

OLD KING COLE

I knew things were not good with King. You only had to look at the new lines on his face.

'Bowl, old fellow I'm getting tired of all this' he often said. I wish the old chap had said more, or that I had asked questions. But I'd hand him his pipe and he'd clench it in his teeth and say nothing for a bit.

I was just his driver at first while he was building up his huge empire. But after his wife left taking the children with her he came to rely more on me. Slowly I familiarised myself with his business. It was quite something I can tell you.

I became aware he was shifting money, lots of it, out of the business. Don't ask me where it was going, but it was going somewhere. The yacht, the fleet of vintage cars, all these trappings of obvious wealth were still there. But I knew something was going on. I started to worry and I am not a natural worrier.

There were more sudden trips in his private jet. Off he'd go from the little airport near Newbury. Back he would come and he would look tired but sort of excited. It really was getting to me. I even wondered if there was a new woman in his life.

Then he asked me to fix up for his accountants Aitkins and Sons to come down. Now, I tell you Fred Aitkins and his two sons, Samuel and Ken were, in my opinion, the proverbial slimy characters you expect of accountants. I was certain they had been fleecing King for years. Secretly I called them The Fiddlers Three. I once said as much under my breath, but King turned on me, tension in his face, and told me to take care. I picked the three of them up from the station and awaited developments. I could hear raised voices from the library and later lunch was

eaten in stony silence. I was a bit scared after I had dropped them at the station. How would King be? What was going on? More importantly, would King confide in me? He was sitting with his pipe at his desk.

'Got rid of them eh Bowl?' he said. Did he just mean had they got their train or did he mean something quite different?

Why do people talk in riddles I so often ask myself .

That evening he gestured to a chair and I sat while he poured me a drink. This was not too unusual, he often seemed to need the relaxation of a chat about life in general. He had, over the years, told me much of his earlier life, travels, hopes and always came back to his dream to return to Peru of all places. 'One day, Bowl, I am going to live there'.

He had wheedled out of me a surprising amount of personal details as well. I had confided that Italy was my dream. My grandfather was italian. The old rogue had laughed out loud.' Nothing very italian about Bowl' he had chortled. I had been a little offended and told him the original name was Bolli and that I had loved my grandfather Bolli. He sat quietly chewing on his pipe after that.

Not long after the visit from the Fiddlers Three, he announced we were off to get the boat ready for a trip. He moored his yacht at a marina on the Isle of Wight. I am no sailor so I would go on board for a beer and then leave him to it. That's just how it was. When all the food and kit was loaded, I had my drink and stepped down onto the board walk.

King shook hands as usual, but this time he clapped me on the shoulder and wished me well. At the time, it surprised me a little but he was an odd ball and erratic enough for me not to make much of this gesture. I wish now I had said something warm or friendly. I wish that because that was the last time I saw my employer. I

watched him skillfully edge out from his mooring and into the central channel of the marina heading quietly for the open sea.

They found his boat half way to France out in the Channel. There was a half eaten meal in the galley. His passport and personal effects still in his cabin. Of King there was no sign. Only his sailing cap bobbing alongside with the monogram of King Cole stitched on it. They searched for nearly a week. Tycoons like him or Maxwell get a bit more attention than the likes of you and I.

So let me see, what happened next.? Yes, the following six weeks were hideous. Lawyers, accountants, not the Fiddlers Three I might add. Turns out King sacked them after that last meeting. Everyone knew King had transferred money from Cole Enterprises but no one had a clue where it was. Strangely they all seemed to think he really had drowned. I always doubted it but I kept my thoughts to myself. I had enough to worry about. Where to live, what to do. King had left me a little lump sum and I had a few savings but I was beginning to get anxious. I needed to find somewhere to live and start working again.

Then, bingo, out of the blue, I get a letter post marked from Lima. No note just a clean piece of paper with a post office number and London address. Of course, I knew this was King making contact. Off I went to London and there picked up a fat package.

That's about it really. Here I am in my own little flat, overlooking the Med in the old town of Spigno in Italy. I have the deeds to the place in my name safely locked in my desk.

In the fridge there will always be a bottle of Prosecco for the day, which I feel will actually come, when that good old King Cole knocks on my door.