

MACMILLAN GUIDED READERS

UPPER LEVEL

RICHARD PRESCOTT

Officially Dead



MACMILLAN

ORIGINALS

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The Meeting

Colin Fenton was lying on the bed in his hotel room, wishing that he was somewhere else. The window was open and he could hear the constant sound of traffic outside.

The hotel was in Brentwood, a small town in Essex, just beyond the eastern suburbs⁴ of London. Colin was in Brentwood to teach a computer software¹ course to the administrative staff of a company called Sutton Chemicals. This kind of teaching was always dull, tedious work, and today – the first day of the course – it had been particularly dull and tedious. By the afternoon, Colin had been exhausted. Now it was good to lie on the bed in the semi-darkness.

The evening air was cool and damp. Slowly, Colin got up off the bed and went to close the window. He stared out over the hotel car-park towards the wide, busy street beyond, while he wondered where he could go to eat dinner.

He had a shower and put on some casual clothes. He phoned his home in Bath, about 200 kilometres away to the west, but his wife wasn't in the house. Then Colin remembered that she had been going to travel to see some clients that afternoon. She'd probably had to work late – she often did.

'I'll phone her after dinner,' he thought.

Colin and his wife, Julie, were partners in business. Their company, C.J.F. Software Solutions, developed computer programs and sold them to a number of large businesses. Colin looked after the company's finances, the marketing of the computer software, and the organization of training courses. Julie, was a software developer.

Colin left his hotel room and went to find somewhere to

eat. The hotel didn't have a restaurant, but earlier in the day Colin had seen a pub which had a restaurant attached, just down the street. He decided to walk there.

The food and wine were excellent. At last, Colin began to relax. So after the meal, instead of going straight back to the hotel to have an early night, he went into the bar of the pub. It was noisy and crowded, but Colin didn't care about that. In one corner of the bar there was a large television set. A football match was showing, and most of the customers were watching it. Colin bought a drink and tried to find an empty seat. As he was looking round the crowded room, he saw something that almost made him drop his glass. He walked towards a man who was standing at the other end of the bar.

'For a moment, I thought I was looking in a mirror,' he said.

The other man was shocked too. The two of them stood facing each other. It was strange – unreal. Then they both laughed.

The two men were unbelievably alike. They were both in their late thirties, they had almost identical features, they even had the same hairstyle. Colin was perhaps slightly heavier, but otherwise the two men were doubles.

'We could be twin brothers,' the other man said.

They introduced themselves. The other man's name was John Bentley. He had a soft London accent⁴.

'There's a seat free at our table, if you'd like to join us,' he said. 'I must introduce you to my wife.'

Linda Bentley was sitting on a long seat in the corner furthest from the television. She moved along the seat to make room for Colin.

'It's incredible,' she said, looking at Colin and her husband. 'You two are identical – you're perfect doubles!'

Linda was dressed in black clothes. She had fair hair, large green eyes, and a broad smile. She wore a lot of make-up and



'You two are identical – you're perfect doubles!'

she wore a lot of heavy gold jewellery. Her skirt, Colin noticed, was very short indeed. She could not have looked less like his own wife, but he liked the way she looked.

'I've not seen you in here before, Colin,' John Bentley said. 'Where are you from?'

'Bath,' Colin said. 'My wife and I own a small computer software company there. I'm in Brentwood for a couple of days, teaching a course.'

'Oh, I don't know anything about computer software,' Linda said. 'You must be very clever.'

She smiled at him and Colin laughed. 'No,' he said, 'my wife's the clever one.'

Colin enjoyed being with the Bentleys. He liked their friendly way of talking. Over the next hour, he drank more than he had planned to drink. As a result, he became very talkative. But after some time, he noticed that John Bentley had become silent. Bentley was probably bored with hearing him talk, Colin thought. But Linda kept asking him questions about his business.

When it was time to leave the pub, Colin shook hands with the Bentleys and they wished one another goodnight.

'Will you be here in Brentwood again?' Linda asked Colin, as they walked out into the cool night air.

'Yes, I will, actually,' Colin said. 'I've got another two-day course to teach at Sutton Chemicals in about a month's time.'

'Oh, so perhaps we'll be seeing each other again then!' she said. 'That would be great.' Her eyes opened wide with pleasure.

'Yes,' Colin said. 'We must meet. I'd love to see you again – both of you.'

Colin turned into the street, and John and Linda Bentley walked towards a white van at the far side of the pub car-park.

'Goodnight, Colin!' Linda called.

As soon as Colin Fenton was out of sight, the Bentleys

started arguing. John, who had drunk rather a lot of beer that evening, began to shout at his wife.

‘What did you think you were doing?’ he yelled. ‘What’s your game³? Why were you flirting⁴ with that guy?’

When he was angry, John Bentley sometimes became violent and hit his wife. But now, some people were crossing the car-park behind them, talking in loud voices and laughing. Linda knew her husband wouldn’t hit her while there were people near.

‘Shut up,’ she said. ‘Give me the keys to the van.’

John ignored her and began opening the driver’s door. She grabbed the keys from him and pushed him out of the way. She got into the driver’s seat and waited for him to walk round to the passenger’s side. He got slowly into the van.

They were silent as she drove away from the pub. But after a minute, Linda touched her husband’s hand.

‘Don’t be an idiot, John,’ she said.

John Bentley didn’t reply. He just stared out of the window. They were driving along a wide road lined with⁴ shops. It had started to rain and the street lamps were reflected on the wet road and pavements.

Linda turned into a side street. ‘That guy will be useful to us, you’ll see,’ she said. ‘That’s why we must make sure that we see him again.’

John turned to look at her. ‘What do you mean?’ he said.

‘You and he are identical, John,’ she said. ‘That’s interesting, don’t you think?’

Her husband didn’t understand her.

A minute later, Linda slowed down and turned onto the drive in front of the garage of their small house. The van’s headlights shone onto the garage door.

‘You can forget about small-time thieving² now, John,’ Linda said. ‘If you do one big, easy robbery now, we’ll be rich for the

rest of our lives!’

‘I’m going straight now, Linda,’ John said. ‘I’m finished with thieving – you know that. I don’t want to go to prison again.’

‘You won’t go to prison this time,’ his wife replied quickly. ‘There’s no way you’ll get caught.’

When Colin Fenton got back to his hotel room, it was too late to phone his wife.

‘Oh, well,’ he thought. ‘I’ll be back home in Bath tomorrow night anyway. It doesn’t matter now.’

The idea of another day teaching the administrative staff of Sutton Chemicals was thoroughly tedious. He didn’t want to think about it. He thought instead about Linda Bentley. The only good thing about coming back to Sutton Chemicals for another course was that he might get a chance to see her again.