

A Red Rubber boat

Percy frowned at Dave, then, moving his eyes from his friend he settled them on the ice cream van parked outside his house. 'Things really must be bad in the ice cream world if you're trying to sell door to door at one o'clock in the morning.'

'Things are bad.' Dave replied with a sigh. 'There are more Eskimos in the Sahara than kids coming to buy ice creams lately, but that's not why I'm here. I'm off to do some work, and because it's really a two man job, I've decided to give you the chance to earn some real money.'

'Why me?' asked Percy. 'You've never asked me to help you before.'

'Like I said, it's a two man job and you are the only one I know who has the kind of expertise it needs.'

'You haven't told me what this job is yet,' said Percy as he climbed into the ice cream van beside Dave. 'Nor have you told me how much I will be earning.'

Dave turned his head to give Percy a lopsided grin. 'If all goes well you will be two grand richer by midday tomorrow. All we've got to do is pick up a package and drop it off at an address in London before eight in the

morning.'

'Percy used his fingers to do some arithmetic. 'Two grand for seven hours work, it can't be legal.'

Dave shrugged his shoulders. 'Legal is boring, this will be exciting.'

'They had been travelling for some minutes, when Percy cleared his throat. 'Well! Where are we going and what kind of expertise have I got that will earn me that kind of money?'

'You can row.'

'I know I can row, I used to take a boat out on a pond occasionally but I'm no expert.'

'As long as you know how to pull an oar, that's good enough for me.'

'What sort of a package is it?' asked Percy suspiciously.

'It's going to be a wet one.' Dave replied with a grin. 'We're going to fish it out of the sea.'

Alarm bells started to ring in Percy's head. 'If we're pulling it out of the sea, then, it definitely isn't legal, if it's Heroin, or Cocaine, you can count me out. I'm not having anything to do with mainline stuff. I'm too young to spend nine or ten years of my life locked in a cell that's no bigger than a toilet.'

'I thought you knew me better than that.' Dave sounded really hurt. 'I wouldn't have anything to do with that stuff either. It's a couple of hundred kilos of cannabis.'

‘What!’ gasped Percy in disbelief. ‘Two hundred kilos of cannabis in a package floating in the sea, I hope you don’t expect me to help you lift it into a boat, that’s far too heavy for me, I’m not an Olympic weight lifting champion.’

‘We won’t have to lift it into the boat,’ Dave replied calmly. ‘We’ll release it from the buoy that it will be tied to, and then we will fasten it to the back of our boat and tow it ashore.’

‘I can’t help but notice that you keep saying we, but, it won’t be we will it? I’ll be the one doing the rowing and dragging a two hundred kilo weight tied to the back of a boat through water isn’t going to be easy, it’s going to be hard and painful.’

‘Surely you won’t mind putting up with a little bit of pain. After all two thousand pounds is a nice chunk of money.’

‘Where are we going to pick up this dodgy package?’

‘It will be floating in the sea just off West Point Bay.’

Percy shook his head in disbelief. ‘The water around the Bay can be really rough at this time of the year.’

‘Don’t worry,’ Dave said cheerfully. This evening’s weather forecast said the sea will be calm. It nearly always is when the moon is full.’

‘I hope you’ve realized that we will need a boat, before we can row out to sea and pick up that package. Please don’t tell me that we’ve got to steal one from the harbour.’

‘It’s all been arranged.’ Dave answered cheerfully.

‘Have you any idea what sort of boat it will be?’

Dave turned his head and grinned. ‘It won’t be The Queen Mary or anything like that. But it will be suitable for the job. The boat is hidden between two rocks on the beach at the bottom of the cliffs.’

Percy didn’t speak again until they reached the outskirts of West Point Bay, then he said. I don’t know if you have realized it or not, but this white ice cream van stands out like a pregnant woman in a crowd of skeletons at this time of the morning and your chimes have been playing since we started out.

‘Thank for telling me,’ Dave said gratefully as he pressed a button to disconnect them. ‘I’ve got so used to hearing them I sometimes forget to switch them off.’

Dave parked the van in a deserted car park near the beach. Before climbing out he looked earnestly at Percy. ‘This is what we are going to do. As soon as we’ve brought the package ashore, I will leave you on the beach to guard it while I come back here to pick up the van. Then we will put the cannabis in the van and be on our way.’

When they found the boat, Percy stepped back in surprise. ‘You were right when you said it won’t be the Queen Mary.’ He gasped. ‘This thing isn’t much more than a glorified red Lilo in the shape of a boat, they are on

sale in every seaside shop for about twenty quid. Do your friends really expect us to take it to sea and pick up a package weighing two hundred kilo's? Just look at size of the oars, my mum has wooden spoons in her kitchen that are bigger than them.'

Together they picked up the red rubber boat, and carried it down to the sea.'

'Percy looked up at the sky. 'The moon's too bright,' he said. 'I wish it was darker.'

'There won't be any people looking out to sea at this time in the morning,' Dave replied reassuringly, 'and even if there is, I doubt if they will be able to see us.'

'Don't talk stupid,' snapped Percy. 'Of course they'll be able to see us. If we are bobbing about on the waves in a red rubber boat in full moonlight they won't be able to miss us, we're going to stand out like an inflamed boil on a nudists backside.'

Percy climbed into the boat and sat down. 'You'll have to push the boat out until you're up to your waist, then, jump in.' he shouted.

'Don't shout,' Dave whispered. 'Voices carry a long way on a quiet night.'

Five times Dave tried to push the boat out and climb aboard, but before Percy could get to work with the oars, a wave always carried them back to

the beach. 'It's no good,' he panted. 'I'm never going to launch this blasted thing with you onboard, you'll have to climb out and give me a hand.'

'I can't do that!' said Percy 'I've got to be ready to start rowing. Maybe you will be more successful if keep pushing until you're up to your chin before you climb in.'

'I'll give it a try, but if that doesn't work then you'll have to get out and help. We can't afford to spend the rest of the night trying to get out to sea, we've got to collect the package and deliver it before eight in the morning.'

Percy looked down at the head that seemed to be floating on the water. 'We should be deeper enough now, so climb in and I'll start rowing.'

With Dave laying half in and half out, Percy pulled expertly on the oars. 'I knew it would be hard going, but it's tougher than I thought it would be, and the sea's getting really rough. I thought you said the weather forecast was for calm water.'

Dave looked up at the sky. 'It looks like the weather forecast was wrong,' he said gloomily. 'The moon is about to disappear behind those stormy looking clouds.' As the words left his mouth, the storm broke.

With the red rubber boat bobbing up and down like a duck on a water spout at a fairground shooting range, Percy managed to be sick three times during his first five minutes of rowing.

Baling like mad at the blunt end with the wind in his face, Dave unfortunately copped the lot. 'If you have to be sick again,' he snarled angrily, pouring the contents of the baling pot into his lap to wash away

Percy's supper, 'will you do it over the side.'

'I can't help it,' pale-faced Percy moaned miserably. 'I used to get seasick when I went rowing on the pond in the park.'

Half an hour later, having lost the battle to keep his breakfast, lunch and supper inside him, Percy shipped the oars. 'Look at the blisters on my hands, he said, waving them in front of Dave's face.

Dave glared at them contemptuously. 'Don't just sit there with your hands stuck under my nose. The marker buoy must be out here somewhere, look around and see if you can spot a small flashing light.'

Percy rubbed his stomach and groaned. 'I daren't move my head, if I do I'll be looking at the waves and then I'll be throwing up again and I've been sick so many times it's left me feeling weak and exhausted, if I don't conserve my strength I doubt if I'll have enough energy to row back to the beach.'

Dave turned his head and pointed at a wave heading towards them. 'At the speed those waves are moving towards us I don't think you will have to row the boat back to the beach we will be carried back, all you will need to do is steer.' Then, Dave's mobile started to ring in his pocket, leaning to his left he lifted it out.

The boat tilted dangerously

'What are you doing?' Percy screamed letting go of the oars and gripping hold of the sides of the boat in panic. 'You're going to sink us. Just let the blasted thing ring, it's probably some drunken git wanting to order a ninety-

nine and asking if you deliver.'

Dave's face grew red with rage when he answered the phone. 'You should have rung earlier,' he snarled. 'If I had known that the package hadn't been left for us to pick up, I wouldn't be sitting here in a small red rubber boat in the middle of a boiling sea looking for a buoy that doesn't exist, with a rower who keeps being sick all over me.'

'Look at that wave coming towards us!' Percy screamed hysterically. 'It's as big as a house.

It's going to capsize us.'

Dave dropped his mobile and stared at the wave in disbelief. 'If it does turn us over,' he bellowed, 'hang onto the boat for dear life and kick for the shore, let's hope that the tide will take us in.'

'What if the boat gets washed away?'

'If that happens, we'll have to swim back to shore. I hope you're a strong swimmer.'

'I swim better than I row.'

'You can hardly swim at all then,' Dave snarled sarcastically.

For several seconds the boat floated on top of the wave, then, it turned over throwing its passengers into the sea. When they surfaced it was several metres away.

Dave spat out a mouthful of salt water as he floated past Percy on the crest of a wave. 'We were lucky,' he said. 'The boat that was supposed to drop off the package was picked up by the coastguard just after it started

out. If it had been a few hours later, they would have arrested us instead.'

Percy stopped swimming, treading water, he bellowed. 'How can you say we were lucky? It's the middle of the night and we're in a really rough sea about a mile from land fighting for our lives.'

The storm clouds drifted away and the sea became calm just minutes after angry waves had dumped Dave and Percy on the beach.

Ten minutes later, Percy opened his eyes and stared up at Dave's lips just inches above his own. 'Were you going to kiss me?' he screamed.

'No I wasn't,' Dave answered indignantly. 'I thought you were dying, I was about to give you mouth to mouth resuscitation.'

Percy suddenly sat up and looked at Dave. 'Will we still get paid, for tonight's work?' He asked hopefully.

Dave shrugged his shoulders. 'There's no chance of that happening. We were going to be paid on delivery, so there won't be any money, but we'll be leaving this beach with something that money can't buy.'

Percy's brow creased into a puzzled frown. 'I'd like to know what it is.'

'We've got memories of an experience that we will never forget.'