

**P342**

**Chapter Forty-Two:8am (pps342-351)**

*A: Toni runs to the barn (342-345)*

IT 1.9 'something beginning with 'g' 'sounds a bit naïve – after all, Toni would suspect that they are armed, and anyway, doesn't she know this from her visit to the lab and finding the guards tied up?

# 8 a.m.

7<sup>30</sup>

For an instant, Toni froze.

Kit Oxenford stood beside her, looking up with an expression of dismay on his handsome face, saying: "Get her, Daisy!" One of Stanley's daughters was falling down the staircase, her pink nightdress billowing up to reveal her plump white thighs, having shouted that the thieves were here and had tied her father up. Running down the stairs after her was an ugly young woman with a shaved head and Gothic eye make-up, dressed in leathers.

And Mother was in the cloakroom.

The daughter, Miranda, had said one more thing: the thieves had something beginning with g, presumably guns.

Momentarily bewildered, Toni half-turned and said: "Kit, what--?"

At the same time, Kit bellowed: "Nigel!" Then he hooked his arm around Toni's neck and pulled, trying to yank her off her feet.

In a flash of comprehension, Toni saw that something very bad was happening in the house, and that Kit was part of it. She did not stop to figure out exactly what it was, for Kit was trying to throw her to the floor.

She elbowed him forcefully in the ribs, and had the satisfaction of hearing him grunt with pain. His grip on her neck eased, and she was able to turn around and hit him again, this

time a punch in the midriff with her left fist. He lashed out at her, but she easily dodged the blow.

She drew back her right arm for a real knockout blow but, before she could strike, Miranda reached the foot of the stairs, tumbled over, and crashed into the back of Toni's legs. Because Toni was leaning slightly back, ready to punch Kit, she fell over backwards. A moment later, the woman in leather tripped over Miranda and Toni and collided with Kit, and all four of them ended up in a heap on the flagstone floor.

Toni realised she could not win the fight. She was up against Kit and the leather girl, and might soon have to contend also with Nigel, whoever he was. She had to get away from these people, catch her breath, and figure out what to do.

She wriggled out of the scrum and rolled over.

Kit was flat on his back. Miranda was curled up in a ball, looking bruised and winded but not seriously injured. As Toni looked, the leather girl got to her knees and, apparently in a fury, punched Miranda, striking her on the arm.

Toni leaped to her feet. She jumped over Kit, reached the front door, and opened it. Kit grabbed her ankle with one hand, holding her back. She twisted, and kicked at his arm with the other foot. She connected with his elbow. He cried out in pain and released his grip. Toni jumped out through the doorway and slammed the door behind her.

She turned right and dashed along the track made by the snowplough. She heard a muffled gunshot from inside the house, and a crash as a pane of glass shattered in one of the dining room windows; but the bullet missed her. She ran to the garage, which was side-on to the driveway, and turned on to the concrete apron in front of the doors, where the snowplough had cleared a space. Now the garage block was between her and the person with

the gun.

The police convoy had departed at normal driving speed along the cleared road, the snowplough with its blade raised. That meant that by this time it must be too far away for her to catch up with it on foot. What was she going to do? She realised that while she was on the cleared path she could easily be followed by someone from the house. But where could she hide? She glanced over to the woods. Plenty of cover there, but she had no coat—she had taken it off just before Miranda yelled her warning—so she would not last long in the open. She ran to the other end of the garage and looked around the corner. A few yards away, she could see the door to the barn. Did she dare to risk ploughing across the courtyard, in full view of the house?

She had no other choice.

As she was about to set off, the barn door opened.

She hesitated. What now?

*Is it still snowing?  
How heavily?*

A small boy emerged, wearing a coat over Spiderman pyjamas and a pair of rubber boots too big for his feet. She recognised Tom, the son of Miranda. He did not look around, but turned left and trudged through the deep snow. Toni assumed he was heading for the house, and asked herself whether she should stop him; but after a moment she realised that her assumption was wrong. Instead of crossing the courtyard to the main house, he stayed on the far side and went to the cottage. Toni stood still, willing him to hurry, to get out of the way before trouble started. She imagined he was looking for his mother to ask her if he could open his presents yet. In fact, his mother was in the main house, being punched by a woman gangster dressed in leather. But perhaps the stepfather was in the cottage. Toni thought it wiser to leave the boy to find out. The cottage door was unlocked, and he disappeared inside.

*How come he hasn't been rounded up?*

*B: Nigel & Kit decide to follow the snowplough (345-348)*

She set off at a run, but as soon as she hit the deep snow, she fell down. She lay there for a second, waiting for a gunshot, but none came. She struggled to her feet, cold snow chilling her through her jeans and sweater, and pressed on, walking more carefully but, inevitably, more slowly. She looked over at the house. There was no one at any of the windows yet. It could not take more than a minute to cross the courtyard, but each big step took painfully long. At last she reached the barn. She had a momentary spasm of fear that it would be locked, but the door swung open. She stepped inside.

Not much daylight came through the windows, but a small lamp revealed a billiard table, an assortment of elderly couches, a large-screen television set, and an empty camp bed where, presumably, Tom had been sleeping. There appeared to be no one else in the room, though a ladder led to a loft. Toni climbed the ladder. When she was half way up, she peeped over the top. She was startled by a several pairs of small red eyes staring at her: Caroline's rats. She climbed the rest of the way. There were two beds. The somnolent lump in one was Caroline. The other had not been slept in.

It would not be long before the gang in the house came looking for Toni. She had to get help fast. She reached for her mobile phone.

Then she realised she did not have it.

She could have screamed with frustration. Her phone was in the pocket of her flying jacket, which she had hung on the hat stand in the hall of the main house just a second before Miranda had shouted her warning.

What was she going to do now?

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"We've got to get after her," Nigel said. "She could be on the phone to the police already."

*Barns don't normally have windows. Need to establish that this has been converted for residential.*

*You've used this expression once or twice before.*

**P346**

IT 1.15 ' can we change this to 'He didn't want Miranda to learn of their destination' – it's a bit neater, somehow, and we know he's referring to the airfield, don't we?

“Wait,” Kit said. He stepped across the hall to the hat stand. He was rubbing his left elbow with his right hand, but he stopped in order to search Toni Gallo’s flying jacket. Triumphantly, he produced a phone from one of the pockets. “She can’t call the police.”

“Thank god for that.”

Nigel looked at the scene in the hall. Daisy had Miranda face down on the floor with her arm bent behind her back. Elton stood in the kitchen doorway. “Elton, get some more rope so Daisy can tie up this fat cow. I saw a hoover somewhere with a long lead.”

“In that lobby.” Elton returned to the boot lobby.

Nigel turned back to Kit. “Your sisters are a right bloody pair.”

“Never mind that,” Kit said. “We can get away now, can’t we? There are several cars here. We can take the path cleared by the snowplough.”

“What, and follow the police?”

“The one place they won’t look for us is right behind them.”

Nigel nodded. “Clever. But the snowplough’s not going to go all the way to...where we need to be.” He was referring to the disused airfield, but being discreet so that Miranda would not learn their destination. “What do we do when it turns off our route?”

Kit suppressed his impatience. They had to get away from Steepfall at any cost, but Nigel had not yet figured that out. “Look out of the window,” he said. “It’s daylight, and the snow has stopped. It will start to thaw soon, the forecast said.”

“We could still get stuck.”

“We’ll drive to Luke and Lori’s house and take the Nissan Patrol.”

“We could get stuck in that.”

“But at least we’d have a chance. And there’s no point staying here.”

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EF: Nigel should guess that Kit might call the police anonymously. That's why he has to kill him.

Elton returned with a length of electric cable. "Kit's right," he said. "We could easily get there by noon, barring accidents." He handed the cable to Daisy, who began to tie Miranda's hands behind her back.

"Okay," Nigel said. "But what if someone here calls the police?"

"We have to make sure that can't happen," Kit said. "We'll have to round up the rest of the family, including kids, and tie them up." *What about Toni?*

"Someone might come and untie them."

"No one's likely to knock at the door in the next twenty-four hours."

"What about those servants, Lucky and Lulu, or whatever?"

"Luke and Lori. We'll tie them up when we take the Nissan from them."

"All right, this is making sense."

"We should take all the phones, too."

"Might as well," said Nigel, "but it doesn't really matter. They're not going to free themselves once Daisy's roped them."

Kit thought uneasily of his father and sisters in bonds all day and all night, possibly for several days. He silently decided that at some point he would phone the police anonymously—but not until he was out of the country. *Has he been carrying his passport? Where does he want to go?*

"All right, let's get moving," Nigel said. "Put this sister in the pantry with the others, and we'll search the outbuildings."

Daisy dragged Miranda through the kitchen.

Kit said: "Our first priority should be phones. We don't want anyone to call the police before we catch them."

"We don't know where the phones are."

*Miranda has been so devoted to Kit. Does he have any pity, remorse about what's happening to her?*

*C: Craig gets the Ferrari keys (348-351)*

“I do. Miranda’s phone must be in the cottage—otherwise she would have used it already. Her boyfriend, Ned, is there.”

Nigel said: “Elton, go to the cottage.”

Kit went on: “There’s a phone in the Ferrari, in the garage. I suggest Daisy goes there to make sure no one is trying to use it.”

“What about the barn?”

“Caroline, Craig and Tom don’t have phones. I’m not sure about Sophie, but she’s only fourteen.”

“All right,” Nigel said. “Let’s get it done.”

The cloakroom door opened and Toni Gallo’s mother came out, still wearing her fur hat.

Kit and Nigel stared at her for a moment. Kit had forgotten she was in there.

Then Nigel said: “Stick her in the pantry with the others.”

“Oh, no,” the old woman said. “I think I’d rather sit by the Christmas tree.” She crossed the hall and went into the living room.

Kit looked at Nigel, who shrugged.

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Craig opened the door of the cupboard a crack. Peeping out, he saw that the lobby was empty. He was about to step out when one of the gangsters, Elton, came in from the kitchen. Craig pulled the door an inch towards himself and held his breath.

It had been like this for half an hour.

After Nigel had looked into the lobby and pronounced it “no good”—Craig had no idea what purpose it was no good for—he had left the kitchen door open. Craig had peeped

out, but Nigel, Elton or Daisy was always within view. The cupboard smelled mustily of damp anoraks and old boots. He worried about Sophie, sitting in Luke's Toyota in the garage, getting colder. He tried to wait patiently: his chance of escape would surely come soon.

A few minutes later Nelson had barked, which must mean that someone had come to the door. Craig's heart had lifted in hope, but a moment later Nigel and Elton had returned to the lobby and closed the door. They had stood inches away from Craig, talking in whispers that he could not quite make out. They must be hiding from the visitor, Craig decided. He wanted to burst out of the cupboard and run to the door yelling for help, but he knew he would be seized and silenced the moment he revealed himself. It was maddeningly frustrating.

Then there was a banging noise from upstairs, as if someone was trying to bash a door down. A voice that might have been Uncle Kit's yelled for Nigel, and he left the lobby, but Elton stayed behind, unintentionally keeping Craig prisoner.

Then there was a different kind of bang, more like a firework, or a gun going off. It was instantly followed by the sound of breaking glass. Craig was dismayed and frightened. Until this moment, the gang had used the guns only to threaten people. Now that they had started shooting, there was no telling where it would end. The family was in greater danger than ever. *Need to feel Craig's own terror. Could he have peed in his pants?*

At the gunshot Elton went, but he left the door open. Craig looked out, but he could see Elton at the far end of the kitchen, talking urgently to someone in the hall. Then Elton came back, and Craig hid again. Next time Craig looked out, he saw the hoover on the floor with its power cable cut off, and Elton handing the lead to someone in the hall.

There was some kind of council of war going on, Craig guessed. Then Elton returned

yet again to the lobby. This time, however, he went out of the back door, leaving it wide open.

The others were still in the hall. This was Craig's chance. He stepped out of the coat cupboard.

He flipped open the key box and snatched the Ferrari keys.

In two strides he was out of the door.

It was fully light, and the snowfall had stopped. To his left, he could clearly see Elton, trudging through the snow, heading for the cottage. Elton's back was turned and he did not see Craig. Craig went the other way and turned the corner, so that the house hid him from Elton.

He was shocked to see Daisy only yards away.

Fortunately she, too, had her back to him. She was walking away from him, using the path cleared by the snowplough, and he guessed she had come out of the front door. He hoped she was not heading for the garage and Sophie.

He flattened himself against the wall, praying Daisy would not look back over her shoulder.

When she reached the far end of the building, she left the cleared path and turned the corner, disappearing from view.

Craig went after her. Moving as quickly as he could, he retraced his steps along the front of the house, passing the dining room where Nelson stood with his forepaws on the windowsill, past the front door, and past the living room with its flashing Christmas tree. He was astonished to see an old lady sitting by the tree with a puppy dog in her lap. He did not pause to wonder who she was.

He reached the corner and looked around.

Daisy was heading straight for the side door of the garage.

If she went in there, she would surely find Sophie, sitting in Luke's Toyota.

She paused, reached into the pocket of her black leather jacket, and took out her gun.

Craig watched, helpless, as she opened the door and stepped inside.

Trembling, shivering, dry heaves,  
knotted stomach but he persists.