

Inspector Jack Redmond stared out of his bus window, contemplating the mission that lay before him. It was a just reward for his years of sincere work - nobody could question that. He was, undoubtedly, the most committed detective Scotland Yard had at present.

Jack was not without his detractors. There were some who questioned his flair and sheer deductive ability, but he had always dismissed them as romantics whose picture of detective work was far removed from the mundane reality. Jack had based almost his entire career on Occam's Razor. The simplest explanation was always the most likely, and it was foolishness to believe otherwise. He rarely considered outlandish motives and did not doubt alibi if they appeared solid. "I deal in facts, not in fairies!" was his favourite way of remonstrating a junior who offered a sensational interpretation. And his record spoke for itself. His success rate was excellent, the highest of his division. He had, of course, reached dead-ends in many of his investigations, but not for lack of effort from his side. If there was something Jack excelled at, it was the ability to squeeze every last bit of information out of a material clue.

The proudest moment of his life had come two days before, when he received a call while holidaying in Paris. The agency had obtained reliable information that Claude Santoro, an eccentric art thief wanted in sixteen countries of Europe and another five around the world, had arranged a rendezvous with his henchmen at a luxurious hotel in Bern, presumably to plan his next heist. However, the eruption of an Icelandic volcano had dealt them an unexpected stroke of luck. All flights over Europe were cancelled for the time being, and since Santoro had no reason to suspect the leak, he would not be in a hurry to move. "We have him caught like a rat in a trap, only the chap doesn't know it!" were the exultant words of the Chief Inspector.

Santoro, a master of disguise, had proved as slippery as the proverbial eel. But if his last attempt on British soil was any indication, his fortunes were taking a turn for the worse. It had not gone smoothly, though Santoro had evaded capture. The public was outraged, and the Metropolitan Police swiftly made their intentions clear – no stone unturned in the search for Santoro. This was the reason they had assigned one of their own, rather than alerting the Swiss police immediately. Jack was to unmask him, and then the locals could do the rest.

And thus Jack was on an exhausting 20-hour bus journey to Bern, on a task which, if completed, would be the crowning glory of his career.

"You wish to extend your stay for four days, Monsieur?" the receptionist asked.

"Yes, please. This eruption, luckily it is not so much of an inconvenience for me. Jacques Remy, it's right there." The rangy man pointed down the register to help her locate his name.

"*Merci*, Monsieur. That will be another four hundred Euros."

Monsieur Remy duly paid and departed. Inspector Jack Redmond, who had just arrived and was also in the lobby, was rather amused. A French gentleman, prolonging his stay, also mentioning that he was not unduly bothered by the disruption of the airlines. It was inconceivable that the first person he saw on arrival was Santoro, surely? Remy wore glasses and seemed a little taller than the five feet eight of Santoro, but an appearance of two full extra inches of height could be achieved with the appropriate choice of clothes and shoes.

Jack had made reservations for a week's stay. He checked in, showered off the effects of the bus ride, and settled for a nap. The hotel oozed class, but was relatively small. It would not take long for him to know most of the residents.

By the end of the second day, Jack was on speaking terms with the majority of the inmates. He had trimmed his list of suspects to five. Monsieur Remy, the magnate from Nice, was on it. As were Andre Giraud, a French actor, and Georges Dupont, a Swiss architect. These were the clear frontrunners, but Jack still had his doubts about the German banker Stefan Bauer, whose lovely sister Angela was certainly worth keeping an eye on in the literal sense. And he very much wanted to give the finely shaped beard of Dr. Albert Kowalski a firm tug. He had told everyone that he was a British diplomat who had just joined the embassy.

"So, what is the latest on the timetables?" Bauer addressed the breakfast table in general.

"All still grounded, I'm afraid," replied Jack, observing that the German was growing more impatient by the day. "You might want to try one of those buses, they guarantee a back-ache."

Bauer sniffed, and went back to his sausages. Giraud once again complained that his shooting schedule was off the rails. He had made that quite clear in the previous couple of days, and Jack wondered if it indicated a sense of insecurity. Then again, perhaps it was for Angela's benefit. Giraud had been most disappointed when she said she had never heard of him before.

"He is a funny fellow, that Monsieur Dupont," said Remy rather unexpectedly after everyone had left. Jack perked up at once.

"Why do you say so?"

"Well, for one thing, he always excuses himself if I start talking about his subject. I have a casual interest in architecture, and hoped to learn a little from him to pass the time here. Monsieur has been very disappointing, though – he has gone away on some pretext three times now. On other topics he is perfectly comfortable, and he is quite knowledgeable about the business world. Rather strange."

"That's true. I should think any man would love talking about his profession."

"Oh well," Remy sighed, "maybe he does not want to be reminded of the pressures of his job. He came here to have a little break."

“You’re right. That could be the reason,” Jack agreed. All the same, his interest was aroused, and he made up his mind to experiment on it.

Jack did his homework, reading up on various styles and preparing genuine questions on architecture. He sought out Dupont patiently. After the exchange of greetings, and a little small talk, he slipped in one of his questions.

“You know, I’ve always wondered – some articles say the Palace of Westminster is Victorian, some say it’s Gothic. Which of them would you put your money on?”

“I should say it is Victorian, although the Goths seem to have had a say as well. ‘Allo! There is Remy, I need to return some stationery I borrowed. That man certainly knows his buildings, by the way.” Dupont walked away quickly to catch up with the businessman.

Jack watched the man with a frown. Remy had been spot-on. But it was Dupont’s parting line that struck him as most peculiar. If an architect declared that someone ‘knew his buildings’, it was high praise indeed. Or at least, an actual architect. And while Remy had professed an interest in the subject, he did not strike Jack as the particularly enlightened type. The game was well and truly afoot.

Jack made it a point to observe Dupont whenever possible. It was not easy, for he was not as socially inclined as some of the others. When he did come out into the lounge, he often buried his face behind a newspaper.

Having decided that again approaching Dupont would not be advisable, Jack changed his tactics. He dropped Dupont’s name in conversations with the others, hoping for a reaction of some sort. He barely got any, however. He had just resolved to abandon this line when Angela gave him hope.

“That man gives me the – what do you call it – shivers sometimes!”

“Really? What could you possibly mean, Miss Bauer?” said Jack, as innocuously as was possible with the feeling of having struck gold.

“Well, maybe this is silly – but my brother says he saw the butt of a gun in his bag after they went swimming. And he often talks to himself. If he is a violent unstable man, we are all doomed.” She shuddered involuntarily.

Jack assured Angela that nothing could happen to her, wishing he could talk to her longer, but he had a job to do.

By now, Jack was ready to pounce on Dupont if he got a final piece of evidence. The clincher, however, was quite hard to come by. Jack finally decided he needed an ally.

“You’re right,” he said to Remy one afternoon. “Mr. Dupont avoids any conversation about architecture.”

“Oh, you tried it? I feel bad for the poor soul, I had resolved not to trouble him further!”

“But it gets more curious. Bauer saw a gun in his bag. What do you make of that?”

At this, Remy’s eyebrows shot up and his face grew grave. “Look, Redmond,” he growled, “are you absolutely certain of that information?”

“Well, no. His sister told me, but she seemed sincere.”

“And what made her tell you? Have you been making enquiries?”

Remy’s tone took Jack by surprise. He seemed angry, almost furious. Jack considered for a few seconds before replying – “Not really. And why are you so upset, Mr. Remy?”

“You have absolutely no idea what you are involved in. Do not go about talking so indiscreetly. Jack, we are all in serious danger here!”

At this tantalizing statement, Jack was intrigued. “Remy, are you really who you say you are? It doesn’t seem so!”

Remy took a deep breath. “I am on the trail of an internationally wanted man,” he began. “His name is –

“- Claude Santoro,” Jack completed for him. “I do know what I am involved in and am aware of the danger. I am of the British Metropolitan Police. You probably know it as Scotland Yard.”

Remy’s mouth hung open for a moment. Then he recovered himself enough to say – “Well, I have no option but to believe you! Listen, I am very much afraid that Santoro has caught on to me. He detests the use of weapons as a rule. If he has bought one, it is probably to eliminate me.”

Jack nodded thoughtfully. This was an entirely new development. He was glad that he had remembered to pack his Glock pistol – somehow, its use seemed imminent. He would carry it on his person from that moment, and told Remy so.

The sound of a gunshot roused Jack from his sleep at midnight. Alert at once, he grabbed his pistol and carefully opened his room’s door, just a crack. The sight turned his blood to ice. Remy was being marched down the corridor, towards his room, with someone – presumably Dupont - holding a gun to his head.

Praying that Remy was not badly injured, Jack closed his door and waited for the footsteps to cross his room before bursting out and yelling, “Hands up! Drop the gun!” and pressing the Glock’s barrel to the armed man’s head. No surprises – it was Dupont.

Dupont looked stunned, and complied. "You too?" he managed, in a bewildered tone, before Jack brought the Glock's butt down on his head in a swift motion. He crumpled to the floor.

"Are you all right, Remy?" asked Jack with concern.

"I think my leg is broken." Remy grimaced in pain, holding his knee. "But that bullet did no harm. I just need to get my knee fixed."

"We'll get you to a hospital as soon as we take care of him," Jack promised. He threw the unconscious Dupont into his room, handcuffed him and locked the door and windows. He would have preferred to be more thorough, but it was the third floor and so any jump out of the windows would surely kill Dupont. The handcuffs were among the best, and the door was too strong to be broken by a handcuffed man.

Jack called the ambulance and accompanied Remy to the hospital, congratulating himself on a job well done. There had been a near shoot-out, but they were now home and dry. Would he make the headlines of *The Sun*, the newspaper he had grown up reading? Brave British Inspector Nails Elusive Art Thief... No, he deserved something better...

"You'll never get away, *je vais te baiser!*"

"Pipe down, Claude," said Jack smoothly. "You'll have plenty of time to rant in jail."

At this, Dupont looked puzzled. "Did you just call me Claude?"

"Why, of course," said Jack. "Would you prefer to be called loser?"

"*Monsieur, do you believe I am Claude Santoro?*" The expression on Dupont's face was so savage that Jack recoiled.

"Yes, I do, and yes, you are!" Jack retorted.

"*YOU IMBECILE!* I am of the Swiss police! I had Claude Santoro at gunpoint! And you interfered! You gave him a royal road to freedom! Free me, you dimwit!"

"What nonsense is this?"

"Remy came up to me and confessed that he was Santoro! I suspected him from the start. And then he said we must have a chase of some sort, and he began to run. I fired my gun to warn him and he ran into your corridor and surrendered. And then you meddled. *Foutre vous, imbecile!*"

Jack's face was white. "But – but – " he stammered, trying to find a hole in the story, "but how did he know I was a detective? And why did he not escape if he knew we were on his trail?"

“Because he is a madman and takes chances. And because you are an imbecile and would have given yourself away. And because checking out suddenly would have been very suspicious. If you do not free me now, I will hunt you down and smash your face into pulp when I get out of these handcuffs!”

Jack ignored him and ran out of the room, and reached the hospital as fast as he could, but was told that the patient had discharged himself before examination. With his head in his hands, he realized that he had been comprehensively outwitted. No headlines, no crowning glory. He began the long walk back, with plenty to think about. Occam’s Razor had decisively failed him this time.