way until this all dies down. There's no doubt that the stupid boy had an affair with that Terry, but there's nothing to say that the child of such a woman is his. Given time, I expect Amanda will come round."

Amanda started up the cliff path much faster than on her regular run. She was driven by anger - still raw from her row with Hugo, but this was mixed with a sense of relief which she couldn't quite understand. As she arrived at the top of the hill, her phone rang. It was her best friend.

"Hello Hayley, how are you?...Mm....Mm.....Yes. I've seen it. Rachel showed it to me yesterday...Aha...Yes.... There's an awful grapevine in this town. He called me. I didn't see much point in denying it...No...No....Well I do feel upset. We had a huge row last week. I said I wasn't going to spend my life with someone like him, and straight away I rang the agent. Tell you the truth, I'm beginning to think it's a lucky escape."

She gazed out to sea, watching the distant ferry leaving for France, as her friend continued to sympathise for the huge change in her life.

"All that's true Hayley, but I've been thinking about how we came together. Hugo is a great charmer, and, at the tennis club, my great rival Charlotte Frobisher was dead set on him. So my going after him started as a stupid game. But we did get on very well, and our parents thought we were a perfect match, so it was kind of assumed by everybody that we would settle down together. I'm just beginning to realise it might have all been a sort of shared illusion. I actually feel sorry for that poor girl in Dallas."

Two weeks later, again dreaming of fame, Miles was Robert Redford in 'All the Presidents Men.' He had the feeling that he too was on to something big. The Bolton story had only just got going.

Steven hurried in and threw the Mail on his desk. "I think you should read page two."

Opening the paper, Miles was amazed to read the headline, 'TROUBLE IN PARADISE.' The correspondent outlined the Bolton story as told by the Post to date, and added some comment of his own.

'This is clearly an embarrassment for Doug Bolton, the local MP, who has been tipped for a junior ministerial appointment in the Conservative-LibDem Coalition. The relationship between the waitress in Dallas and Hugo Bolton and his sudden departure to the USA certainly implies that there is more to this story. Miles Barnard of the Bradport Post was the source of local information.'

"You're on your way now, Miles," said Steven. "What's the next step?"

“I think it’s time to speak to Terry again. I plan to do that on Tuesday.”

“Good, but don’t pass anything over to the Mail unless I agree. Understood?”

Miles rang Terry’s number. Just as he was about to ring off, she answered.

“Hi Terry, it’s Miles from the Bradport Post. I wanted to update you on progress over here.”

“Oh. It’s you. Sorry not to answer straight away. I was in the shower. You’d better have something worthwhile, or I’ll be billing you for mopping up the carpet.”

“Well, your information certainly put the cat amongst the pigeons – do you say that in the US?- Anyway, Hugo and his new wife Amanda have broken up, and he’s been sent to the US to keep him out of the way. The national papers are on to it, and Bolton senior is now in the headlines. I could easily focus on the stopped payments to help your case.”

“No. Don’t do that. You must have put the squeeze on them already. Bolton’s started paying again. He called me. Said he couldn’t understand how the payments got stopped. Nice as pie. Almost as if I was one of the family. So I don’t want to rock the boat. I already knew Hugo was back. A mate of his came into the restaurant. The guy thought I’d be pleased. I expect he’ll be up to his dodgy tricks again.”

“Dodgy tricks?”

“Yer. He used to boast about how he could get info about competitive products if the money was right. That’s all I’m gonna say. Like I said, I’m keeping my head down for now. Call me if there’s anything else that affects me please.”

“OK. Will do. Thanks, Terry.”

Miles sat for many minutes after the call. *Dodgy business, payment for product information, sounds like industrial espionage. This is getting very interesting*, he thought.

“Wake up, Miles!”

“Wha...What’s that,” Miles lifted his head from his desk and realised his editor had nudged him awake. “Sorry, Stevan. I had a late one.”

“We still have to get the paper out in two days. Make yourself a cup of coffee and look a bit lively. What were you up to anyway?”

“Looking into Bolton’s company. I’m sure Terry’s suggestion of ‘dodgy business’ must be to do with their activity in the USA.”

“What have you got so far?”

“Well. The structure of the company and what it does. Doug Bolton stepped down as Chairman in 2013. I expect that’s something to do with his political ambitions. Hugo is Group Sales Director. They seem to specialise in secure manufacturing systems.

Sounds quite hush-hush. One of their major sales was the installation of a system for Flimatic Controls in 2010. They specialise in control systems for advanced military systems.”

“OK. Plenty to go on. Have you got the piece on the Hotel Imperial fire ready?”

After completing his urgent material for the Post, Miles rang an old university friend who worked in Corporate Finance.

“Hi, Jonathan. How’s it going?Nothing special. Just thought I’d ring to see how you are doing.That’s great. Wish I could say the same. Actually, I’m on to something that might interest you.....OK. That is the main reason for the call. Anyway, it concerns a company called Prodasure Inc. Could you find out anything about their customers which might suggest industrial espionage.....That’s great, Jonathan. See you next Saturday.”

Miles met his friend waiting in the bar of the King’s Arms.

“Lucky I was visiting my parents this weekend. What are you having?” Jonathan said as he hugged his old mate.

After catching up with each other’s news, Miles gave Jonathan a summary of the Bolton story.

“I thought you needed to know the background. All I’ve got is Terry’s hint about dodgy business and the fact that Bolton’s company is deep into firms with valuable product and contract information.”

“You might be right to be suspicious. Their systems manage the intricate details of the manufacture of electronic systems – the details of circuit layout, the components, assembly and testing of the systems – all covered by high definition cameras.”

Did you find out anything about their relationship with Flimatic?”

“Yes. Prodasure were proud of being appointed supplier to Flimatic in 2011. I found out that Flimatic were designing and manufacturing control systems for the Klincha drone, manufactured by a company called ELX Industries. But the strange thing is that in 2013 ELX announced that they had contracted with a Hungarian firm called Magyomics for the supply of those same systems. No proof of Prodasure’s involvement, Miles, but at least a smoking gun.”

“That’s very interesting. What do you think I should do now, Jonathan?”

“You know what Deepthroat said – *follow the money* ”

“Well, thanks very much for all your help. This will certainly wake up this sleepy little community.”

After the meeting, Miles wrote four names in his notebook.

ELX

Flimatic Controls Magyomics

Prodasure

The key to this, he thought, is finding out how Hugo Bolton could have used Prodasure to extract the illicit data from Flimatic and then I have to establish a financial connection between Magyomics and Prodasure. But first, I need to know how they could have obtained the data.

A few days later, Miles met another old university friend in the King's Arms.

"I was surprised to hear from you, Miles. It's been a long time."

"I thought it was about time we met up anyway, Matt, but to be honest, there is something I'd like to pick your brains about. Are you still working on surveillance systems?"

"Come on then. Let's get it over with, then we can relax with a few beers."

Miles explained his suspicions about Prodasure and Flimatic. "But how do you get data out of a secure environment," he asked.

"Easy if you're the trusted support company like Prodasure. Someone in the client company calls them and then makes a direct connection to the systems to allow remote diagnosis and fixing of faults."

"So that person in the company would need to be in on the game then?"

"Not necessarily. During any routine maintenance call, Prodasure could implant a fault timed to occur later. Then they get called to fix it, and they have an open door without anyone in the company knowing."

"From what I've read, their systems are working at a very detailed level. Could they get that data and the images from the cameras out on such a link?"

"So long as all the devices are on the same network, which is increasingly the case. Yes."

The next morning Miles woke feeling unwell. His increased understanding of the potential espionage had caused him to celebrate with too much enthusiasm with his old friend. Only after several cups of coffee was he able to think coherently about the Bolton situation. *What next, he wondered, Follow the money – Jonathan was spot on.*

"That's the key issue," he muttered, "If it's espionage, there must have been a payment from Magyomics for the product info. Presumably, Hugo Bolton arranged it to be paid into an offshore account. Not much chance of finding that out."

After considering this for half an hour with no conclusion, suddenly Miles shouted, "The house! Of course. It cost about 750 grand." *Maybe their parents gave it to them, if not, where did they get that sort of money, he thought, I'll do a bit more digging and then maybe have a chat with Amanda Crowshaw. Though, that might not be any good. If Hugo supplied the money, she might have persuaded herself it was legit.*

Miles' euphoria died away as he looked at his cluttered desk. *Typical parochial stuff, he thought, what am I doing here?* "No mystery," he told himself, "this was the best you could get." He recalled how leaving London had caused his girlfriend to dump him. She'd said she didn't want a long distance relationship. His recent conversations

with Jonathan and Matt - both talking about starting families – hadn't enhanced his mood. *Perhaps when I've exposed the Bolton scandal, I'll be able to get back to London and some sort of life*, he reflected.

With renewed determination Miles called his estate agent friend.

"Hi, Dave. It's Miles - after another favour. Do you have any idea where the money for that house came from?"

"Hello Miles. Just between us it was quite strange. Amanda Crowshaw paid cash for the property. You know I always check up on solicitors, so I get the excuses passed on to me. Anyway, they said there was a delay in transfer of funds from an offshore account. I've no idea which one. That's all I know."

"Well at least that's helpful. It's something to go on....Yeh, yeh....if anything comes of all this you'll be the first to know.

No certainty there then, Miles thought, *but I think I'll have a go at Amanda anyway*. The following morning at seven a.m., Miles was sitting on a bench at the foot of the cliffs awaiting Amanda, who, luckily had very regular habits. A few minutes later she appeared at the top of the last hill, the sun lighting her blonde hair as it blew in the wind. Miles noticed her athletic figure as she elegantly skipped down the path and almost gave up his quest. *Could such a girl be part of a cynical conspiracy?*

As she came towards him, he stood up and said, "Amanda Crowshaw?"

Surprised, she tripped and would have fallen but for Miles catching her.

"Thank you so much," she gasped, "I would have come a real cropper if you hadn't been there."

Miles now fully aware of the attractive young woman, accidentally in his arms, again almost lost his nerve.

"But now I come to think of it, it was you who caused me to trip!"

"Yes, I'm very sorry. I wanted to have a few words in private. This seemed the best way of doing it."

"You're that nosy reporter from the Post," she said, as she hurriedly disengaged from the embrace, which she had been quite enjoying.

Now forced back to business, Miles said, "I'm afraid that I am. I have information that you bought that house with money which was the product of crime."

"What do you mean? It was my money."

Miles, knowing he had little more than a suspicion, gulped and carried on.

"I have reason to believe that the money came from an offshore account. What do you have to say to that?"

"Nothing sinister in that. It came from bonuses my husband earned in the US. He paid it that way for tax reasons. I don't understand these things."

“What if I tell you that the money came from an illegal act, and it wasn't paid into your account by your husband. Have you checked?”

“No, I had no reason to. It can't be true, but, if there is anything at all in your story, I don't want my family mixed up in it. What are you going to do?”

“That depends on you. If you would help me a bit, I'll promise to do my best to keep the Crowshaws out of it, but I can't say the same for the Boltons. It would be helpful if you could tell me who paid the money into your account.”

“I suppose I have no choice but to assist you. I'll ring you later.”

As she disappeared down the path, Miles was jubilant at how far his bluffing had taken him. He also welcomed the chance of becoming more involved with Amanda. Miles waited impatiently for two days before Amanda rang suggesting they meet at the Bradport Post.

When she arrived, she looked around in amazement, “Is this all it is?” she said, seeing the entire operation at a glance.

“I'm afraid so.” replied Miles. He cleared a chair for Amanda. “Well, what did you find out?”

“You promised not to involve my family. Did you mean that? I can't talk to you unless that's the rule.”

She looked pleadingly at him, and he saw a vulnerability which was at odds with her usual confident manner.

“Of course I'll stick by that,” he replied. *Even though that might make things more difficult for me*, he thought.

“Right. I looked up payments into my account. Two large sums had been deposited.” Giles admired the way she had been able to switch instantly from personal worries to the details of his enquiry. She leaned across him and placed a bank statement on his desk. He found her close proximity quite unsettling.

“There, and there,” she said as she pointed out two transactions, “as you can see, they are reported in detail, so it's not obvious at a glance where they're from. I suppose I just thought, *foreign transaction – must be Hugo as promised.*”

In amongst all the banking detail, Miles saw *Zoltan Nagy: Magyomics*. “There, Amanda, you see that Magyomics transferred the money - not Hugo. It's not proof of criminal behaviour, but it would be an unusual transaction, even if it were Prodasure business.”

“Don't forget your promise, Miles.”

As she picked up the statement and left, Giles' feeling of triumph was mixed with a sense of loss.

That afternoon, Giles and his editor, Steven, had a discussion about progress on the Bolton affair. They agreed that given the financial incentive, it was time to brief

Steven's contact at the Mail. Giles was insistent that he had to protect his sources, and so the money should not be mentioned.

The following morning Steven threw the Mail onto Miles' desk. "You've been name-checked again. At this rate, I'll have to start worrying about head hunters. Look on page 2. 'MP's Son Quizzed on Security.' It mentions his little US family again and goes on to carefully outline your story about Flimatic without naming them. It refers to a possible link with another supplier and suggests potential industrial espionage but doesn't make a direct accusation. Poor old Doug Bolton's in for it. They have no qualms about detailing Hugo's role in Bolton's company, Prodasure."

Miles had a surge of pride at this further recognition of his work but felt sorry for Doug Bolton. Even if he hadn't known about Hugo's activities, he would certainly be held responsible. The Mail never lost an opportunity to twist the tail of an MP.

Caroline Bolton was re-reading the article about Hugo in the Mail when Doug arrived. She could see that he was very upset.

"What's wrong, Doug. You look as if a seagull stole your ice cream."

"Not surprising. Charles rang me on the train. He claims that he's had several of the committee members on to him. He said the consensus is they want an association meeting in a couple of weeks to discuss my future. My bloody future! I think he's beginning to get cold feet about all the scandal with Hugo."

"They can't chuck you out. It's not up to the local association to determine candidates without reference to Campaign Headquarters. But it's tricky. Yesterday was one of my volunteer days there, and I did pick up a whisper about you."

"Well, I could do without Hugo's activities. A tried to bail him out of the US marriage debacle, but now I'm getting this innuendo about industrial espionage."

"Yes, it's terrible. What can we do to help poor Hugo."

"Poor Hugo. What about poor me."

"You've always been down on the poor boy. Ever since we got married."

"That's very unfair. I tried to treat him as if he were my own son. I've paid for his schooling and university expenses. I took him into the company and did my best to prepare him to take over from me."

"OK.OK. I'm sorry I said that, but what can we do for him now? He was a naughty boy with that Terry woman, but I'm sure he wouldn't be involved in industrial espionage."

"I very much hope not. If it were true, it would bring down Prodasure. All that I've worked for over many years. Politically I'd be dead too."

Doug's mood wasn't improved by the conversation. He looked out of the window at the distant London Eye and thought *that's a metaphor for my life. I've been steadily rising to a peak. Now I might have missed it and already be on my way down. Surely Hugo couldn't be guilty of industrial espionage. That would be the finish of me.*

He went out on the balcony and made a call to the Director of Customer Support at Prodasure. “Hi, Joe. Can you access the customer support log for the period Feb 2011 to mid-May 2014? I know that’s a lot but just select those dates when there was a lot of data downloaded to us and give me the duty officer’s name and client for those.”

He knew Joe to be meticulous in his record-keeping. After only ten minutes, he was back.

“Hi, Doug. There have been quite a few fairly large downloads, but that’s not unusual in dealing with camera faults. But there’s one that stands out. On the 6th September 2011, there was a massive download from Flimatic.”

“Who was the duty officer?”

“It was Mr Hugo, Doug. He occasionally likes to do the overnight shift. He says it helps him keep in touch.”

Miles drifted off into his latest daydream in which he starred as a heroic reporter in a film with a Watergate-like climax. His co-star now closely resembled Amanda.

Steven entered, late for their editorial meeting. “Morning, Miles. Sorry, I’m late. Glad you’ve got the coffee on. It’s a slow week for news. The biggest story is the local man killed in the Ukraine plane crash. Bad news on your story, though.”

“Oh! What’s that then,” said Miles, back in unwelcome reality.

“Bernard’s drawn a blank on the Bolton story. Says he rang the CEO of Flimatics; ‘No comment.’ Bolton; ‘No comment, I don’t have much operational responsibility these days.’ The CEO of Prodasure; ‘Don’t discuss client affairs. Commercial confidentiality. Not talking to the Mail.’”

After Steven departed, Miles was left contemplating the loss of his big story. The arrival of Amanda to talk about the Grand Hotel ad., lightened his mood. Although Miles thought these visits were strictly unnecessary, he welcomed any opportunity to meet her. After they had dealt with the ad., she said, “Miles, I’m very grateful for the way you have kept us out of this Bolton business. How is it going by the way.”

“It’s stuck at the moment. Nobody wants to talk to the Mail, but I haven’t given up. I just have to think of an angle.”

Since uncovering Hugo’s access to Flimatics, Doug Bolton had looked at the type of data that was downloaded. The immense amount of product detail couldn’t be necessary for fixing a software bug. He called Hugo on Skype. After summarizing the security breach, he asked, “What the hell were you doing in Customer Support anyway, and why did you need so much proprietary information. Can’t you see what it looks like?”

“No problem, Doug. I like to keep in touch with real client issues. It’s easy to explain the amount of data. I was looking at how confidential data could be stolen from clients using our systems. Since then, I’ve been working on a process which would prevent such incursion.”

“I find that hard to believe. Also, you seem to be quite flush with cash recently. It’s not from what we pay you.”

“You’re dead right there. No, I have done quite a bit of lucrative consultancy for non-Prodasure clients. This might benefit your company too.”

“Well, I’ll leave it there, although I’m not at all convinced by your story. Since you admit you have plenty of money you can take over the payments to Terry. Last but not least, you need to decide what to do about your marriage. You can’t leave poor Amanda in limbo. Goodbye.”

Sitting alone in the corner of his lounge in the fading light, Doug felt the large house was a metaphor for the weight of the problems surrounding him. He jumped when his phone rang.

“Hello, Doug. Charles here. I’ve met with the Committee. I’m sorry to tell you they’ll be debating a motion of no confidence in you at the Association meeting on the 8th August. They seem to think that you can’t carry on after the recent scandals about your company.”

“I think you mean *you* want me out, Charles. Your fear of this tarnishing your reputation and your standing in the Party comes before loyalty to a friend. Well, I tell you now. I won’t go quietly.”

Miles found it hard to accept that his big story had come to nothing. After days of indecision, he decided to try the direct approach. He rang the Flimatic CEO. His PA said the CEO was busy and asked what Miles call was about.

“It concerns some information I have about a data breach at his company.” There was a pause and then,

“Hi there, Miles. Randy Hauser here. How can I help?”

“Mr Hauser. I have evidence that your systems were breached by Prodasure personnel and may have been used for industrial espionage with a rival company.”

“I don’t know where you got that information, Miles, but it is entirely false. We pride ourselves on the security of our systems here. No one has ever penetrated them. By the way, I don’t want to seem unfriendly, but if you make any such allegations publicly, we will be obliged to sue for libel. Thanks for your call. Goodbye.”

Miles immediately rang his friend Matt and told him about the call.

“Well, what did you expect? His company’s a supplier to the Defense Industry – the most security-conscious of all. They will always deny any story like yours. If they don’t have an impeccable security record, they wouldn’t even appear on the shortlist for work in that field.

“While you’re on. I have kept my eye on stories about Flimatics since we spoke. They have announced that they are suing Magyomics for patent violations. They allege that Magyomics reverse-engineered their control system and could thus undercut them with the ELX contract. I doubt that Magyomics can hold onto the ELX contract now.”

Doug Bolton had just finished his constituency surgery. *Yet more potholes and complaints about holiday yobos*, he thought, *not much changes in Bradport*. His phone rang as he was leaving. He could see it was the Conservative Association secretary,

“Hello, Cyril. What can I do for you.”

“Well, Doug. It’s more what I can do for you. I and some of the members want you to stay on. We need stability and continuity, particularly with an election coming next year. We are determined to face down the Charles Crowshaw faction at the meeting on the 8th August. You are a well-liked employer of local people, and we think you’ll be an asset to the campaign.”

This indication of support made Doug even more determined to fight the attack on him. Unfortunately, his renewed optimism was soon dampened by a telephone message from his wife,

“Hello Dougie, Just calling to tell you that you had a call from ELX Industries. Please ring the CEO, Stew Krympt. Why do Americans have such odd names?”

That can only be about the Flimatics security issue. Maybe he knows their security was breached, he thought. *He might even believe we were involved in Magyomics’ getting that contract. One pace forward – two back.*

Doug delayed calling ELX, grateful for the excuse of the weekend, but on Monday morning, he realised there were still eight long hours before he could call. Hugo’s story sounded very dubious, and if ELX had proof, he would be finished. Why hadn’t he kept a closer eye on things – primarily where Hugo was concerned?

At 2.30 pm, very nervously, Doug dialled the ELX CEO’s private number.

“Hello. Stew Krympt.”

“Good morning Mr Krympt. Doug Bolton of Prodasure here. I gather you wished to speak to me.”

“Sure thing Doug. It’s about security....*Doug’s face whitened, and his throat went dry. This is going to be as bad I as I feared, he thought.*Thing is, I’ve heard that one of my suppliers is suing another for industrial espionage. Copying of product - that sort of thing. There’re lots of ways that can be done, but it set me thinking about how I could tighten up even more here.*Doug began to relax a little*....I would like to have my production and that of all my main suppliers on one platform controlled by ELX. We wouldn’t depend then on any outside agency for support, and we would have absolute control.*Doug relaxed even more*....I’ve talked to Flimatics who use your system, and I’ve had my people give it the once over. We think it’s what we need. Would you consider selling your company to ELX? I’ve had the finance boys have a look, and we’d be prepared to pay the best of two times sales and fifteen times EBITDA. What do you say?”

Doug felt a flood of relief and for the moment was speechless.

“Doug. You still there?”

“Yes, Mr Krympt. I’m here. This has come as rather a surprise. I wasn’t thinking of selling at all, but I’ve found it increasingly difficult to balance business with my political career – I’m a Member of Parliament – so I might be tempted. Yes. Now I’ve had a moment to take this in, I’d certainly welcome an offer from ELX at that sort of level.”

“Great to talk to you, Doug. We’ll reach out to you real soon.”

Doug fell back in his chair. He was limp with relief. “*With this news at my back and good core support in the Association, I’m confident I can see off the attempt to oust me.*” He thought as he opened his computer.

In the next edition of the Post, there was a prominent statement. It read;

The Bradport Post apologises to Doug Bolton MP for any comments or innuendo about impropriety involving his company, Prodasure. Mr Bolton has stated that there is no basis in such accusations and he has been assured by the companies said to have been involved that they were subject to no industrial espionage

Miles had been persuaded by Steven that it was a necessary move. If they had no proof, they were open to an action for libel if they persisted. Although he had to agree, Miles found this very difficult to accept as final.

He spent the whole weekend trying to think of a way to resurrect the story. If Flimatics, the company most affected by the stolen product details, denied it had ever happened, what could he do? He realised that in the direct payment from Magyomics to Amanda, he had indirect proof of the event, but he had promised not to use that. *Maybe, if I could get Terry to be more forthcoming,* he thought, *I’ll call her this afternoon.*

She answered immediately when he rang her number, “Terry Leblanc. Who’s this?”

“Hello, Terry. Miles from the Post here. I thought I’d call to find out how you’re getting on.”

“Oh! It’s you,” she said almost in a whisper, “Sorry, I can’t speak now.”

“Terry, who’s that,” an English voice could be heard in the background.

“Just some salesman Hugo,” Terry said as she rang off.

“Wow! So he’s back in there. I hope for her sake it’s a bit more permanent than last time. So that avenue is definitely closed. Look’s like I’ll have to give up.”

His phone rang, “Hullo, Miles Barnard of the Bradport Post.”

“Hi, Miles. Amanda here. I’ve got a little announcement to make. It might merit a note in your ‘People of the Town’ news section. Would you like to join me for dinner tomorrow night at the Beachfront Bistro? Is seven OK for you?”

“Certainly, that would be very nice. I’m intrigued to know what your little announcement is though.”

“Well, you’ll just have to wait. See you tomorrow.”

All the next day, Giles was occupied with the clamour for publicity from the many local organisations and businesses. *Very important for them, he thought, but it’s the same old thing for me. Is this all I can aspire to? It’s the end of my daydreams now. My big story has lost its legs!*

After leaving the office, he hurried home to prepare for his dinner with Amanda. He was agreeably surprised that she should invite him to dinner, and he hoped it might be the start of a closer relationship outside of their business connection.

When he arrived at the bistro, she was already at their table. He noticed an open bottle of champagne.

“Hi, Miles. Join me in a glass of champagne?”

“Thanks very much, Amanda. What’s the celebration though?”

“I’ll tell you later. This is just to thank you for keeping your promise. I guess from what I’ve read that your case has hit a brick wall. Doug Bolton seems very sure of his ground. So I’m especially grateful for you keeping your promise not to reveal the payments to me. That could have reopened it, I assume. You are a great friend.”

Miles was taken aback by her extreme gratitude. *A great friend, he thought, that’s at least a good start.*

“Oh. Don’t mention it. Not all reporters are like the News of the World hackers, you know.”

“Well, thanks anyway. Shall we decide on the food?”

They enjoyed the debate over what to eat and while waiting chatted easily. Miles thought that she clearly seemed interested in him. It wasn’t just the wine which had given him a warm feeling. After they had eaten the main course, he said, “Come on. I can’t wait any longer. What’s your little announcement?”

“You know what I do as marketing manager for the Grand Hotel, don’t you? Well, I’ve been thinking for a while that I’ve got as far there as I could. I’ve brought the marketing out of the dark ages with the Internet, social media and all that. To tell you the truth, it can be a bit difficult sometimes with my father. He has such set ideas. Anyway, I’ve been looking around, and yesterday it paid off. I’ve been offered a senior marketing job with the Urbarest Foundation who run several of the big London hotels.”

“Congratulations! That’s fantastic for you,” Miles said, although he thought it was far from fantastic for him.

She told him she was going to buy a small flat with some of the money received for the Bradport house and the rest would be given to a homeless charity. "If Magyomics want their money back they can go and ask Hugo for it," she said.

"It sounds as if you have got it all worked out. It's obviously the right move for you, but – *was he presuming too much?* – I was hoping that we could see a bit more of each other."

She put a reassuring hand on his. "Of course, I'll be coming back to visit. We can meet then. I would like that."

Miles tried to seem glad of that prospect, but all he could think of was the way distance had caused his last relationship to founder. His phone rang.

As he left the table, he said, "Sorry, Amanda. This is probably my editor, Steven. He said he might want to contact me urgently this evening."

He returned, and with great excitement said, "I can hardly believe this. Steven's mate at the Mail is going to offer me a job in London. He wanted to clear it with Steven first. He's said it's a great opportunity and I should grab it with both hands."

Amanda stood up and hugged him enthusiastically. She poured the remains of the champagne and said, "That's fantastic. The scoundrels and poseurs had better watch out! It will be great to have ...*she paused...* a special friend in London. Here's to us both!"