

1**İSTANBUL**

I had my shower and I took a good look at myself in the bathroom mirror. At first, I didn't see anything particularly eye-catching. Just like every morning, I didn't pay any attention to my, well, pathetic appearance. Then, for some reason, I looked again, but this time more carefully: my hair was thinning, my belly was overhanging my belt, my skin was losing its sheen, my eyes were lifeless, wrinkles lined my face... all of this really pissed me off. And then it hit me: I was forty-two years old and had done nothing but fritter away the best years of my life.

There I was just standing there in the bathroom; I could hear my wife yelling at me from the living room. She was reminding me of what I had forgotten to buy on my way home yesterday evening: meat, milk, cheese, stuff for salad and a whole load of other bleeding crap... Now I came to think about it, I'd forgotten all sorts over years, like doing a fun sport; making time for hobbies; having sex with a woman out of nothing but lust - but, hey, forget about having sex, just a bit flirting would've been nice: you know, a romantic meal in some posh restaurant, getting off my face, getting down and dirty; biking with my mates; going to the movies or a concert; dancing like there's no tomorrow... Then I gave up thinking about it and trying to list them off because I really had forgotten about them all; I'd wanted to forget about them all. You can't turn the clock back though, can you? Is it really life, all those years that just chew you up and spit you out?

My daughter had been pretty much the only source of happiness

in my life until she finished primary school, but now she'd just turned twelve. And she'd turned into a whining, spoilt little brat who got on my nerves just like her mother did. It's got to the point where they actually enjoy ganging up on me to throw a spanner into *everything* I do. They were always wanting something or other from me, and, whatever I do, it's never good enough. We were a middle-class, comfortably-off family; we couldn't afford to lead the life of luxury that the rich businessmen we knew could. And whose fault do you think that was? Mine! I was why my wife and daughter couldn't have what they wanted; I was why they couldn't go wherever they wanted...

I was the finance director for a big company. We produced tyres for the automotive sector. I'd been working there thirteen years. Luckily, I'd got two foreign languages. That meant I'd been able to rise from being just a normal accounts clerk to managerial level. If it hadn't have been for that, by now, I'd be, ooh let me see, head of the accounts department and only making half of what I'm on now. Maybe then the wife would've already left me, and I could've been so much happier... Who knows?

I was in the bedroom getting dressed, and the wife was nagging me to hurry up and get myself ready: I was supposed to be helping my daughter with her homework. The mother-in-law and sister-in-law were coming, and she was in the kitchen, getting dinner ready. Forget how much it cost for her to throw all these fancy dinner parties, most of my hard-earned cash went on my daughter's school fees. My God, we were paying a small fortune. In this country, when you've got an eleven year-old who's about to leave primary school, it's hell. Oh, of course, every kid from our social class *had* to go to some fancy private school. There were no more free secondary schools and grammar schools like there was in my day. Even if there still was, our wives had conveniently forgotten

they existed. Once, I stupidly said, 'let's let the child grow up naturally; she can go to a normal secondary school; then she can go to music school: I mean, she's a girl, she can get involved with art.' Well, that made the shit hit the fan, didn't it? My wife declared a cold war on me and wouldn't talk to me for three days.

If you want to get your kid into one of the well-known private primaries, first, you've got to enter the draw for that school's nursery, then, you've got to bicker among yourselves 'to give your child the future she deserves', then, if your little darling is actually selected, you've got to shell out ten grand a year. And why do you fork out all of this? So your kid can catch some different bug every couple of days from the other kids, get sick and, hey presto, strengthen their immune system. The ten grand you pay for nursery school goes up to fifteen when they go to primary school. Every last penny went on lessons, courses and private teachers, and, on top of that, *we* were helping her with her homework every evening.

There's an old saying: 'Look at the mother, marry the daughter,' but actually that's wrong; the original goes like this: 'Look at the mother, *don't* marry the daughter.' As she grows up, she's becoming more like her mother every day. She doesn't like me or my ideas, just like her mother. For them, I was just some kind of walking cash machine, and the cash I gave them was never enough. I never had any time to myself at the weekend or of an evening. All my free time was swallowed up by DIY, being a chauffeur or babysitter on days out, shopping, fixing the car, paying off the bank loan, and the child's lessons.

I'd be trying to explain Pythagoras' theorem to the girl, and problems at work would keep popping into my mind. This year, I was fighting a war on two fronts: home and abroad. Ongoing conflicts with colleagues above and below me are making my life a

misery. The assistant CFO has recently started to see me as a threat, and, because of his childish paranoia, has started to persecute me whenever he gets the chance. So I had to keep a close eye on him as well as on a few twats from my own department.

At the same time, the company was having difficulty paying back all its loans. We kept squabbling with the banks, but we had to find some new short-term loans from somewhere. I couldn't get anyone to stick to the budget goals I'd set. And the cost of our investments, for various reasons that I won't go into here, had exceeded the programme we'd drawn up, and, at the same time, sales were lower than expected. Frankly, it was depressing.

Was it really worth it, putting in so much effort just to live this shit life of mine? I asked myself this question again and again. You can only put up with the pain if you think it's going to get you somewhere. And here was me, fighting just to stay afloat. My whole future was mortgaged: the house was bought on credit, the car was bought on credit, the new fridge was bought on credit, the washing machine was bought on credit, the stereo was bought on credit, even the mountain trip we went on during the winter half-term had been bought on credit for God's sake!...

Sure, I was getting good money as a glorified clerk, but life was expensive. As an honest financier, I was like a tailor who couldn't re-stitch the seams he'd unpicked. All those things I could do for the company with one arm tied behind my back: all the financial wizardry, the cheap loans, the well chosen and perfectly timed investments, the budgets measured down to the millimetre and the cash flow tables; I just couldn't pull off for myself. I was just one of those saps who knows how to make the boss rich.

I'd known I had to change something for the last two years, but not being able to do anything at all had given my confidence a bad knock. But there was one area where I thought I was successful:

planning... If I really wanted to reset my life to zero, that's where I'd have to start from. So one hot July evening, while I was still at the company, I got started making detailed preparations for the period of activity that would be the beginning of the rest of my life.

Actually, I was really depressed, and taking my own life was one of my options. But I chose the other one. The more I thought about it, the more I could see the light at the end of the tunnel. But, then again, maybe it was just the light of a train speeding towards me... While everyone at home and at work was in the holiday mood, just killing time here and there, I spent every free moment I had thinking and planning. It took me two weeks to flesh out all the details, and when I'd finished, I put it into action immediately. I couldn't afford to lose a single hour now. My grandma used to say, 'Well begun is half done,' but I kept hesitating until I'd taken that first step. After that though, I soon got over the butterflies of the first few days: the fear that made my hands shake uncontrollably, worrying about what people would say, like my kid's got nothing to eat, my wife walks the street.

After brains, the next thing you've got to have for this sort of thing is money, and lots of it. If you're serious about robbery, you can't just set up a company, accumulate capital and then float it on the stock market, you know. It's not like the good old days: in today's world, even if you want to rob a bank, you've got to have capital... But anyway, I'd worked out how to get round that one, too: I'd been keeping tabs on the company's most active foreign bank accounts. Almost all the company's exports to England were routed through the one Sterling account, held in a London branch. Its annual transaction volume was eighteen million pounds. We'd actually opened this Sterling credit account to regulate export revenues. Our customers' payment periods on export fees for cash on delivery were irregular. Based on the currency exchange regulations, we

had to bring this foreign currency into the country within ninety days. And on top of that, they paid the exporter additional bonuses on contracts closed within thirty days. That's why we chose this sort of method.

It's simple: we'd write an order to the bank in London twenty-five days after shipping to ensure an amount up to the value of the goods was transferred from the credit account to the account of the local bank we worked with as a payment on export goods. Our foreign customers made payments into the same account. That's how we settled our debts. The system had been working like this for two and a half years. And this foreign currency account was the first step in my plan to swipe the money in the easiest and surest way I knew how... At first, I'd been wracking my brains and slogging my guts out over it. When the time came, I was going to finish the job.

The second king pin of my project was to escape from my wife. If you leave your wife, you end up leaving your children anyway: two birds, one stone. At this crucial stage of the plan, I was going to have to act out the role I'd written for myself, and act it out well. The only thing was I had pretty much no acting skills. So I'd got into the habit of rehearsing what I was going to say to her in front of the mirror every day, and, you know what, my acting got better and better. After a while, I'd memorised all my lines and rewritten the ones that seemed fake.

After leaving the wife, I'd have to leave the country. I'd got the timing down for my border escape points. Even the Birdman of Alcatraz hadn't prepared his escape plan so well. After I'd got the timing sorted, I got to work on the second part of the plan. But this part was looking like a real spider's web...

My worst fears never happened. I managed to get divorced much more easily than I'd been expecting. I told her that, for reasons

I couldn't go into, I'd have to leave my job in a month, and sell the house to pay off all our debts. I told her how much I loved her and that I knew she wouldn't leave me now when I needed her most. Even though I was no Lawrence Olivier, I still put on a fantastic show that night... There were even tears in my eyes. She was touched by what I'd told her and was very understanding about the whole thing. And when we were having sex for what must've been the first time in months, she kept probing me for details about my problems at work and my debts. It was just like it was when we were on our honeymoon with her screaming in bed, doing her porn star impression.

Two days later, I sold the car. When I asked her to borrow some money from her mother, and give it to me to pay off our own debts, she started to see things a bit differently, though. Now, I started tightening the screws shamelessly; I was calling pretty much on the hour, begging her to find me some money from somewhere, anywhere.

In the end, the inevitable happened; after ten days, she called me at work and told me she was leaving me. In spite of my heroic resistance, we got divorced in a single hearing. I'd made her feel so sorry for me she didn't want anything from the family home. I could even have got maintenance from her if I'd wanted to force the issue. In the space of one day, I'd packed all my belongings into two suitcases and moved into a studio flat in a trendy suburb.

Then I went onto the financial phase, all the while keeping my divorce secret from everyone at work. At that time, the management were all at each other's throats with company problems, and career conflicts had come to a head: the witches' cauldron was bubbling. In the middle of all this chaos, I managed to open myself a personal account in the same branch of the bank we used for our export loans, without letting on to a soul. No one even bothered to

ask me why. And then, just to make sure the money'd be transferred from the company account to mine, I sent instructions to the tune of almost five hundred and eighty thousand pounds. Before I sent the coded message, I drew up all the documents myself, and got them approved and signed off by the directors and the general manager. I changed the numbers so they matched my personal account by tampering with the bottom part of the signed orders.

And, twelve days later, I was filthy rich, and it had all been so easy. I reckoned it would take at least three weeks for the company to notice they'd been the victims of an audacious robbery. I'd executed the final bank instructions on the Friday afternoon and called the bank's customer rep in London, so they wouldn't get suspicious and call up the company when a large sum of money was transferred to a personal account. It was already August. I'd be going on my annual leave after the company's weekly evaluation meeting. All my stuff was ready and waiting by the front door of the house. Now, I'd reached the third and final stage of the plan: I covered all my tracks, hopped into a taxi, and went to the airport. My visa and passport were still in my own name. Once I'd got through passport control and customs, and onto the plane, I felt a bit more relaxed. I took a deep breath.

During the flight, I kept wondering if I'd forgotten something. There was no room for any mistakes. When they began to serve lunch, I realised I'd hardly eaten anything since Wednesday, but, anyway, I wasn't feeling hungry. It was too late now to do anything about my misgivings. I opened my notebook and glanced at what I still had to do. I wanted to make sure I'd done everything well, so I wouldn't have any problems and get myself into trouble.

I thought about what I'd left behind me: maybe I'd never see the magical city of Istanbul ever again. Sure, I'd been born and bred

there, and it really was a beautiful city, but for me it'd become a hell on earth. It's not *where* you live, but *how* you live; that's what's important. I was leaving my mother, my brother and all my old friends behind; from now on, I had no childhood memories.

I only managed to force down a couple of mouthfuls of British Airways food. But I asked the hostess for red wine and drank three glasses, one after the other, to calm myself down. At customs and passport control in Heathrow, I was pretty nervous they might refuse me entry and send me back. I was sweating like a pig and dashing off to the toilet practically every half hour.

If you decide to start a new life, you notice how many links you have with the past, and though you try not to leave any clues about where you've gone, you'd be surprised by how many details the little problems throw up. I wrote up another checklist and ticked everything off; I was glad to see I hadn't forgotten anything. From now on, though, I was going to need to have luck on my side.

Within a month at the very latest, I'd have to find either another country to go to, or else someone to marry with the right to live in England. If I left it too late, they'd find out I was wanted in Turkey. I'd got my English visa using genuine documents and it was valid for one month. I'd have to sort out a wedding, or else get hold of a fake passport from somewhere, before the police found me.