

The Temple of Fortune

WHEN THE MONEY'S GONE & ONLY LOVE REMAINS



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Part One

Chapter 1

North London, late autumn 1990

The red Jaguar XJS, its wipers working overtime against the persistent rain, pulled away from the deserted industrial estate and joined the flow of traffic heading towards Central London. Stanley Rose gazed in his rear-view mirror at the estate agent's *For Sale* board planted outside the old brick factory as it receded in the distance. As the boss, he was always the last to leave – but today it would be for the last time. There would be no more getting in at 8

a.m. to the welcoming hum of the bandsaws, or the distinctive smell of cellulose from the latest prototypes, fresh out of the spray booths. H. & A. Rose Limited, manufacturers of high-quality dining-room furniture for over half a century, had finally gone broke.

The 100-strong workforce were now without jobs – and he, Stanley Rose, was responsible for that.

Stan had personally supervised the disposal of all the stock and sundries to ensure that the creditors got back what was owing to them. His reputation for honesty and fairness was still important to him, even at this low point. Unfortunately, despite his best efforts there was a shortfall of close to a million pounds – a sum which kept him up at nights.

As he drove away, the sense of relief that he had anticipated, now that the worst was over, failed to materialise. Panic took over instead as the reality of his situation began to sink in. Stan knew that the past six months of stress had taken their toll on his looks, as well as on his nerves. His mother often remarked on his resemblance to Omar Sharif, since he was tall and dark, not yet forty, and had the same sort of moustache as the handsome Hollywood star. Now, however, Stan reckoned he looked more like

Moe, one of the more miserable characters from *The Simpsons*. And just when he needed to keep up appearances too.

Stuck in the midday traffic, hemmed in by two huge trucks, he thought about the shell of a business he had just left.

It was his Uncle Harry who had started the company after World War Two, partnered by his less able older brother Arnold - Stan's father. Stan had a sudden memory of Harry directing production from the factory floor, immaculately dressed in his usual navy-blue suit, a large cigar in his mouth. The firm had provided the brothers with a decent standard of living, but years of under-investment, coupled with industrial action from workers who hated change, had gradually brought H. & A. Rose to its knees.

Stan knew he had made the wrong choice. He should have completed his accountancy qualification and made his own way in life, instead of taking the easy option and joining the family firm when his father died twenty years ago. Look where it had got him! He cringed at the thought of his Uncle Harry's reaction when he learned of the demise of the business, which he had built up single-handed.

Seeing the road sign for East Finchley, Stan was relieved and terrified in equal measure at the thought of going home. Switching on the car radio to pass the time, he rehearsed again the speech he planned to give to his wife Carol. Stan groaned aloud. He had tried to remain positive for the sake of Tara, their fourteen-year-old daughter, but with the burden of all his business worries, he knew he hadn't given either his wife or daughter the attention they deserved. Diagnosed with breast cancer eighteen months ago, Carol had been through a very difficult time. The loss of the business would, Stan feared, be the last straw.

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Carol had left the car in the small car park behind the stately home of Kenwood House, while she and Tara went to have lunch at the Spaniards Inn over the road. The sixteenth-century pub, former haunt of highwaymen, was a family favourite, especially now in the chilly weather when the roaring fire and cosy little nooks made it the ideal place to while away an afternoon.

Tara finished her salad and took a sip of her Diet Coke. Her mother, she noticed, had barely touched her salmon.

'You know, you really shouldn't have taken time off school to come with me for my check-up,' Carol told her daughter.

'Well, Daddy wasn't going to take you. Anyway, Wednesdays are our half-day at school, so I won't have missed much.'

Carol examined the olive-skinned girl, already a resilient young woman, who reminded her so much of herself at the same age.

'It's not his fault,' she said. 'He had something to do at the factory that he couldn't put off.'

'Sounds familiar,' Tara quipped.

'That's not fair – your father does what he can. He's actually a very kind man, deep down.'

'You'd have to dig quite deep!'

They both burst out laughing.

'It's not his fault that he finds it hard to show his feelings; in my experience it's endemic in the male species,' Carol said.

'You mean he's emotionally retarded, due to being the only child of an overbearing mother,' Tara said.

'I thought you got on so well with Grandma?'

'She's all right in small doses, I suppose,' Tara conceded, finishing her drink.

Carol yawned. The visit to the Royal Free Hospital that morning had tired her out. Then she perked up, saying, 'I know – let's take a stroll down to Kenwood House and look at the view across to the lake.' She loved it so much there, and something told her she might not be around long enough to see the rhododendrons there bloom in the late spring.

'All right, Mummy, if you're sure you're feeling up to it,' Tara replied, happy to put off her English essay for a little longer.

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The landscape of tatty housing estates and rundown shops had by now given way to the lush open spaces of Hampstead Heath. Without even thinking about it, Stan had bypassed the route home, thereby avoiding the confrontation with his wife, and driven straight to his mother's house. He was hoping for some sort of comfort and advice - but even as he rang the bell, he knew it had been a mistake.

The door opened and a perfectly groomed woman, dressed in a maroon cashmere coat and kid leather gloves, looked at him in surprise.

'Darling, what are you doing here?' Elaine Rose said in her well-spoken voice, dabbing a few drops of her favourite Cabochard perfume behind her ears. 'You've just caught me on my way out to lunch at Fortnum's with Stella and then I'm off to the Royal Academy. And would you believe it, I'm out again tonight?'

'I just wanted a quick word,' Stan replied, disappointed but trying to keep his spirits up. He badly needed to share his troubles. Maybe for once his mother would reassure him that everything was going to be all right.

'I don't suppose you'd mind taking me, would you?' Elaine asked, not giving her son a chance to refuse as she passed him on her way out of the house that he'd grown up in. 'Trying to find a meter in Piccadilly can be impossible at the best of times and I shan't want to be late.'

'Yes, all right,' Stan agreed, trying not to let his lack of enthusiasm show. He helped her into the passenger seat and drove off.

'This car is lovely and comfortable - is it new?' Elaine Rose enquired, checking her make-up.

'It's a couple of years old, you've been in it before,' Stan reminded her.

'It's important for a man to have a nice motor car,' Elaine said comfortably. 'It gives a good impression. The first thing I noticed about your father was his car. I remember it was a black sports car with a wonderful smell of new leather.' She sighed.

Stan pictured his father sitting behind the wheel of his immaculately polished Humber Snipe, proudly waiting outside the house to take him to St Anthony's, his prep school in Hampstead.

When it came to his family, nothing was too much trouble for Arnold Rose.

The day that Stan was ushered out of a gym lesson and taken to the Headmaster's office, to be informed that his father had passed away, still seemed surreal, two decades later. Arnold had gone to bed the previous night, feeling slightly unwell, and had never woken up. The post mortem showed that he had suffered a massive stroke. He was just fifty years old.

'Of course, it's different these days,' Elaine was rambling on. 'For someone independent like me, a car's an absolute necessity. I'm sure your wife has one, doesn't she?'

'Sorry, Mother, what were you saying?' Stan asked distractedly.

'A car!'

'Yes, of course, but Carol hasn't done much driving since she's been unwell,' Stan replied, irritated by the way his mother had of always putting him on the defensive.

'I thought the mastectomy operation was successful? I do hope that isn't the reason you came to see me. And Tara, she is all right, isn't she?' Elaine said, showing genuine concern for the first time.

'Carol went for her three-monthly check-up this morning,' Stan informed her. 'We are hoping that she's still clear, but it's been hard on Tara, seeing what her mother's been going through.'

By avoiding the side roads, he was now on a clear run to the West End. It was time to grasp the nettle.

'It's the business,' he said, coming right out with it.

But Elaine was ferreting in her handbag and didn't pick up on his tone. 'I'm sure that it's just the time of year, Stanley dear. You can hardly expect people to buy furniture in this weather. Your father used to say, "any excuse for the public not to buy".'

'I'm afraid it's more serious than that.' Stan cleared his throat. 'The company has closed down. We tried everything to keep it going, but the bank withdrew their support.'

Elaine finally found what she was looking for and began to file one of her long pink nails. 'There are bound to be others who would be only too pleased to acquire a business like ours. Don't worry, you'll see - it'll sort itself out,' she replied, apparently unable to absorb what was being said to her.

Stan cursed himself for wasting his breath. It wasn't her fault that she had no grasp of financial affairs. His mother came from a generation of women who rarely worked, got married off and left it to their husbands to support them.

Stan turned into Duke Street, the network of art galleries and antique shops so discreet that they always appeared closed, and let his mother out at the side entrance of Fortnum's.

Nothing had been accomplished.

He put on a tape by the Allman Brothers, the American rock band who had blown him away the first time he heard their classic 1970 album *In Memory of Elizabeth Reed*.

Indulging himself in thoughts of what might have been, had he been allowed to follow his dream of becoming a fulltime musician, gave Stan a little respite as he turned the car round and headed back home to face up to his troubles.

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It was past six that same evening when Elaine Rose arrived home. She paid the taxi driver and went briskly into the house. Switching on the lights, she picked up the telephone and dialled the number in Spain that was lodged firmly in her mind.

'What!' a man's gruff voice said at the other end of the line.

'Harry, it's me,' Elaine replied, using her free hand to undo the buttons of her coat. 'We need to talk - it's important.'

'Why, what's wrong?' her brother-in-law asked, annoyed at being interrupted during his weekly bridge game in Marbella.

'It's Stanley. He needs help - the business is in difficulty.'

'So, what do you expect me to do about it?' Harry snapped back.

'He's got a wife with cancer and my granddaughter to support. Do you think for one moment I'm going to see a child of mine out on the street?'

'All right, all right, I assume it's money you're after.' There was a short pause while Harry relit his cigar, giving himself time to think. 'How much?' he barked.

'I was thinking that fifty thousand would help keep him going until he gets back on his feet.'

'How much?' Harry repeated in shock.

'Small change compared to what you milked the company for, all those years,' Elaine said coolly.

Harry exploded. 'So I paid myself dividends when we were doing well. What's wrong with that?'

'Nothing - except you made damn sure that Arnold never got his share,' Elaine butted in.

'That was different and you know it. He was never involved in running the business.'

Elaine ignored him. 'And then, when you'd drained any goodness that was left, you couldn't get to that flat in Spain quick enough.' Her voice turned bitter. 'How convenient for you, to have Stanley there to pick up the pieces and shoulder the blame.'

'Trade was tough! Anyway, it was time for the boy to show what he was made of,' came the blustered response.

'Harry dear, do I need to remind you that it was *my father's money* that set you up in business in the first place? Arnold was entitled to half of everything. The fact that he was too good-hearted to ask for it is quite beside the point. Giving it to Stanley now is only making up what was due to him.'

'I see. I suppose I don't have a choice,' came the resentful reply.

'Write this down,' Elaine instructed. Reaching into her crocodile handbag for her cheque-book, she read out her bank details.

'All right. The funds will be transferred first thing tomorrow,' Harry confirmed, beaten.

'I shall put Barclays on alert to expect it,' Elaine told him, replacing the receiver. That money, she decided, could stay in her

account until she deemed it the right time to help her son without making him feel as if it was a hand-out. She would then pass it off as 'family money'. Satisfied, she hurried upstairs and quickly showered and changed, in preparation for her evening engagement.

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When the Mercedes limousine drew up outside, Elaine appeared, wearing a black evening dress and elegant high-heeled shoes. She was, as ever, ready on time.

The chauffeur tipped his cap and opened the rear passenger door.

'Good evening, Paul,' she said, getting in next to a distinguished older man.

'My dear, you look absolutely stunning,' he announced in his thick European accent, reaching across to kiss her.

Elaine took the flute of champagne he handed her and clinked it against his own. Relaxing for the first time since her son's visit, she said archly, 'Well, it's not every day I receive an invitation to the opera at Covent Garden – *and* dinner at the Ritz.'