

One False Move

Somewhere a cell door slammed shut, the bang echoing along the landing. The jangle of keys accompanied the yell of a screw giving orders. The banging grew ever louder as it approached my cell.

A key turned in the lock. "Time to move out Joe", the senior officer ordered. "The prison is now in lockdown and it's time to get you out of here. Get your things together."

"You'll get fed at the other end," the other one chipped in."

In my cell I demolished the stockpile of overpriced snacks bought from the canteen. Everything in prison has a value - favours, bribes, canteen tuck, whatever - everything has its price, whether it's paid for with cash or contraband. Today I had no time to make any deals, so I scoffed the lot.

I can't say that I was shocked by the officer's statement as I've been moved more times than I have fingers on my hands and usually without any previous knowledge. On this occasion I would, however, have appreciated a bit of notice.

This was to be the latest leg of my grand tour of HMP prisons so it didn't bother me where I was going. Wherever journey's end was, I'd need to re-establish myself quickly. To make new contacts, set up supply chains, find out which screws could be bribed, ensure that other inmates showed due respect.

Of immediate concern was how to protect my interests and secure the delivery scheduled for later. It involved weeks of organising, inside and out. I was expecting Spice, mobile phones and sim cards for which I had orders. Given time I could get my hands on any contraband, from drugs of all sorts to screwdrivers and other weapons. You name it, there were well-established supply and demand chains to get the contraband in and distributed throughout the prison.

All of this was possible by maintaining a disciplined hierarchy - and having a number of officers on the payroll, so to speak. These officers were the runners, getting the word spread about what was going on and turning a blind eye whenever necessary. They were decent blokes and had the respect of most inmates. It was an unwritten code of conduct that no one would cause them any bother. Of course, there always the possibility of there being a weak link but anyone who broke that code would be dealt with in one way or another. The officers wouldn't say where I was going, other than to the private security van parked outside the main block with its doors open. With my wrists handcuffed, I was then handcuffed to a chain. Another screw sat on the bench a few feet away. A miserable-faced git. He looked more pissed off than I did. Didn't say a word. These vans can be sweat boxes in hot weather so I hoped the journey would not be long. It

was just as well that I was being treated like prison royalty and didn't have to share the confined space with other inmates.

As the van pulled away and moved through the prison gates I imagined the route we were taking. A left would take us north. A right turn meant that we'd heading south. I hoped this wouldn't be a long journey, or one delayed by too many road works.

In my mind's eye I imagined passing by fields of grazing cattle or sheep, suburban parklands and uncultivated fields. I expected that Jason and the boys would be in such a field making ready for the drop.

Rehearsals had gone better than expected. Vagaries of weather and wind speed had been factored in as well as length of journey. Anything that could possibly go wrong had been identified and resolved. We named the drone Duggie in memory of World War II flying ace Douglas Bader.

Tasks were assigned. Luke organised the contraband and packages. Mike would suspend the packages from the drone. Bill would be the look out. Jason would take the controls and fly Duggie over the prison wall, hovering at each cell window on the upper floor of the accommodation block. I was the angler and would use an extendable pole to lift the suspended

packages from the drone when it hovered outside my cell.

Duggie would then return to base. The plan was as near perfect as possible. The problem was this unexpected move.

It was hard to keep track of time but it must have been a couple of hours into the journey when I imagined we were travelling back on ourselves. A left turn followed by another, then a right turn was taking us back in the direction from which we came.

The welcome I received back on the wing was overwhelming. Not everything was back to normal. I remained on the wing but found myself in a different cell. My previous one remained unoccupied for the time being following seizure of a drugs delivery by drone.

An unpopular inmate had been placed in the cell and caught using an extendable hooked pole to capture a package of contraband when a drone hovered outside his cell window. The inmate denied all knowledge of the event other than this. The contraband was confiscated and shortly afterwards that team flying the drone was arrested. It had been under surveillance for weeks.

Okay, so I'm now several thousands of pounds out of pocket and my accomplices may be going down but I'm in the clear. They'll not grass on me. Guess I owe a favour to someone

in the know and with influence who sent me on a bogus transfer journey. It only goes to show that it pays to have friends on the inside as well as on the out.

Ends

Length: 956 words

