

Outline Notes 1

17 December 2002

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## SNOWFALL

### Part I

1. Stanley Wooller, 60, is owner and boss of a boutique pharmaceuticals company. A successful entrepreneurial scientist, he has made several fortunes from drug patents. His company, Wooller Biotech, is housed in a steel-and-glass complex of laboratories on the outskirts of Harbourmouth, a port city on the south coast of England. It is midday on Christmas Eve, with snow falling, and his employees are leaving for the holiday.

Wooller Biotech is working on (among other things) an antiviral drug. Stanley has invested heavily in a high-security isolation laboratory because of the dangerous nature of the viruses they are experimenting with. However, they have a very promising drug and have reached the stage of testing it on animals. He walks around the lab with his head of security, Susan Burrell, 40. They discuss a threat from an animal rights group to "liberate" the chimpanzees who have been infected with a deadly virus. This would be a catastrophe as the chimps could spread the virus to humans. Susan assures him the security arrangements are watertight.

They briefly discuss holiday plans. Stanley's three grown-up sons will be coming to stay at his home, a few miles from the lab. Susan, who is single, normally has her elderly mother for Christmas. She has a brother, but he's not good at taking responsibility. However, this year, her brother has agreed to take Mother, and for once Susan is free to enjoy herself. She will spend the holiday at the home of friends, but will check in periodically with the security guards at the lab.

Stanley and Susan are strongly attracted to one another, and he kisses her under the mistletoe. She kisses him back, but then she says she does not fool around with married men, and Stanley confesses he is happily married, and they regretfully wish one another a happy Christmas.

2. In a smart suburban home in south London a young electronics engineer, Karim Abdalaziz, 29, lives with his wife and two small children. His parents and other relations are visiting on Christmas Eve. His father, an immigrant from Pakistan, is bursting with pride as he shows the other relatives around the house, exclaiming at the en-suite bathrooms, the separate laundry, the appliances, and the his-and-hers Mercedes in the two-car garage.

Only Karim knows that after Christmas he will have to sell the house and move the family back into a cheap apartment. Karim is a chronic gambler, and he owes £250,000 to people who will break his legs unless he pays. His heart is breaking at the thought of explaining this to his father.

There is a knock at the door. It is Ron Trumper. A year ago, Karim worked with Ron. Karim's employer had a lucrative contract to instal a state-of-the-art alarm system at Wooller Biotech. At the time, Ron was head of security there.

Ron explains bitterly how he was fired by Stanley Wooller for a trivial theft. Karim, anticipating a request for a loan, says he has troubles of his own. I know, says Ron;

that's why I'm here. I know you need £250,000, and you can have it, in cash, tomorrow morning. Call me Santa Claus.

Karim knows this must involve something illegal, but he listens on. Wooller Biotech has developed an Aids cure, as yet unpatented, worth millions. Ron has been asked to help steal it. He needs Karim to disable the alarm system. And the job must be done tonight, to enable everyone to get clean away.

Karim hesitates, but in the end agrees.

3. Tess Whittaker, 35, is a divorcee with a nice 12-year-old son, Tom. She is engaged to Edward Wooller, 29, second son of Stanley, who is also divorced and has a troubled 14-year-old daughter, Sophie.

Edward is successful, wealthy, and kind, but weak. This suits Tess, whose first husband was a bully. Her son Tom likes Edward. Tess is keen to set a date for the wedding, but Edward wants to give everyone more time to get used to the idea. "Everyone" means his daughter Sophie, who expresses her rejected mother's rage. Tess regrets having moved in with Edward before getting him to commit to a date.

On Christmas Eve Tess, Edward and Tom drive through the snow to the home of Edward's ex to pick up Sophie. The four of them are going to the Wooller family home. It will be the first time the four of them have spent a holiday together.

The ex is not at home, and Sophie is not ready. Edward asks Tess to come in and help Sophie pack. Tess has never previously been inside this house, which used to be the marital home, and she is reluctant, but gives in. Sophie is difficult and disagreeable. The ex returns unexpectedly and is angry to find Sophie in the house. She rudely tells Tess to leave.

Tess sits waiting in the car outside, humiliated, wondering if Edward will ever really break free.

4. Susan Burrell is a smart, honest woman who was a rising police detective until she discovered that her boss was on the take, and in the ensuing fuss she lost her job. Like all whistle-blowers she found it hard to get hired again, and she is profoundly grateful to Stanley Wooller for giving her a chance.

As she is about to leave her apartment to drive to the home of her friends, her brother calls. His wife does not want him to drive through the snow, so Susan will have to have Mother after all. Susan is angry and disappointed, but she is used to her brother being unreliable. She cancels her plans and drives to the residential home to fetch Mother.

5. Stanley arrives at his home, Steepfall, a large, comfortable house on a cliff. The family has lived here for 30 years, ever since he made his first million, and the house is full of memories. In the kitchen, his wife Martha, attractive but bad tempered, is supervising the domestic staff in preparing food for the holiday.

Edward and Tess arrive. They will sleep in the main guest room, which has an adjacent bedroom suitable for young Tom. Sophie will sleep in the barn with the older grandchildren.

Stanley is especially fond of difficult Sophie, because she's got guts. He chats to her about life's problems, and because he is not judgmental he learns more than she

would ever tell her parents. All the same she does not tell him about the bottle of vodka in her suitcase.

Next to arrive are Stanley's eldest son, Hugh, 40, Hugh's fractious wife Olga, and their children, Charles and Caroline. Olga has brought all the wrong clothes, she finds fault with their accommodation in the guest cottage, and she immediately starts making arrangements to return home earlier than planned. To placate her, Edward and Tess give up their room and move into the cottage. Tom will have to sleep in the barn with the older kids.

6. Karim and Ron rendezvous with Nigel Buchanan, mastermind of the theft, and Uriah Jones, in charge of transport. Nigel has flown in from his home in Spain. A long-term professional thief, he steals only to order and for a prearranged price: works of art, nuclear warheads, special jewelry, high-tech equipment.

They run over their plans. When they have the samples of the drug they will drive to a nearby airstrip to rendezvous with Nigel and hand over the drug. They will be paid there and then, in cash, £250,000 each for Ron, Karim and Uriah, and an unnamed sum for Nigel. Then they will drive to where their own cars are parked and split up. They will all be home for Christmas lunch.

Nigel gives them £10,000 each in cash as a down payment.

Using a laptop, Karim hacks into Wooller Biotech's phone system. From now on, all calls into and out of the lab will come to his mobile.

The phone rings almost immediately. Karim's computer quickly tells him the security guards at the lab are calling Susan Burrell. He presses a button, and the guards get a recorded message saying: "The service you have requested is not available." Their next call is to the company that installed the phone system. Karim answers, and promises to send a team of technicians to repair the fault.

Uriah is worried about the weather.

7. At Steepfall, the adults sit down to supper. The kids spy on them from the crawl space in the roof over the dining room. The dog knows the kids are there, and Tess guesses after noticing the dog's reaction.

There is a family row involving Olga. At its height the third son, Davy, 25, arrives with his latest trashy girlfriend, Tara. (Is Tara with the Animal Liberation people?)

8. Susan picks up her mother, then drives to a supermarket to get some supplies for Christmas dinner. The snow is falling heavily. She calls the lab to find out what it is like there. She speaks to a security guard she has not met before. (In fact it is Karim.) He tells her they are having some problems with the phones, but the phone company has promised to send out a crew.

Susan is uneasy. A phone problem should have triggered an alarm. She ought to drive out there—but how can she, with her mother? Guiltily, she does nothing, and hopes for the best.

## **Part II**

9. In the barn, the Wooller kids play pool. Sophie produces a bottle of vodka. Young Tom insists on trying it. Sophie flirts with Charles, 16, thereby annoying Caroline. They

quarrel.

10. Karim and the gang show up at the lab in a van with the name of the phone company on its side. They show forged ID and are admitted.

Karim disables the alarm and they enter the isolation lab where the chimps are. Nigel finds several heavy locked steel vials. Karim wonders whether they really are stealing an Aids drug. It looks more as if they are stealing the disease.

The guards surprise the gang who pull guns and tie them up. Then they drive away into a blizzard.

11. Tess and Edward go to bed in the guest cottage. They have a row about Sophie.

12. Susan calls the lab again, worried. Again there is no reply. Becoming suspicious, she decides she must go there. Although it is late, she puts her mother in the car and drives there. The blizzard is getting worse and she is afraid of getting stuck in the snow, but she makes it. She discovers the burglary.

13. Stanley and Martha in bed. They have a row about Susan.

14. The gang's car gets stuck in the snow. They abandon it. They make for a nearby house, not knowing it is Steepfall. They check it out. Karim disconnects the phones to the house.

15. Tess sees lights in the barn. The kids ought to be asleep. She goes to investigate and finds that Tom is drunk on vodka and has puked. She cleans up and scolds Sophie, then puts the kids back to bed.

Returning to the guest cottage, she thinks she hears something, but decides it was her imagination.

16. At the lab, Susan realises the gang have stolen a lethal virus that could wipe out thousands of people. She calls Scotland Yard. She calls Steepfall, but there is a problem with the phones.

She could drive there, but the blizzard has got worse, and she decides she has to stay at the lab until it blows over.

### **Part III**

17. Stanley and Martha get up at dawn. They realise their staff are not going to make it to work today. They will have to do the cooking. They go down to the kitchen and start preparations.

There is a knock at the door! Stanley sees four men standing outside. He opens the door. They tell him they were forced to abandon their car and headed for the lights of Steepfall. He lets them in.

Then he recognises Ron Trumper.

18. Ron thinks fast. He says he now works for Karim's firm. There was a telephone problem at the lab, and he and Karim were sent with two other engineers to fix it. They

got lost in the snow.

Stanley tries to phone the lab, but his phones are not working. He does not have a mobile, except the one in his car, and he does not want to go out into the snow to the garage. Most of his guests have mobiles. He will call when one of them wakes up.

The gang turn on the TV and anxiously watch the weather forecast.

19. Tess comes into the kitchen. She becomes suspicious when Nigel questions her about how many people are staying and where they are sleeping. She gives deliberately misleading answers.

20. Susan continues trying to contact Stanley. She calls his car, on the off chance, and leaves a message.

Scotland Yard say there is not much they can do in this weather. Susan suspects they do not understand, or perhaps believe, how dangerous the virus is. She calls a friend in the FBI.

21. Stanley calls the lab on Hugh's mobile. Karim hurries into another room to answer the call, which is automatically diverted to his phone.

Stanley becomes suspicious of the gang. Eventually he confronts them. They pull weapons.

22. The gang put everyone in the dining room and go through the house picking up all the mobile phones. But they are not sure who else is in the outbuildings.

23. Tess, in the guest cottage, realises what is going on. She goes to the barn. The children are not there.

24. Susan gets a call back from the FBI. They have gone ballistic. Not only do they know about this virus. They know, from intelligence, who has stolen it, and who the end customer is—a terrorist group.

#### **Part IV**

25. Stanley tries to get to his Mercedes. He reaches it and switches the phone on. He hears the message from Susan, saying there has been a break-in at the lab. But before he can make a call, Ron gets him.

26. Ron and Karim try to establish who is where.

27. Tess and Charles manage to capture Karim and tie him up.

28. Susan at last gets the police searching for the gang's van. But they have to go with snowploughs.

29. Stanley realises Sophie is free.

30. Gang capture Tess & Charles and release Karim.

31. Tess is captured. Back in the dining room, she notices the dog's odd behaviour and realises that Tom is in the crawl space. She begins to talk loudly about the phone in her car.

32. Susan.

#### **Part V**

33. Stanley looks inside Nigel's bag and realises what the gang have stolen. He confronts Nigel and explains that this virus, if released, will kill him, Nigel, and his wife and family. Karim is horrified by this and urges Nigel to give it back. Nigel refuses. Stanley and Karim attack Nigel and Ron, but they are defeated, and beaten up.

34. Gang.

35. Tess saves Sophie's life.

36. Susan

37. Stanley

38. Gang

39. Tess

40. Susan

#### **Part VI**

41. Stanley. On TV, pictures of a snowplough clearing the road.

42. Gang head for the airfield.

43. Tess: getting to a working phone.

44. Susan: the police assume the gang headed the other way.

45. Stanley: chasing the gang in his own car.

46. Gang at the airfield.

47. Tess alerts the police.

48. Susan: the antidote is used to cure the gang.