

5 The Burglars

I met the two men – let me call them Tom and Jerry – in a small dark cafe in Soho. They would talk to me because I, too, have been on ‘the wrong side of the law’ in the past. And though they are not violent men, I would not like to write anything that they would not like, or that could give the police a clue to their identity.

As I went into the cafe, a tall young man of about 19 pushed past me in the doorway. Tom was sitting at the back of the cafe and called me over to the table. He put a cup of coffee down in front of me.

Tom: “We can talk here, it’s quite all right. Jerry will be along later.”

I: “Who was that in the doorway – the one who nearly knocked me over? A friend of yours?”

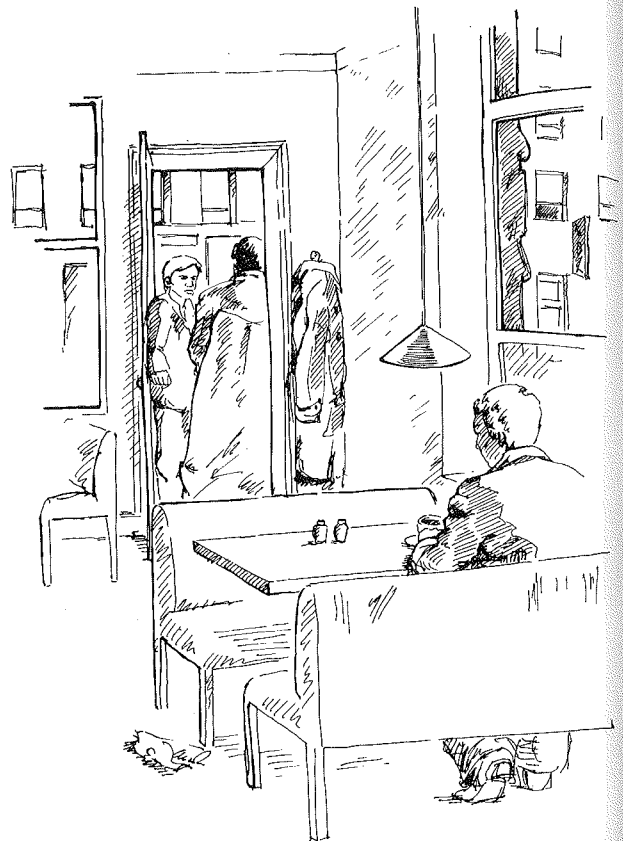
Tom: “No! He’s not a friend of mine. Let’s call him Richard. It’s funny, because in a way, he’s in the same business as I am.”

I: “Do you mean...”

Tom: “Yes, he breaks into houses as well. He’s good at it, too – in a way.”

I: “He’s very young to be doing that for a living – he can’t be more than nineteen.”

Tom: “I started when I was eight! I was always a thin boy – I could get through the smallest windows, and then let others in. Through the front door, if possible! I always got a bit of a laugh out of it.”



burglar indbrudstyv
Soho part of London that
 has been a crime centre
violent voldsom, voldelig
 a clue to an idea of



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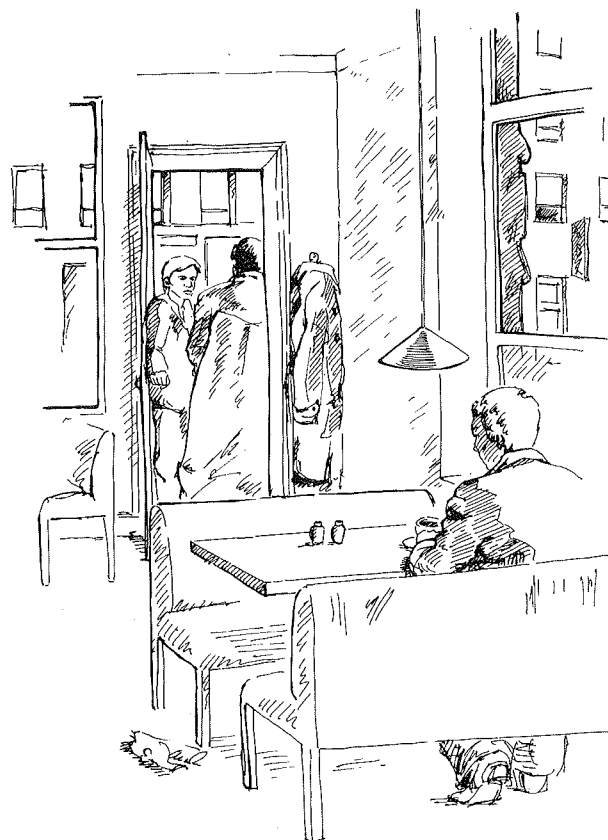
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I: “That sounds strange. Weren’t you afraid? Didn’t you ever get caught?”

Tom: “Yes and no. No, I wasn’t afraid. Not like Jerry. You see, to begin with, I had nothing to lose. Prison couldn’t be worse than the sort of life I had.”

Tom saw me opening my mouth to ask about this, and lifted a hand to stop me.

“No, I’m sorry. I don’t want to talk about it. Sometimes, in the streets, I see kids, all thin and lonely, and it reminds me of my past. I try to forget it. That’s one of the reasons why I break into houses and steal, I suppose.”

I: “But are you never afraid now, then? Now that you have a good life?”

Tom looked out of the window, and rubbed his cheek with the back of his hand.

“It’s strange, but there is one thing I am afraid of. And that is breaking into a house and finding myself in a room where there is a kid asleep – and then seeing the kid wake up and see me. I wouldn’t like that for the kid.”

Tom went a little red at this point, and poured out some more coffee. The cafe was still empty. Jerry had not arrived yet.

Tom: “But to go back to what we were saying – yes, I did get caught. I was sent away to a special school as I was so young. That’s where I met Jerry. And learned a lot of useful things!”

I: “Did you meet Richard there?”

Tom laughed loudly.

“Richard! He was much too good for that sort of place! No – but I was going to tell you, we did a job together. Our first and last together! It was a luxury flat in... well, never mind where it was! I went through the drawers and cupboards as usual – people keep valuable things in the strangest places – and I heard crashes from the sitting-room. Help, I thought. Cops. Let me get out. But, do you know, it was Richard smashing the place up. The noise was terrible! He just didn’t care. I soon told him to shut up. When I had finished, I found him in the bedroom; he had poured beer, sherry, tomato ketchup – masses of things from the kitchen – onto the bed, the carpet, over the walls. I’ve never seen anything like it.”

At this moment Jerry sat down quietly beside me, nodding hello to me, and pulling the coffee pot over to his side of the table.

Jerry: “That’s Richard, isn’t it?” He laughed quietly, shaking his head a little. “He’s a bad one. I don’t like him.”

lose *tabe*
rub *gnide*
cheek *kind*
pour out *hælde op*
luxury *luksus*
never mind *skidt med*
drawer *skuffe*
valuable worth a lot of
money
cops (slang) police
smash break
shake move from side to
side





Tom: "He goes into places to break. I wonder why, really. It seems a bit stupid."

Jerry: "You do it for the money. You're a professional."

Tom: "Yes. I'm good at my job – it's a hard job, harder than many other jobs and there's much more to learn than in most jobs. I like knowing that I can break into any house, take what I want, and go – and no one will see me, no one will hear me. I don't make mistakes, don't make a mess."

Jerry: "I don't like it. I don't mind admitting that I'm afraid. I don't like the dark – you never know what you might find. And the quiet sounds from the rooms next door, and the shadows, and the photographs that my torch shines on – I'll never get used to it. But it's better than standing in a factory, anyway."

Tom: "You'll be making me nervous soon, the way you talk about it. More coffee? But it reminds me of a job we did in North London."

Jerry: "Not the place with the bathroom?"

Tom: "Yes! The place with the bathroom!"

I: "Come on, then. Tell me about it!"

Jerry: "A really fine place. Jewels on the bedroom table, money in the desk drawer, fine pictures on the walls – you could get quite a bit for them. But I think it's too dangerous. Anyway, we went through the whole place. Tom's got a nose for the crazy places people hide their things – we've found money in shoes,



mess *rod*
ad'mitting telling the
truth
shadow *skygge*
torch *lommelygte*
factory *fabrik*
jewel *juvel, smykke*
desk *skrivebord*
quite a bit a lot of
money

telephone books, the knife drawer in the kitchen, in the coffee tin."

Tom: "So I said, look in the bathroom – you never know, there might be a watch or a ring."

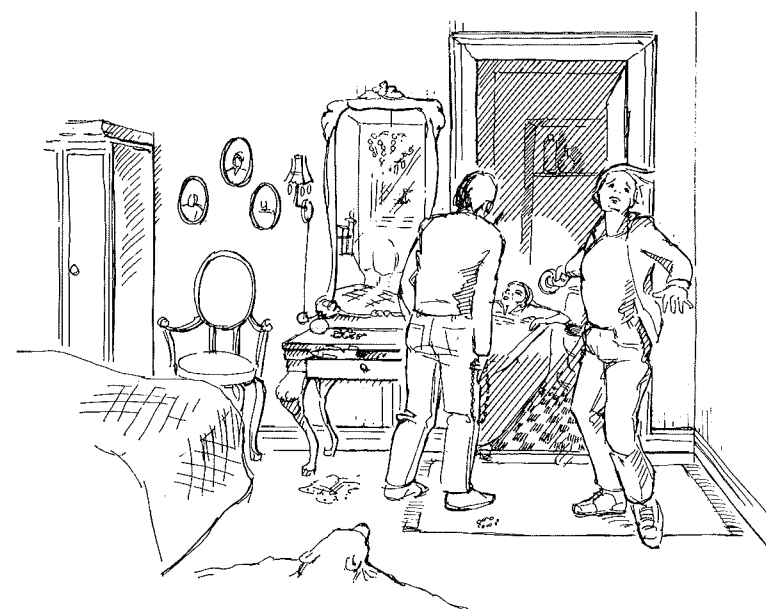
Jerry: "So I went in. The light wasn't working. I felt around for the light-switch, but when I found it, it wasn't working. Then I went back to the bedroom for my torch, and I could hear something in the bathroom."

Tom: "He called me over, and we had a look together. He shone his torch, and there in the bath was an old lady, fast asleep, water up to her nose. And snoring away! Jerry dropped the torch – on the carpet, fortunately – and then..."

Jerry laughed: "Yes, O.K. I ran! I got a shock, I can tell you. Someone had been there the whole time."

Tom: "You might at least have stopped long enough to pull out the plug. She might have drowned!"

Jerry: "Talking about North London, there's a little place I thought we might..." Tom coughed and looked over at me.



Tom: "Finished your coffee, have you?" He smiled.

I took the hint, and stood up. Jerry nodded goodbye to me, and I went out of the cafe. Outside, it was suddenly bright and sunny. A man was sweeping the street, a woman was selling flowers on the corner. On the other side of the street, there was a policeman walking slowly along, looking up at the pigeons flying by. I pulled my jacket a bit further up round my ears. I felt strange. I felt guilty. I wonder why?

tin *dåse*
snoring away *hun*
snorkede
fortunately *heldigvis*
plug *bundprop*
cough *hoste*
I took the hint I
understood what he
meant
sweep *feje*
pigeon *due*
guilty *skyldig*



1. When did Tom start working as a burglar?
2. What did he do when he started?
3. Why was he never afraid?
4. Is there anything Tom is afraid of now?
5. Why do you think he is afraid of this?
6. What are the 'usual things' he learnt at the special school?
7. How did Richard behave when he was in the house with Tom?
8. How does Jerry feel about the job?
9. Where do people hide their money and jewels?
10. What did they find in the bathroom?
11. How did the person who tells the story feel when he left the cafe – and why?
12. Which of the three – Tom, Jerry, or Richard – is your idea of a typical burglar?
13. Tom calls it a hard job. What do you think he means by saying this?

