

IT'S ONLY MONEY

'Look, you'll be able to recover some of your losses next week.'

'Not forty five million!'

The Black Friar on a busy Friday evening; pin stripe suited city types flashing their credit cards and expense accounts; seductively dressed women looking for a good time. The buzz of excited conversation; the chink of champagne glasses. A sweet-smelling bouquet of expensive perfume infiltrated the air. Alex drained the remainder of his cocktail and slumped forward, holding his head in his hands.

'Rufus sold me down the river, I shouldn't have trusted him.'

'It's only money Alex, just numbers on a screen!'

'Shut up, Ryan.'

'It's all a game, really it's just Monopoly money.'

'Come on old boy, you need to lighten up. You need a woman! There's a couple of likely fillies over there how about it?'

'Not tonight Ryan.'

Ryan ignored his protestation and marched over to the smartly dressed women. Both looked mid to late twenties, one blonde the other brunette. He engaged them in conversation for a minute or so and then nodded in Alex's direction. The women picked up their glasses and followed Ryan. Alex groaned as he saw them heading over to his table.

'Cheer up Alex, these ladies are happy to join us.'

Alex smiled meekly at them.

'Hello girls. I'm sorry I'm not good company tonight.'

'Nonsense Alex, Madeline and Georgina are here to cheer you up. The girls said they would be pleased to accept your generous offer a bottle of Champers for some entertaining conversation.'

'Hi Alex, Maddie and Georgie to our friends. I'm Georgie,' announced the blonde.

Sitting next to Alex she shuffled her chair closer to him. He eyed up her long legs as she crossed them; her purple and white striped skirt riding up her thighs.

'So where's the drink we were promised, Alex? Asked Maddie.

'Ryan, be a good chap and procure a bottle for our guests. So what do you charming ladies do in the City.'

'We both work at Freeland Securities,' explained Georgie.

'Freeland Securities, aren't they preparing to float in the next week or two?'

'That's right, we're totally submerged with it at the moment.'

'This is our first night out in weeks,' Maddie added. 'We've been chained to our desks until nine or ten most nights.'

'You poor things, at least you've escaped tonight.'

The first bottle was swiftly drained and Alex quickly ordered another bottle. The second was consumed at a more modest pace as the conversation became more stimulating and intense. Maddie and Ryan found they had a number of things in common; a love of horses, Chelsea Football Club and sex. They turned their chairs to face each other to continue their tete-a-tete.

'Are you staying here all night, or can we go somewhere more exciting? Georgie asked.

'What sort of excitement are you looking for?'

'We could go clubbing up the West End, make a night of it.'

'Sorry Georgie, I've had a stressful day, I could do with an early night.'

'Me too, your place is probably nearer than mine!'

'My flat's in Docklands, it's only ten minutes by taxi,' Alex suggested.

'That's great, I live across town in Wimbledon, let's get a taxi and leave these love birds.'

'Magic, I'll get another bottle to take with us.'

Outside it was cold and dark; they staggered along Fleet Street giggling. The road was busy with red Routemasters lumbering along and black cabs weaving in and out plying their trade, headlights glowing. Alex flagged down a vacant taxi; they fell into the back seat. From the buzz of the City to the intricate Docklands road layout; soulless glass fronted tower blocks reaching skywards like a downsized Manhattan. Alex tapped in his security code to open the sliding glass front doors. His apartment was on the sixteenth floor; in the slow moving mirrored lift they hugged each other. Stumbling out when the doors finally slid open, Georgie giggled holding tightly onto his arm as he pulled her along the corridor. Once inside Alex steered her through to the bedroom in darkness. They fell onto the bed in a tangle of arms and legs. It was a competition who could undress the other the quickest. Georgie didn't have time to take in the impressive view of London over the River Thames with the London Eye and Big Ben lit up in the distance. As the passion subsided they laid drowsily in each other's arms.

'So what's the score with the Freeland flotation? I'd heard a whisper that it may be postponed.'

'How did you know that?'

'It's my job to know these things.'

'A couple of weeks ago they nearly pulled the plug, the numbers weren't stacking up. It's still touch and go, but they need a fresh injection of capital.'

'So when are they floating?'

'The prospectus is issued on Monday, and investors have until the thirty first to decide.'

'Interesting.'

'Can't you forget about work for an hour or two?'

Saturday morning dawned dull and grey over docklands, tower blocks hovering above the murky mist. After a slice of toast Georgie was keen to be on her way.

'Thanks for a wonderful night Alex, it was great meeting you.'

'How about dinner one evening, if you're not chained to your desk next week.'

'I'll let you know Monday, I may need to work late a couple of nights.'

Monday morning; Alex joined the early morning swarm of bankers, lawyers and insurers on the Docklands Light Railway. Tightly packed, swaying shoulder to shoulder reading the FT as the blue and red carriages headed for the City. Seven thirty; he was at his desk in Threadneedle Street checking the day's priorities before the Exchange opened.

'Ryan, I need your help today, I think I've got the makings of a recovery plan, thanks to you.'

'What do you mean, I've not done anything.'

'I had a great session with Georgie on Friday night. She could hold the key to getting even with Rufus. How did you get on with ... what was her name?'

'Maddie.'

'Anyway, we've got much more important business to sort out.'

'You mean the Freeland flotation.'

'I need you to do some digging. I'm arranging another date with Georgie, so I'll be able to get the inside line.'

Later Alex rang her mobile; it went straight to voicemail.

'Hi sweetie, it's Alex, remember? Call me back and we can fix up our dinner date.'

Tuesday morning; no response from Georgie. He tried again but once more her voicemail cut in.

'Damn! I need to speak to her sooner rather than later.'

'It certainly looks shaky, I wouldn't want to put any money into it,' Ryan added.

'We need to get Geoff in Futures to convince Rufus it's a dead cert for a quick profit. I need more information on their cash flow and activities. I don't suppose Maddie said anything.'

'No she didn't, she's more interested in her horses.'

'Typical! You can never trust a woman. Where's Georgie disappeared to?'

'Maybe she's one of Rufus's old flames.'

'What! No, you can't be serious.'

'Well he certainly knows how to pull them.'

'Look, we need to dig out some optimistic facts and figures so Geoff can sow some seeds with Rufus. Once I get hold of Georgie again, I'll sweet talk some more info out of her.'

Wednesday morning; still nothing from Georgie; Alex tried her mobile again. After a couple of rings she picked it up.

'Georgie, its Alex. Where've you been?'

'Sorry sweetie; snowed under this week.'

'How about dinner this evening?'

'Sorry, working late again tonight. Final push and all that, but I could manage an hour for lunch.'

Just before one the Black Friar was filling up with affluent lunchtime drinkers. Expectant chatter provided the soundtrack. Business accounts, free lunches for clients; the old boys' network in full swing. Alex arrived early, looking round nervously. Georgie arrived a few minutes later in her short skirted black suit with matching high heels.

'Do you know anyone working at the Exchange?'

'No, should I?'

'Does the name Rufus Evans mean anything to you?'

'No, why? Do you think he can help us?'

'No, but maybe, I can. I have contacts who can spin some positive messages and make sure they get to the right sources.'

'Really?'

'I'd need some hard facts and figures, there has to be some evidence behind it.'

'I can email you the press releases.'

'That's good for starters, but I'll need more back up for the numbers.'

'No problem, I take the analyst's raw data and sanitise it for circulation.'

'Good girl. Email it to my private account, that'll be safest. Can you do that this afternoon, darling?'

'For you Alex, I can.'

Back at the office, Ryan sat alone in the large open plan space staring at the screens on his desk, checking spreadsheets and making notes.

'Any joy with Geoff?'

'He's primed ready this afternoon. He's had issues with Rufus as well,' said Ryan.

'I thought I'd heard whispers a few months back.'

'Rufus set him up, on the Brooke Field merger and then left him out to dry when the deal collapsed.'

Three o'clock; still no email from Georgie.

'I thought you said she would email the press releases straight away.'

'Damn, maybe she's been diverted onto something else.'

'Or ... she's friends with Rufus!'

Three thirty; her email arrived. Alex scanned the attachments but there was nothing new.

'Come on Georgie, where's the figures?' he shouted at his laptop.

Suddenly his mobile went off; it was Georgie.'

'I need the backup data, Georgie. Where's the figures?'

'I can't send it, our firewall prevents sensitive documents being emailed.'

'Shit! Can't you email them from a private account to get round it?'

'No, we can't log into our private emails.'

'Bugger! Technology is too bloody sophisticated these days.'

'What else I can do?'

'Can you print the relevant pages?'

'Yes.'

'Great, I'll send Ryan over. We'll have to use the hard copies.'

Forty minutes later Ryan arrived back. Alex wasted no time pouring over the documents.

'Good old Georgie, this is great stuff.'

'We can quote these figures and if Rufus checks them out they'll hold up.'

'They do, but you need an inside view to understand what's really going on.'

An hour later Geoff had the report ready for circulation. By six o'clock the report landed in Rufus's inbox. The offer closed on Friday morning at ten o'clock, the timing was perfect; he would have less than forty eight hours to decide and make his move. Friday afternoon; Geoff called, Rufus had fallen for it.

'Now for phase two. Once the stock is floated we need to expose the weakness of their management, word of mouth will fire up the rumours.'

'There's a chance they could ride it out though,' Ryan suggested.

'There is, but that's a chance I'm willing to take. Once we highlight the discrepancies in their numbers, and it'll fall like a pack of cards.'

One week later the Freeland shares floated and at close of play were making a modest profit. One day later questions were being asked in all the financial briefings and within hours trading was suspended. The next day they went into administration.

The next morning; Alex got into the lift as an ashen faced Rufus got out.

'It's only money, old chap!'