

Broken promises

Elizabeth Shove

As you might recall, Benjy sent me a letter in October describing his first week as British Ambassador to Japan. Some people will be curious about how I came to be in Belmarsh prison, and how Benjy ended up in Tokyo. Let me explain.

It began innocently enough. Benjy and I met at Eton and that is where our relationship began. After Cambridge we both went into the diplomatic service. Our feelings for each other were undiminished, but it wouldn't do to be seen together and in any case I was by then a married man. Fortunately, our postings took us all over Asia and with so many foreign trips it wasn't difficult to keep our love alive.

I looked forward to our clandestine meetings, and to the camaraderie and easy gossip we enjoyed. It was during one of these secret encounters that I mentioned my suspicions about Philip Southgate, the long-standing ambassador to Japan. I knew Benjy distrusted Philip, but he was amazed to learn of the corruption, drug smuggling and unauthorised dealings that I had uncovered. Philip had gone over to the dark side: he might even be a spy or part of a terrorist cell. These things had happened before.

To start with, blackmail didn't cross our minds, but the more we learned, the more attractive this seemed. It would let Philip know we were in control. It could be done in private, and anonymously. No one, but no one, would know. Gradually the scheme took shape. When we had all the evidence we needed, we would take Philip by surprise, not on his home turf, but in the London hotel we'd all be staying at for the forthcoming meeting on climate change. Benjy and I would arrive separately, check in, and then don our disguises.

We needed to prove we were serious, so I collected a selection of incriminating evidence: coded messages from hostile states, fraudulent bank statements and an unopened consignment of heroin addressed to the British Ambassador. I put everything in a buff-coloured holdall and met Benjy by the lift on the second floor. We knew Philip was in room 257.

I knocked and Philip opened the door, but before he could say anything someone approached from behind: 'Ricky the game is up, we've caught you at it'. I spun round and faced a large man in a long brown coat. 'I am Frank Spooner, a private detective hired by your wife. She thinks you are having an affair, and now we know that's true.' Benjy went pale behind his clumsy make up, and Philip shut the door.

Before I could protest my innocence, a security guard appeared with a sniffer dog in tow. The dog went berserk at the sight of us, barking like mad. This was all too much for Benjy who fled, leaving me to my fate.

It wasn't pleasant. The detective and the security guard called the police when they found I was a senior member of the diplomatic service wearing a wig and a false beard, carrying a dossier of top-secret documents and a quantity of illegal substances. It was all highly suspicious.

My accomplice was never identified and, true to our word, Benjy and I never admitted we were lovers. Not even when I was convicted of intent to blackmail and being in possession of a cache of forgeries, fakes and Class A drugs. Philip, who was in cahoots with the Prime Minister, got off scot

free, but the whiff of suspicion lingered and after a few months he moved on to another posting. It was then that Benjy applied for the vacant position of British Ambassador to Japan and got the job.

So now you know. That's how October's letter came about.

