

*Cherry, Cherry, Cherry, Cherry, Pear*

I know I shouldn't waste my last takings on a fruit machine, but what have I got to lose? The hostel kicks out at eight and sitting outside Greggs in the rain gets you more pasties than coin. The Lodestar Arcade is dry and I might get lucky. I'm about to kiss the pound into the slot when I see the bag tucked down the side of the bandit. I look around. Behind me on the Bell Fruit a punter is concentrating, tongue out as he nudges. I toe the bag towards me and unzip. It's full of notes. There must be, my mind reels, two hundred grand? Three? I push it back and think. The other guy's coin drops to the hopper. I can tell it's about to pay out and curse that he got there first. But then I have the bag. Start.

*Cherry.* Three hundred grand. I'll call off the bailiffs first. Tell Jackie our home is safe and she won't need to move in with her sister. I still have a key. A quick shower and I'll be waiting with the good news when she gets in from work. She'll be overjoyed that she can stay in the house her mum left her when she died. I'd rather buy a new build, but you have to make sacrifices.

The Bell Fruit behind me chirps the theme tune to *The Sting* as it starts a new game. Spin.

*Cherry.* Start my own business. Yes. Show that arse Neil. 'No room for losers in the carpet business,' he said. He'll be the loser when I undercut him on the broadloom. Rent a unit across the road. Stock it high, sell it cheap. Result. Spin.

*Cherry.* Third time lucky. A new car too. Not flash like Neil's Audi, something classy. A Lexus. Yes. Red. Spin.

*Cherry.* Four in a row. Lady Luck is with me today. She used to pull me into jeweller's windows, Jacky did. Especially after Val and Keith renewed their vows with a whopping great diamond ring. 'Look Gerry', she said that last night, 'this one's so sparkly.' I kissed her cheek. Soon, love, soon.' The week later I hit another bad run. I glance at the bag. Diamonds *and* emeralds. To match her eyes, which are grey, but she'll love the gesture. She will have to take me back, if I tell her it's an eternity ring.

*The Sting* has ended and I realise he's gone. The Bell Fruit bandit is quietly humming to itself. I've had my eye on it all week. Any fool can hear it's about to drop a biggie. His loss.

One more reel to play here and then. Big time. Spin.

*Diamond.* It's a sign. Diamonds are forever. I still want that final cherry though. The lights on the machine chase giddily around the screen. Nudge.

*Pear.* Damn. No matter. I slip a twenty from the bag and head for the kiosk. One last game before I go back home.