

## SPIDER ON THE MONEY

Queenie had quit and left me with the lad. He was only three and a half at the time.

I was glad to see her go. She'd lost faith with the vision, it wasn't fun for her any more, I could see that. Three years on site in a caravan with me and a baby and with none of the amenities a girl depends on; no bath, not even a shower or a toilet. We knew, when we made our plans it was going to be hard for all of us for a while. I knew she'd not be up to it. It was OK, but I knew.

She didn't need to make such a fool of me on her way out, on my own doorstep. The locals don't miss a thing; he was one of their kids, some arrogant little surf bum out at Sennen. She needn't have done that. I'll never forgive her for that. she made me look a right fool. She'd better look out. I'll get her for that one day when she least expects it. I can wait; revenge, so I'm told, is a dish best savoured cold.

I miss her firm little body though; it brings an ache to my heart and tears to my eyes when I think of it. But all in all I'm glad she's gone. I'm free of those nagging doubts. It was a terrible state to be in, wondering all the time where she was and who she was with. It used to give me the worst headaches. She'll get her come-uppance.

The lad cried a bit at first when she went, but he's a tough one. He looks like an angel, blond and blue eyed like her, but he's got a will of iron. I don't know where he gets that from. Not me, that's for sure. Nor from his mum either. Ask any one. That's not me at all. I'm for letting things take their natural course. I'm not one for imposing my view. I'm very easy-going really.

There are admittedly certain things that get right up my nose like ingratitude. I don't have much time for people who just take from me without so much as a thank you. I'm always ready to help someone. God knows the number of times I've been helped and really appreciated it. I'll help a mate all I can but I expect him to reciprocate and help me out too. I think that's fair.

I've had a number of people stay here since I got the house habitable on a share and share alike basis but none of them came through, none of them was prepared to give a hand, not even keep an eye on David, not even do the cooking occasionally. They would at first but it wasn't long before they'd lose interest, they would quickly become bored living out here in the wilds with no entertainment and they'd split. They couldn't stand the isolation. Not everyone can. That's what really got to Queenie. She likes to have her friends around her and some background noise to soften things out. The isolation and the quiet, that's what got to her.

Not so the lad, he loves the countryside and misses it when he's up in

London with her. That's what he says. He'd much rather be in the country.

He gets in the way a bit when I'm working; I have to leave him with minders a lot of the time; it costs a fortune but there's no way around it. When I have a nine to five we don't get to see too much of each other. I drop him off at school in the morning and pick him up from the minder in the evening by which time I'm knackered. I've got so much on my mind all the time, trying to focus on the job as well as taking care of him is exhausting. I bring him home, feed him, let him watch TV for a bit if there's anything suitable on, a nature programme or something like that, then put him to bed with his light dimmed and a fairy story on the cassette player and that's about it most days, I just don't have the energy for anything more. But he's well fed and loved.

I suppose I'm tough on him sometimes; things aren't easy, but I don't think it hurts; we've got to learn about that side of life when we're growing up haven't we? otherwise we'd drift around thinking we're in some cloud cuckoo land where everything's just fine all the time and be completely unprepared for adversity. I'm a fine one to talk.

When I'm out of work we see a lot more of each other. But when I don't have a job, somewhere to go to do something specific, I've got more time to worry about everything else. My head gets full of it. Money, no money, debts, the telephone bill, Tom for a days work on the roof, old Pool for

hire of his cement–mixer, Paul for fixing the MOT on the Peugeot, fifty pence for David’s swimming. I’ve got to get the floor down in the kitchen before winter and get the Raeburn working otherwise we’ll be up shit creek and freezing. I should dig the well deeper, too, but don’t have the time... and then along comes Queenie.

Whenever I’m drowning in anxiety, which is often enough, Queenie comes along as if to deliberately push me under. She’s thinking of getting married again and making noises about possession of the lad. Over my dead body. She can have her divorce but she can forget about the lad. She left him with me to go off gallivanting with that surf–bum when the boy might have needed her, but he doesn’t need her anymore. She didn’t even manage to keep up the support she promised, just a few quid a week. Typical! How can she behave like that? And the money I lent her! She knows how short of cash we are; she knows how much there’s still to do on the house. And then my head starts to ache.

Dad comes down sometimes. Not my mum. I’ve lived here now for over seven years and she’s never visited and I can’t say I’m distressed about it. We never really hit it off. I invite her but she won’t come; nor will my sister. I really don’t understand them. You’d think they’d be curious about the kind of life I’ve carved out for myself, wouldn’t you? Not a bit of it. It’s as if I’m living with someone they don’t approve of. She telephones at least once a week and chastises me for not coming home more often but she won’t come down.

Dad's all right. He's a very practical man, likes to potter around the cottage, finishing some of the detailing and painting. He's kept himself strong and healthy. He said he learned how to stay in shape when he was a prisoner of war in Germany when it was a question of survival. He's retired now after a life-time job with a big printing company in Birmingham. He started with them when he was demobbed from the RAF.

He'd had a miserable war, most of it spent as a POW, but in the end he came out a hero with a medal for distinguished conduct to prove it. He'd helped a wounded mate to bale out of their burning Lancaster over Holland. The firm was proud to take him on, and sorry to see him go twenty-five years later, only good marks in the book. Like many men of his age these days, he was much too young to retire, far too energetic. He'd occupied himself fiddling with their house ever since. It runs in the family.

Of course, the dreaded day arrived when he'd finished the house and no longer had anything to do. He still has the garden, planting and weeding and so on, but in winter, when there's nothing much to do outside and there's nothing to do inside either because it's all done, he gets bored and comes down here for a week or two's hard labour. He's been a tower of strength, really.

We get on reasonably well now but he never approved of me as a kid. He had me baptised Charles David but everyone calls me Spider, they

always have and dad just can't abide the name. When I was seven or eight, I used to read a lot of American Si Fi comics and Spider Man was a special hero for me. The way he would spew out a sticky line to catch his victims like a real spider fascinated me. My child mind seemed for some reason to identify with him, maybe I'd been a spider in a previous incarnation or something like that, but I insisted on being called Spider. They loved it at school. Nobody really liked me there and the feeling was mutual. They were delighted to call someone Spider, particularly someone they didn't like. So I became Spider. That was it. I was Spider to everyone but him. He'd named me Charles and that's what he called me and still does. That's the clue to our relationship; he expected me to grow up to be Charles but I grew up to be someone called Spider. Charles would have followed him into the RAF, become a career pilot or something like that, an astronaut maybe, but Spider took LSD, ate psilocybin mushrooms, smoked dope and dropped out and he was very disappointed.

When we work together everything's fine, we're both fussy about standards. But when the work's done for the day there's nothing left but silence. He talks to the lad like a grandfather does and the lad loves him and listens to him like grandsons do. I love him and have a lot of respect for the way he's handled his life and deep down I'm sure he loves me but finds it difficult to express because he's never respected the way I chose to live. He's never been able to reconcile Charles and Spider.

He likes the house and thinks I've done a good job but can't understand

why it's still unfinished after six years. He can be bit unfair in that way. He can't imagine what it's been like for me, moving out here to the wilds of Cornwall, miles from anyone, with a wife and baby, living in a caravan for three years on site, running back and forth to London, keeping the business there going to make money to do some more on the house, it was enough to drive anyone crazy. And then Queenie copping out like that and leaving me with the lad! Shit! Does anyone wonder why the house isn't finished?

Another problem is, there's so much going on in the countryside, right outside the door, I get distracted. What's the hurry? What's the point of living down here if you spend all your time working? There are some great walks, miles and miles without encountering another soul, so much to see and learn about. It's true some of the locals don't show much respect for their own patch. There's a farmer up near Cripplesease who's taken out all the stone hedges on his land, destroying three thousand years of ecology to make room for large cultivating and harvesting machinery. It's a dreadful shame. There's another one just up the road who filled in a wet meadow on his land, destroying a universe of ecologically important bird and insect life so he could graze a few cattle. They should have known better. It's things like that that really depress me and make me wonder sometimes whether it's all worthwhile.

We got through Christmas all right. The lad, his name is David, went with Queenie to her parents in the midlands and I had a good time with

Mrs Downey across the valley. She's been divorced about two years and her boy goes to school with mine. Sometimes they play together, sometimes Mrs Downey and I play together. She was nothing like Queenie. She was older and knew her away around. I liked Mrs Downey. There was no bullshit, she just liked to bonk, as she would put it, and that was that. The moment I'm inside the door she's got her hands on my zipper. Her lad was off with his dad for Christmas so she and I bonked merrily away for two or three days.

## **CH. 2**

After the holidays, Queenie brought the lad home and started getting emotional about a boy needing his mother in these early years and broke down, sobbing her heart out about how she regretted leaving, regretted everything – the lying bitch – and she wanted her baby back.

Well he wasn't a baby anymore and she certainly wasn't going to have him back. She'd made her bed and she could darn well lie on it. She went back to London more determined than ever to cause me trouble leaving me with a humdinger of a headache. The guy she was going to marry was wealthy and paid for some shit-hot London solicitor to work on it for her. I got myself a smart young local on legal aid and soon we were entangled in recrimination and threats; she didn't get the boy.

Around February I took a job with the regional office in Truro of



Friends Of The Earth. It was a worthwhile job, not well paid, barely more than the dole, but worthwhile. It was nearly thirty miles drive each way but I didn't mind, I liked driving and enjoyed the countryside. The lad was the problem. I worked out an involved schedule of minders but I could see it wasn't going to be easy. I was beginning to get a splitting headache when the phone rang. It was Zack Fergusson. He was back in London.

I'd known Zack for more than ten years. He'd done loads of things, been everywhere. He was a wandering Jew. He didn't wander all the time, sometimes he'd settle in one place for as long as six or seven years. He was settled on the Welsh side of the Wye Valley when I met him in 1971, the first guy I met who'd opted out of the urban rat-race for a quiet life in the country. At the time he was looking for a good sound system, an amp, a radio, a turntable and some speakers, and my partner Gus and I had been recommended.

That's what I used to do for a living, Gus and I put together sound systems. He found us and we built a system for him and I went down to Wales to install it. We became good friends. Spending the occasional week-end with him in his comfortable, peaceful and isolated cottage set me thinking about my own situation, not that I hadn't been giving it a lot of thought before I met him, but he'd actually done it, cut and run. It made my own plans and schemes seem more possible. All I had to do was do it, and I did.

Life caught up with Zack eventually. A woman sought him out. They won't let you be. Carlotta sought him out and, in no time, they had a couple of kids. She was a hard one, that Carlotta, a hard-line feminist. There were quite a few around in the early seventies. I don't know what he saw in her. She never liked me and I never liked her. It's not that I don't like women, not at all. You could say I adore women; you could say I'm a bit of a feminist myself. But I don't think Carlotta liked men at all. She certainly didn't like me. She must have liked Zack for a while but it didn't last long. As soon as she'd had couple of kids from him they split up.

Zack was a writer and had just returned from six years in Hollywood. He'd married again while he was out there, the third or fourth time, I'm not quite sure. Whatever, this one didn't seem to be working out any better than the others.

He had his moments as a writer but in the main he struggled. He was broke and looking for a quiet place to rest his head and sort things out. The answer to my prayers. I invited him to come and stay.

As I said, I'd had fellows stay and help out with the house before and look after David now and then when I was at work but they were young guys and didn't last, they were always on their way somewhere else, Kathmandu or Thailand.

Zack was a mature man, a father himself and interesting besides. We used to have marathon chats into the early hours of the morning about the

state of the planet and what could be done with the new electronic technologies to make life easier for everyone in general and ourselves in particular. We shared a common viewpoint about most things. I thought it could work with Zack, he listened, he'd understand my problem.

Even though Gus and I are no longer business partners we've maintained our friendship. Gus was due for a visit and when he heard Zack was coming to stay, offered to drive him down. They arrived just before dusk. Zack and I gave each other a kiss and a bear-hug. We'd always greeted each other like that, from the first time we met we always looked each other in the eye and we weren't afraid of kissing, we didn't have those kind of problems.

He didn't carry much baggage in those days, being on the move so much. He had a small suitcase, a hold-all, a small camera case and an electric typewriter.

Some people, if they don't have a home-base, don't collect much. Most people with homes collect a lot and I was one of them. I'm a collector and not ashamed of it. I couldn't pass by a builder's skip in London without checking it out for anything that might be useful. You wouldn't believe what some people throw away. Where do you think the entire bathroom suite upstairs came from, Victorian brass taps and all? Queenie would get well pissed off when we were driving to a party or a movie and I spotted a skip.

I'm not so much a collector as a recycler. When you're living at survival level you have to consider the usefulness of everything that comes your way. If there's no immediate use for it you tuck it away knowing you're bound to need it later.

Zack called me a pessimist. An optimist, he'd say, was someone who hoped it would never happen but I was a pessimist because I obviously feared it would. Maybe so, but I can't tell you the number of times I've stored stuff and found good use for it later, all kinds of stuff, wine bottles for when I got around to making my own wine, jars for preserving food, reusable nails, screws, bolts, taps, lavatory cisterns, clay piping, stoves, timber, building granite, wire of all kinds, lengths of PVC conduit and drainage pipes, half used cans of paint and bags of plaster for the bits that still needed doing. I couldn't even let go the five wrecked and rusting cars that littered the property. Every part of every one of them was a potential life-saver if and when, as often happened, something failed on the car I used. I needed them. The inventory of society's reusable detritus choking up the house was endless.

The bedrooms were full of boxes, clothes, papers, photographs, remains of projects relating to my defunct London business that somewhere in the back of my mind I thought I might need.

David's room was an exception, an oasis in the midst of my chaos, the only room in the house, besides the kitchen, that functioned. I'd painted it

out in bright, primary colour. I like colour that way, raw and honest. He had a shelf for his books, a nest of drawers labelled ‘Nicks’, ‘Socks’, ‘Shirts’, et cetera, double bunk beds for when a friend stayed over, bedside table, a bedside lamp with fader switch, a sound system and a pile of bed-time story cassettes, beautiful wildlife posters on the walls. He had it made. But the rest of the house, well, I just hadn’t had time to get around to it. It wasn’t until Zack arrived that there’d been any need to attend to it.

He looked tired. He used to pride himself on being able to detach from emotional pressures, but he was drained when he arrived, washed out, and we were soon looking for a space amongst the junk for him to lay his bones. I suppose that was the beginning, clearing a space for Zack.

I’d always known him to be self-sufficient and hoped he’d soon sort himself out. In a way it gave me heart. Seeing old Zack in such a state, wasted by a woman again, made my own wounds hurt less. My mum’s brother was half blown to pieces in the war and he said when he was in hospital he only had to look around the ward with his one remaining eye to realize he wasn’t as badly off as he’d thought. Can you imagine him laying there in pain with one leg, one arm and one eye thinking he wasn’t badly off? It was odd though. Somehow I always imagined Zack was the one who had it all sussed.

I put him in the guest bedroom, the room next to mine. It was a nice room built into the roof, its double-glazed window looking out on the

lawn at the front of the house. The lawn, like David's room, was an oasis, a tidy patch in an acre and a half of primal heath-land that surrounded the house. Dad and I sorted it on one of his visits. Zack always thought it was at the back of the house. He had a problem with the driveway being at the back of the house. I suppose, as far as he was concerned driveways came to the fronts of houses even if they lead to the kitchen door at the back.

Clearing the room out for Zack meant finding alternative space for the precious things that were stored there. This meant going up in the loft which was overflowing and repacking everything up there so there'd be more room. It took us the whole day. I couldn't really spare the time what with everything else that was going on, but Zack had to sleep somewhere. That's how the house gradually became usable.

I'd been sleeping on three mattresses piled on top of each other, an island in a sea of boxes and piles of indispensable stuff including an unassembled spring bed and brass bedstead trapped and useless against a wall. When we cleared the room for Zack, we cleared my bedroom at the same time.

I used to have pleasing visions of how that room would be, tucked up warm in the brass bed with the wife, the lad bringing us tea on Sunday morning. I hate to admit it but I suppose when Queenie left, it spoiled quite a lot of my dream. It's difficult to forgive her for that. When we cleared the room we put up the bed.

### Ch.3.

It was some days before he unloaded on me. I try to be caring and listen to people. Everyone's got to be able to unload but with what I was already caring about I needed Zack's help not his problems. I listened to him like a silent confessor and that's all he wanted really. In a couple of days he was right as rain and looking around to see where he'd landed.

I took him for a walk or two. We went up to the iron-age fortifications by the china clay quarry, poked about amongst the rubbish there. He really got off on the history of the place. Being from an ancient tribe himself he appreciated the age of things and had a sense of all those countless generations that had stood there before us, who'd built the place and fought and died right there where we were standing.

On the night of a full moon I took him to the old disused quarry that's a lake now; we sat under the walls of the old ruined engine house there and smoked a roll-up and watched the moon as it joggled about in the black water. Zack said one day when he'd made a killing with a movie he was going to buy that piece of land, the old quarry, the lake, the moon, everything and do up the engine house into a magnificent electronic dwelling. I didn't tell him I'd heard the English China Clay Company were thinking of opening up the quarry again and would never sell it; I'm not one to spoil dreams.

I used the car to get to and from work in Truro every day so we had to have another set of wheels for Zack to be able to take David to school and bring him home. Paul, son of a neighbouring farmer, had set himself up in an old barn on their land as auto mechanic extraordinary to the dozen or so families that lived in the area. I still owed him for the MOT but it didn't seem to worry him. He came down and we looked over the wrecks outside the house.

I'd always favoured French cars. I can't tell you why because they always proved to be a pain in the arse when it came to maintenance. There was a time I'd buy nothing but Citroens because of their clever pneumatic suspension but at this period of my life it was Peugeot 303s and whenever one came up for sale at auction or in the Pirate I'd have a look at it. They were usually ready for the scrap heap, well out of order and in towing condition. If I could get one for a few quid I'd take it. Usually there was something usable, a tyre or two, a windscreen wiper motor, a radiator that wasn't completely shot. The number of headaches I've had on account of 303s! The drive belts went round corners; can you imagine the inefficiency? The energy loss? And the clutch was completely inaccessible and needed special tools.

Recently I'd bought one where the gearbox was written off but the motor itself still turned over. Paul said he could lift the engine out and put it in one of the other wrecks that still had a reasonable gearbox, clutch and transmission.



Zack and I would check the Pirate every week to see if there were any bargains. Later we put in our own advertisement. The Flying Peugeot Brothers for Peugeot spare parts. 303s a speciality. It was surprising how many people in the area ran 303s and we sometimes did quite a brisk trade in door handles, wheels, seats, headlights, you name it. It brought in a few quid and when Zack had signed on at the DHSS in Penzance for about twenty-five quid a week, we were in clover.

Well, I say clover. I was still under the gun all the time don't worry. I didn't have any rent to pay but there were rates, telephone, electricity. I still owed old Pool for hire of his cement mixer and Paul for rebuilding the car for Zack. I'd settled the problem of paying for water by digging my own well and a septic tank for sewage disposal but they still came after me, the buggers. They still wanted me to pay water rates. I told them to get knotted; they could hardly turn my water off. As soon as I could get a reasonably efficient wind-driven generator built I'd tell SWEB to get knotted too. They could all go to hell. Even if I had the cash I wouldn't pay them, not immediately.

While times were hard we had to be very careful how we spent money. We didn't eat meat and lived entirely on grains, pulses and vegetables, we didn't drink booze and couldn't afford dope and only an occasional pouch of rolling tobacco. We could hardly afford petrol for the cars and coasted powerless whenever we could. I would do odd electronic repair jobs for local folk and occasionally sell off some of the more valuable treasures

accumulated in the loft, a lamp shade or two, a piece of china. If I had a few bob in my pocket, when I came home from Truro I'd bring a six-pack of Special Brew and Zack and I would get happily drunk. Very occasionally we'd drive over to Zennor and sit on the wall outside the pub there, contemplative with a pint of Hicks Special Draught, watching the sun set over the Bristol Channel and knowing for a moment what it was all about. Hard as things were, they were good times I have to admit.

Zack was a tower of strength. Well, not a tower. He wasn't tall enough to be a tower. He wasn't even as tall as me. About average, I suppose. But he was a bit of a mover and shaker was Zack when it came to doing things. He looked younger than he was but didn't have the strength of a younger man when it came to moving granite coin stones around and stuff like that. He'd do it, mind you, but it would leave him puffed. He was about fifty-five when he came to stay. But for sheer will and determination you couldn't beat him, although I have to say his assertiveness was sometimes too much for me to take.

Call it a weakness if you like, but I wanted to take things easy and sometimes resented his enthusiasm. In some ways he came on more like a father than my own dad. Zack had no problem expressing his love and friendship for me but he'd get on my case if I got distracted from our purpose and wouldn't get off it until I bent to his will. Even though it might have been to my ultimate benefit I resented it. I hated being made to feel guilty if I decided to goof off for a couple of days. And then he'd go

on about the nature and origin of guilt until my head ached quite badly.

I must admit Zack was not one to let the grass grow under his feet. Within days of his arrival he was at work on a screenplay. He used to get up early of a morning and write. He'd set the typewriter up on the window ledge in his room looking down on the lawn and tap away from as early as five in the morning when it was light enough. Each morning I'd awake to the whirring and tapping of his machine. When he heard me stir, he'd go down and make some tea and bring me up a cup.

He had this mate in London, Alistair, who was a magazine and newsletter publisher. They'd known each other for years and had worked together on a variety of projects. As luck would have it, Alistair came up with some paying work and in a month Zack had a check for a thousand pounds. A thousand quid. It had been a long time since I'd seen that kind of money.

We'd talked often enough about the need in life for a computer and here was our chance. There were some great machines on the market with colour screens and laser printers. I figured we could put the thousand as down payment and pay off the rest with the fruits of the machine's labour.

I tried to persuade Zack to go for something good but he wouldn't have it. All we could afford to pay cash for was an Amstrad 1512, black and white screen, no hard disk, only one floppy drive and a miserable dot matrix printer and that's what he bought. A real Mickey Mouse outfit that

wasn't good for anything but writing letters. It was our first major argument. He could be so darned stubborn. He couldn't envision the advantages down the line of a more sophisticated machine.

So it wasn't the most advanced computer in the world but it changed our lives. There wasn't space for it on the window ledge in Zack's room; that's how we became motivated to clear out the utilities room. I'd had to have a washing machine to keep the lad's clothes clean and had leaned on Mrs Downey's credit rating to get one, a real state-of-the-art beauty that would do everything except cook your breakfast. It cost an arm and a leg and I still owed about five hundred quid on Mrs Downey's account. I'd plumbed it in and everything but we'd never been able to use it. The room had become a storeroom for all those bits and bobs I mentioned. All that stuff that was too valuable to throw out. It was jammed with it, wall to wall, floor to ceiling. It was packed so tight you couldn't get through to the second toilet at the other side of the room let alone open the door of the washing machine.

I'd started a lean-to structure at the side of the house for my workshop. I'd built the walls and the roof before running out of steam so decided, for the time being, to use it for storing all the stuff in the utilities room. Once cleared and painted out, it became our laundry and office and that's where the computer went. We also had access to another toilet. Things were looking up.

#### Ch.4.

Zack had an old friend who lived in Mousehole just round the western point of Mount's Bay and it wasn't long before he was borrowing the car and driving over to see her, a divorcee with a kid, just like the rest of us. Moira had gallivanted all over the place, mainly on sailing boats smuggling dope from east to west. Her husband had done time for some drug offence or other and while he was inside she fell out of love with him and when he came out they got divorced. They were still good friends and their six-year-old daughter Poppy didn't seem to mind the arrangement too much. Her dad lived in London and whenever his job and probation officer allowed he came down and showed her a good time.

Zack and Moira didn't seem to be lovers or anything like that, though I must say she was an attractive woman and I wouldn't have minded getting the old leg over myself. Alas, she only had eyes for Joel, this Jewish New York guy that was living with her. He'd flown in a month ago with his Apple Mac and a load of floppies in his rucksack direct from JFK to Newquay just changing planes at Heathrow. He'd missed out on the usual culture decompression procedures and was still a month later when I met him, in fast-forward mode.

He and Moira were always at it, either screwing or screaming at each other or both. When things got too rough for him, and Moira seemed to be

the passionate kind of girl who could really bust a guy's balls, he'd drive over in search of sympathy. Not that he'd get much. We had enough on our minds. He'd come over on the pretext of borrowing tools to tinker with the car and it would take me an hour to find the bloody things. I'd give them to him and leave him to it, he seemed to know what he was doing. When he'd cooled off he turned out to be very interesting.

While we were brewing up in the kitchen he brought out a pack of cards and started doing the most amazing close-up tricks you've ever seen. He'd made a deal with the airline he came over on to do tricks to entertain the passengers up and down the plane in exchange for his ticket.

He was working on a newsletter on his computer to do with oriental spices aimed at people who were interested in preparing oriental food. He tried to persuade us to join in with him saying there was a very profitable back-ender to the deal in sales of spices by mail to the newsletter contributors. Zack and I, ever on the look-out for a quick buck, seriously considered it for a time but it came to nothing.

After one of their real ding-dongs, Moira had taken off with Poppy and not returned until the evening of the following day. She found Joel trying unsuccessfully to hang himself by his neck from a beam in her bedroom. I don't think, from her account, it was a serious attempt. He'd waited until she was home before he tried. He left that same night and Moira's never seen him since. Many phone calls at all hours of the day and night for a

couple of months but he never showed up again in person poor sod. I know what he must have been going through.

I'd watched David's reaction to Zack from the time of his arrival at the cottage. At first he'd been suspicious of him. He'd seen it all before with his dad's friends who'd stayed a while and then deserted him, so he was cautious and a bit cool with Zack at first. But Zack handled the situation well. I think he projected on David the love he might otherwise be giving to his own kids. So, in a sense, nothing was wasted and David was the winner. After two or three months, his defensive stance softened and he and Zack became good friends.

Zack had stayed on good terms with Carlotta, the mother of his kids. I had to take off my hat to him. I knew her and there was no love lost 'twixt her and me. But he had nothing bad to say about her. I never believed in his charitable attitude towards someone who'd given him such a hard time. He said maybe I'd feel the same way about Queenie one day. I didn't say anything but I very much doubted it.

He wrote to Carlotta and the kids regularly and as soon as he was able he started sending them pocket money and arranging to have the girls down for a holiday which was OK by me as long as their mother wasn't with them. I thought it was a good idea. I'd known them on and off since they were born and although a bit older than David they'd be fun for him

to have around for a week or two.

Zack had also stayed in touch with his recent wife, the one he'd left in London when he came down. He thought at that stage they still loved each other even though he'd not heard a word from her since he arrived. That's what I mean about Zack, I thought he had women sussed but he could be as foolish as anyone when it came right down to it. He'd written several times and must have been a good letter-writer because after the initial period of silence she softened and decided to come down and spend a week with us.

I'd never met her before and although I treated her with the respect I felt due to any wife of Zack's I didn't like her and she didn't like me. Her eyes glittered like a snake's; she wasn't my type at all. She showed no feeling for our way of life or the countryside and complained about the weather. She and Zack seemed to get along OK but after a few days she became bored and started getting on the phone. She made calls all over the place, New York, California, everywhere. I was furious and called the operator to find out how much she'd spent. When I asked her for the money telling her how hard-up we were she was really acid and scribbled out a cheque.

Zack tried hard to entertain her, drove her around the peninsular showing her standing stones, wishing wells, engine houses, an occasional pub but as far as I could see nothing seemed to impress her. She was a miserable sod and I was glad to see her go.



She'd been going on about cream tea ever since she'd arrived. It was the only thing she knew about Cornwall. Before she left, Zack had arranged for the three of us to have cream tea at the Tea Pot up on the main road. But as we were about to go, she threw a weird paranoid fit and started yelling at us. What kind of fool did we think she was? It was out of left field, I can tell you.

Here we were being hospitable and she was accusing us of trying to make her feel stupid. I never understood that outburst. Perhaps she thought there really wasn't any such thing as cream tea and that it was a local joke played on innocent tourists to make them feel even more like outsiders. Anyway, whatever it was, she left the following day. When she got back to London she put a stop order on the cheque she'd given me for the telephone calls. It was unbelievable. She knew exactly how hard-up we were so you can only draw one conclusion.

Zack and I had this great idea for making money. Video libraries were becoming big business and we figured their cassette covers would make a good local advertising medium. It was brilliant. But by the time we'd bribed the libraries to do it, spent two weeks hard slog selling the advertising spaces to local tradesmen, designed, typeset and printed the darned thing to a satisfactory standard, there wasn't more than tuppence to show for it. We needed an accountant and met Maurice Heeley.

He came from the midlands like me, a nice bloke but terribly unfit. You could see he didn't think too much about diet or anything like that. He smoked like a chimney and drank coffee continuously but he functioned all right between bouts of coughing and put us straight and showed us how books should balance and how income has to exceed expenditure and all that. I'd dealt with this kind of stuff before and never been very good at it so I was happy to leave it to Zack. I don't think he'd had any business experience but he seemed to have the hang of it so I didn't need to worry.

I had plenty on my plate to worry about. There was a stone hedge along the side of the property urgently requiring attention that I was looking forward to repairing. There was the pond to consider and, with winter coming on again, I needed to talk to Harvey up the hill about hiring his JCB to dig it out before it rained.

It would be great when it had water in it. It would attract migrating ducks and there'd be an island in the middle and I'd build a little house where they'd be safe at night from the foxes. David would love it and he could feed them every morning before school.

I still hadn't grouted the kitchen floor and there were a million other things to do, so it was good that Zack was keen to take care of that side of the business. Besides, we had to deal with a bank and I was *persona non grata* with them. I was still into Nat West in South Hampstead for about fifteen grand and I wasn't about to stick my head up and let them see

where I was. So Zack was left to deal with all that. It was a bit of a nuisance that only he could sign cheques. There were often times when he'd go against my advice and wouldn't buy some of the things I knew we really needed to smarten up our act.

Anyway, we put an ad in the *Pirate* for a dedicated space-salesman and this guy calls up in response and I couldn't get him off the phone. We'd struck lucky! The way this one was going on I knew he could sell ice to Eskimos! Finally, I got a word in and invited him to the cottage for an interview and that's how we met Gavin Wallace. Gavin was his mother's maiden name; his Christian name was Fred but Gavin Wallace was the way he liked to be known professionally. We sat around the kitchen table drinking herb tea.

Even though he didn't smoke or drink coffee and went on about Yoga and Veganism, Fred didn't look any healthier than Maurice Heeley. He was originally from London where he'd been a space-salesman for cowboy publishers in the city while all he really wanted to do was write novels. It drove him crazy and as far west as he could go without wetting his feet. He'd been in Penzance for eight or ten years and written six novels but none of them got published. Same old story, I thought. But Zack was impressed. Six novels was a lot of writing, published or not, he said.

There's not much in Penzance to compare with living in London but

Fred was still a townie. He wore a dark suit and tie and matching socks. What got him my vote apart from his obvious gift of the gab were his shoes. They were bright red Kickers.

We agreed terms and started work. Fred would sell, I'd look after design and production and Zack, happy as a pig in shit with the computer, would take care of business doing all the promotion and paperwork.

Maurice Heeley arranged bank loans in Zack's name and we set off to conquer the world. I could see it spreading beyond Cornwall into Devon and up-country. Wherever we had friends we had potential business associates. Zack had relations in Sussex and London he said were always on the look-out for a good thing. I had family in the midlands and the north, friends in Bristol, Liverpool and Aberdeen who'd go for something like this. I could see us all connected by modem, instant communication from computer to computer, an electronic network flashing across the country, Europe, the world, spinning out like a fibre optic web from the cottage, the control centre. I'd be rich at last. Talk about cottage industry! Talk about electronic cottage industry.

With all the DTI and EEC financial assistance that was available to us, the company's bank account began to look quite impressive. We had money. I had money and was able to straighten out accounts around the village, get up to date with the payments on the washing machine and buy the car I'd had my eye on for some time, a tidy little Peugeot drop-head

coupé. They were very rare in England. I could hardly wait to get it on the road and see heads turn. But first I had to get it running. It had been in Farmer Lately's barn for four or five years. He'd got it from an advertising man who'd migrated to Cornwall to take up farming. He'd taken it in part exchange for an old Fordson and disc harrow and had never used it. It had just been sitting there under all kinds of rubbish and he was glad to take fifty quid just to get rid of it. Rats had made a meal of the upholstery and the canvas roof but the motor, once I'd got jump cables on the battery, turned over at the first turn of the key.

I put it into Paul's shop for a re-spray and he did a fair job on it for the price. A lively aquamarine lustre on the body and vermilion wheels (the same vermilion as my baseball cap) with freshly chromed hub-caps. Here and there a little paint had got onto the wrong places but the overall look was there. I got covers made for the seats and a new canvas roof. I even got number-plates specially made up.

Until now it hadn't mattered who drove what, but this was my car. I was the only one allowed to drive it. I'd driven with Zack and watched how heavy he was on a motor and a bit careless in narrow lanes, often scratching the bodywork on the granite hedges. It didn't matter with the old wrecks we were driving but I didn't want him messing up this one. He was put out when I told him. He made some comment about me spending a lot of money on myself. He really didn't understand. There was prestige involved. If you wanted to get on, you had to be noticed, you had to fly the

flag.

When dad next came down I thought he'd at least have something complimentary to say about our progress but he didn't. When Zack asked him what he thought, he said rather dryly, looking straight at me, he'd seen me involved in many schemes and none of them had ever come to anything. I still owed him twenty-four hundred from the last fiasco. Good old dad.

Zack moved on. It was time. He had begun to undermine my self-confidence and get under my skin. We stayed together in business, found a little house in Newlyn where we could run our office and he could live upstairs. It was best that way. We continued as business partners for a while but you know how it is, time can erode relationships born of need.