

"Well, what do you think?"

"Do you want a truthful answer, or just what I'm supposed to say after a journey of ten thousand miles?"

"The truth will do."

"It stinks, and the climate's lousy."

Danny laughed. "Well, you know what they say about Manchester, rains all the time."

"Passports, sir."

John handed over their passports. They stood there, both trying to pretend they weren't nervous. They'd been through this already on the way out of Italy. But they both knew this would be worse, much worse.

It wasn't. They were waved through customs with all the other visiting Italians. Easily. There was nothing hard about it at all. Getting the taxi was harder.

Thirty-five minutes later they were sitting in the back of a grey Volvo, watching the rain streaming down the windows and listening to Piccadilly Radio.

"Nothing to it," Danny said.

"Yeah, right."

Danny looked out the window. "Feel like shit?"

"Mm."

"Join the club."

And that was the last thing they said till they got to their hotel.

The hotel was a large vertically black building that had been built in 1976 by Reo Stakis and which no amount of refits could possibly alter or improve. It looked like what it was, an expensive dump. The pavement outside was covered in a thick black slime of chewing gum and bird droppings. Every morning they saw the little pavement cleaning cart far down below, brushes polishing up the urban varnish and removing none of it. It was city dirt, different from any other kind and ingrained like lines in a dirty old drunk's face.

John pulled the curtains shut on the rain and sat on the edge of the bed to pull on socks. Danny was in the shower. It went off abruptly and John shouted, "I'm going to go down and pick up the mail."

Danny wiped off the moisture on the mirror and looked at himself. Short red hair clipped close to his head, darker looking than John's now. "Sure," he said. He'd given up asking him why he didn't wait till they went down to breakfast. If he wanted to haul ass all the way down there, that was his business. He heard the bedroom door close.

They were running out of money. Not seriously, not yet. But soon. Six years living off Danny's savings had finally left them high and dry. They had sold the Villa Rosa and decided to move on. It was odd; they'd talked round it for a long time, when they'd finally realised they were running out of cash. Two months it had taken one of them to finally say, 'We could always go home'. It wasn't home, of course. They could never go *home*, not that they had a home any more to go to, but it was as close as they could get; next county, even.

They could have gone to London, should have probably, more anonymous, but it had never been on the cards. It was fate. And here they were.

John had been for four job interviews since they'd got here. Hardly more than two weeks. Danny had been for none. He couldn't settle. The lousy climate didn't help. It had rained solidly since they'd got here. John hadn't said anything, but Danny felt guilty nevertheless. John had said, "Don't worry about it, the right job'll come up." But what would the right job for him be? He'd never worked at anything in his life, except farming and...

The room door banged again.

"Anything?" Danny shouted.

John appeared in the doorway. He was grinning a slow grin Danny hadn't seen in a while. "You bet." And he held up an envelope.

Danny took it out his hand. He opened it and pulled out the sheet inside. He looked at it for a moment then looked up slowly. "You got the job."

John grinned.

Danny smiled and said, "You jammy bastard, you got the job."

John slapped him on the back. "Come on, I'll stand you breakfast."