

Siege at Calais

by Hasan Fernandez

Avignon Jewelers is in a quiet part of Dover where the gulls fly and the sea crashes against the white cliffs. The store itself is not large, occupying a space that would normally be taken up by an average detached house. The windows are large and bullet proof and the walls are a light blue.

It was a day in summer when the sun is at its zenith and its warmth fills the air. The sky was clear blue and by 5.00 p.m. the sun was still shining brightly. The last customer was a young man known as Adam, who was buying a new watch, as his old one, a Ben Sherman had become unusable.

‘Did you have good days trading sir?’ asked M. DuPont.

‘Yes. Indeed. Busy but not very eventful.’

‘And what watch would you like?’

‘A French watch. If not then a Seiko.’

‘We have French watches indeed. How about a Pierre Cardin for men?’

‘Brilliant.’

Adam bought the French watch after paying out what he personally thought was a lot of money. He slowly closed the shop door behind him, and headed home. As he reached the top of a bridge he was struck on the shoulder by a rough looking man.

‘Hey what the hell.’ Adam said loudly and turned to look at him.

‘Let me look at that,’ the assailant said in a hoarse voice.

‘No. You can’t, Wait a minute. I have seen you before, haven’t I?’

‘Huh? What? Who are you?’

‘You are Mistee, the bank robber, aren’t you?’ Adam asked the assailant in return.

‘Give me that thing.’

‘Suppose the answer is no.’

Mistee, the assailant struck Adam on the chin, snatched the bag and ran like an animal.

‘Stop. You. Stop.’

No one heard him, least of all Mistee. Adam felt isolated and victimized on his return home to his flat, while Mistee discussed his latest venture with his gang.

Adam spent the night searching for the insurance documents for the watch. He threw objects around during his search, and swore a few times. By midnight he had to admit to himself that he had never insured the watch against theft, and felt terrible at the loss of a few hundred pounds.

When he awoke he was bleary eyed and his face was wet. The workplace seemed like a lonely place itself. He just could not face another days work, and telephoned the bank to let them know.

“We can’t do without you, Adam.’ Mr. Cash reassured him.

‘Honestly sir. I can’t come to work today.’

‘What happened. Not well?’

‘No. I was mugged and robbed.’

‘Come to work and I will give you a bonus for working to your usual standard.’

‘Please, Mr. Cash, don’t try to make me feel guilty.’ Adam raise his voice.

‘Okay,’ said Mr. Cash,’ Hope you get better soon.’

Adam spent the day roaming around the streets of Dover feeling bitter and vengeful. The shore was cold and the sand was wet under his feet. He strolled along the coastline as best he could.

The road close to the harbor was busy, and Adam had no idea about the occupants of any of the cars. Within minutes he was confronted by a gun pointed at his head.

‘Come with me before you open your mouth to anyone.’ said the voice behind the black scarf tied around his face.

The man with the mask grabbed Adam around the neck and within seconds more men in masks came and dragged him by the hair to a nearby van. The white van looked innocent enough from the outside but in its interior was a torture chamber with no back rest for Adam, as they sped away to their hideout.

‘Where are you taking me?’ Adam could not conceal his fear as he asked them.

‘Shut up or you are dead.’ said a familiar voice.

The van sped along and the men locked Adam in and rushed out to a building, or so it seemed to Adam. He could hear them smashing some glass window and running back with their loot. There were cries of ‘Stop, thief.’ He could hear footsteps approaching him hurriedly.

Before the police could arrive, the robbers had sped off. At first they seemed to be going to their hideout but then it seemed they were going to the harbor. They stopped their van and pushed Adam along with them.

When Adam got out with them it was clear that the robbers had a grand design and wanted to use him as hostage.

Roundee, the gang leader decided his men would smuggle their loot of stolen jewelry as well as Adam into Calais by ferry overnight. That evening, Roundee, Sortie and Mistee tied Adam’s wrists and hid them underneath an overcoat. They kept on hovering around Adam making sure that he was never out of their control.

The border guard at the harbor wanted to check Adam’s identity with the passport they had shown him. They cleared the space around Adam slightly and the guard tried to look carefully. He narrowed his eyes to see if there was anything suspicious, and with great hesitation let them through.

The robbers surrounded Adam again once they were on the ferry, and insulted him and threatened him until he grew irritable. No one on the ferry noticed anything, and when they did, they were silenced by their more adult relatives.

Adam Carter thought at this stage that he would never be able to return home. He even began to wonder if he was going to remain alive.

'Hungry?' asked Mistee, sneering at Adam.

'Yes, I am starving.'

'Good. You deserve to starve.'

'Tired?' asked Mistee.

'Yes.'

'We are going to finish you and there is nothing anyone will do about it.'

'Why? Why are you doing all this?'

'Is this guy going to shut up or not?' Roundee heard the last sentence.

'I was just getting bored.'

'Never mind the boredom,' retorted Roundee. 'keep an eye on him and do not let him out of your sight.'

'Sorry boss.'

'Now be on your alert.' Rowndee said angrily.

'I want some food.' Adam said suddenly.

Roundee immediately struck a fist into Adam's stomach. Adam let out a squeal which the ferry's security guard could hear. Robert came running into the cabin and asked after Adam's health.

'He is fine.' Mistee said stiffly.

The switchboard at the pilot's desk was frustratingly busy. Robert could not seem to persuade the crew that he had a matter of concern that needed the attention of the authorities in Calais Harbor. After trying unsuccessfully for a while he asked an unwilling ship captain if he could use his mobile on board.

'No. Sorry.'

'The man looks ill. I saw him just now.'

'Just speak to the nurse on board.'

'I must phone Calais Harbor.'

'Not from this ship.'

'Well, let's see the nurse then.'

A stubby mean looking nurse greeted them in the medical room. She was annoyed at the idea of more work and asked Robert if he knew the invalid.

'He is not an invalid. He looks pale and worried.'

'Can't help you then.'

'I will just have to help myself then.' Robert said angrily and walked quickly away.

While the captain was out of earshot, and Robert had found an isolated spot, near the stern of the ship, he pulled his mobile out of his pocket and phoned Calais Harbor.

'Hello. Bangor.'

‘Hello. Can I help?’ replied the voice at the other end.

‘A matter of concern here.’

‘Go ahead, tell us.’

‘Man looking really pale and frightened. Some people around him all the time. They seem to be bullying him.’

An extended reply came in French over the mobile phone. Robert felt a pang of disappointment, and wished he had mastered French. He headed for his cabin and on passing through, heard the men again talk to the invalid as the nurse had called him.

‘Can I have some drink or so.’

‘No.’ shouted one of them.

‘Are you trying to kill me?’ asked Adam.

Not a single robber replied. Mistee suddenly landed a hard blow on Adam’s face sending him to the floor.

Robert knocked at the door of the cabin where he heard the sound of arguments and a man falling to the floor. He enquired what was happening

and the four bank robbers reassured him that everything was fine and that the victim had just knocked his head against an object. Having sent Robert away, they picked up Adam and let him have some cold water and sit in a chair.

The calm waters of Calais Harbor lapped gently against the ferry. From the

cabin window the lights could be seen. There were lorries waiting to ship their cargo to the port of Dover, and some other ferries carrying tourists. A few boats with coastguards littered the shore line.

The robbers pushed Adam in front of them to leave the ferry and enter Calais. He could feel the nozzle of a revolver pinned against his back. As they left the deck, Robert noticed them pushing Adam in front of them. The four robbers, dressed in long coats looked very much part of the crowd, and Robert simply could not persuade the ship's captain to interrogate them.

The robbers walked hurriedly along with Adam now surrounded by them. The breeze at Calais was steady yet it was colder than Adam had experienced at Dover. The robbers continued to swear at him and taunt him as they rushed out of the gates. Some distance Behind them, Robert slowly managed to get the attention of one of the guards who spoke English to a limited extent.

'Please call the Police,' he said to the guard. 'Those men look suspicious.'

The guard seemed to know which men he was talking about and phoned a number on his mobile. But before the police could arrive, the three robbers had Adam surrounded and were walking him onwards. The frost could be seen emanating from their mouths and they all shivered in the cold.

Very little traffic seemed to impede their progress, though the regular rattling movement of a distant freight train gave a strange reassurance to Adam. As the train continued to make the sound the robbers grew more uneasy and nervous.

'Get a move on,' Mistee shouted at Adam suddenly.

One of them looked around and a fog had descended over the harbor impairing his view. All he could see were unrecognizable figures walking at a distance behind them. The robbers grew more nervous and irritable and

Adam felt he would be killed yet the train soothed him from becoming sad and panicky.

‘Anyone following us?’ asked Roundee.

‘Not sure. I can’t say.’ replied Mistee.

‘Unsure. You stink.’

‘I can only see some strange figures at a distance.’ said Mistee quietly.

‘You getting bloody blind or something?’

‘Are you trying to say something?’ Mistee pulled out his gun, only to be shot down in the stomach instantly by Roundee.

Mistee let out a sickly belching groan and slowly collapsed to the ground holding his stomach tight. Roundee and the other robbers hurried on leaving Mistee to die in his own pool of blood. Sortee pulled Adams arm around his back and with the other hand grabbed his neck to push him along. Roundee thought he heard some steps.

‘Probably just a few people starting work.’

‘We got to hide him somewhere. We got to get back to Dover.’

‘You chicken slime. We stay here and try for more.’

‘If you say so, Roundee’

The robbers at last found a shop with the name ‘armaments’ on it. Not knowing French they forced their way through and put a rope around Adam’s mouth to keep him silent. Roundee and his men looked around and to their

delight found a wealth of weapons.

After a short period of jubilant laughter, they looked out of the window. The fog was lifting and they could see some cars and some police officers. The vision that the fog allowed was not enough to let the robbers see if the police were armed with weapons.

Roundee began to feel hungry. He grew irritable and foul mouthed to an unreasonable level. He smashed a bit of furniture to let off some of his anger. All at once, he stopped and kicked Adam in the leg. 'Trust you not to have any food.'

Then as if some radio had been turned on, the robbers could hear a voice in French. Not knowing the language, they asked Adam to interpret and opened the cloth around his mouth.

'I think they want you to surrender.'

'ha fat chance.' said Roundee with confidence.

He opened the window and shouted in abusive terms that he had a hostage, who would surely be killed if the police opened fire.

A reply came in French. 'What does that mean?' Roundee asked Adam.

'No idea. I don't know much French.'

'You just tell me what they mean, you young rat.'

'Honest, I don't know what he said.'

Roundee's paranoia returned and he fired a shot at the police. There was no

answering shot.

‘Ha! the suckers.’

Roundee reached for a weapon that was in a cabinet drawer of the building where he and his gang were hiding. It was obviously a rifle and Roundee began to smile with glee when all of a sudden he heard a loud bang and tripped, startled and nervous.

‘What was that?’ asked Sortee, who was within a few yards of Roundee.

‘A gunshot, you oaf.’

‘They are going to kill us.’ replied Sortee in a nervous panic.

‘Stop acting like a half grown baby.’ Roundee shook his gang friend violently.

‘Finish him first.’ Sortee pointed at Adam when he had calmed down.

‘No. We can still use him.’

‘Why?’

‘He can come in handy at the last moment. As bait I mean.’

Just then a loud shot rang out with a whistling cry and this made Sortee panic again. He could see a bullet hole through the window. The fog had lifted and now he saw the whole area swarming with police and gendarmes. All were armed with firearms.

‘Quick. Tie up his hands.’ said Roundee to his friend pointing at their hostage.

‘Why not tie up his mouth?’

‘Okay but get on with it.’ shouted Roundee in a roaring voice.

‘How about blindfolding him as well?’

‘Don’t waste time.’ said Roundee in a growling voice.

They hurriedly tied up Adams mouth and led him off to another room in the building. They had hidden the stolen jewelry in that room during their entrance to the building and were confident they would use Adam for the ‘grand finale’.

Suddenly a few more shots were heard by the robbers and they reached for the weapons of which there was an abundance in the building. They barricaded the door and pointed their rifles at the windows to prepare for a fight.

Again came an announcement in French and this time even louder than the first. Adam felt a sense of short term relief at not being asked to interpret this warning to the robbers. He checked to see if his hands were securely tied and if his legs were tied. Neither were his hands tied up properly nor were his legs that sore. Nevertheless he stayed as still as a frightened mouse.

Another short round of shots could be heard by Adam and he remained still and silent, all the while looking at the loot of jewelry.

The robbers decided they would spread out and fire at the police from different windows. Roundee began to fire from a top window and Sortee fired from a window below. Their shots were answered by sporadic gunfire aimed at the building. This went on for hours.

Adam went stealthily to the jewelry loot and with a rush he threw it out of the window. in an instant, he hid himself behind a door and remained perfectly still and quiet. The large wooden door offered a lot of cover and he

waited his fate.

The shooting stopped. Roundee looked out of the window for signs that the police would go away. Yet they stayed lingering on. Sortee inquired as to why they had stopped shooting, and realized his friend was tired.

“Give it a rest for a minute. These cops are determined.’

‘Shall we sit down for a while?’ Sortee sounded out of breath.

‘Let's eat something.’ replied Roundee.

‘There is no food.’

‘How do you know.?’

‘We will have to search.’ said Sortee, between gasps of breath.

They searched all over the building for food, smashing pieces of furniture and throwing odd bits of metal about. Roundee, on reaching the room where Adam was noticed the jeweler was missing.

‘Let's get some food first.’ said Sortee.

‘Where the hell is the jeweler?’

‘I am tired.’ said Sortee.

‘Stuff you. Always tired.’

‘Where is that guy? That hostage?’

‘Good point.’ The robbers began to smash more furniture and once they were both out of the room, Adam rushed to the window and jumped out of it. He ran to the police and took cover.

Roundee heard the crash of the window and shouted: ‘the bastard has gone. Our hostage has gone.’

‘What do we do?’

‘Quit this place for sure.’ said Roundee now breathing heavily.

They looked through the windows again. A cold mist had settled over the area. From the steely concrete building, they noticed that there was no policeman visible. The cars seemed to have their engines turned off. Roundee assumed that the police were waiting inside their cars waiting for their surrender. A chilling breeze blew in through the slightly open windows.

No further announcements came. Roundee shut the windows tight again. ‘I don’t like the look of this’ he said.

‘What do we do?’ Sortee spoke through a now wheezy voice.

‘Get the jewellery at all costs.’

‘We can’t. The police are there.’

‘Pull yourself together man.’ roared Roundee. ‘Are you man or mouse?’

They both opened the front windows wide and in a desperate bid to escape they fired shots continuously at the police cars. This was answered by a barrage of machine gun fire from semi automatic guns. The robbers both fell to their deaths.

Their bodies were pulled away and while the police cleared up the area, Robert, who had been in one of the cars, enquired about Adam's health. Adam came up to the security guard and shook his hand warmly.

'I don't know how to thank you.' he told Robert.

'What you need is a well deserved rest and a holiday. I am going to help you get a passport and visa to stay here in Calais for a while to let you enjoy what is good about the place.'

Epilogue

When the media asked the police chief why the robbers were not taken alive, he responded that the robbers had killed a man and left him to die and so the case was not just one of simple bank robbery. This was why he decided to use 'zero tolerance.'

Robert went back to his post as a security guard immediately after the incident. He was greeted warmly by the ferry crew and captain. The jewelery was never sold again.