

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Lime's Photograph

Leif Davidsen

About the Book

Peter Lime is trained to hunt down his prey and catch them on film. But now he is the one being hunted. Whose prey has he become? And what is it that he has that these people will kill to get? Lime is a Danish paparazzo, living in Madrid. For more than 20 years he has stalked and captured the rich and famous on film, making vast sums of money from exposing their secrets – the more salacious the image, the bigger the fee. But lately he's been thinking of giving it up.

Then he goes on a routine assignment, snapping a Spanish minister out sailing with his mistress, and suddenly his world is turned upside down. When a fire destroys his home, but not all of his photographs, Lime sets out to discover a motive and finds himself drawn into the complex and terrifying web of international terrorism.

Leif Davidsen

LIME'S PHOTOGRAPH

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH BY
Gaye Kynoch


V I N T A G E

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To Ulla, for love and for everything.

About the Author

Leif Davidsen was born in 1950. He spent 25 years at the Danish Broadcasting Corporation as a radio and TV correspondent, specialising in Russian, East and Central European affairs, and has been a correspondent in both Spain and Moscow. He published his first novel in 1984 and has written full-time since 1999. His novels are bestsellers in several European countries.

PART ONE

PAPARAZZO

The term “paparazzo” was coined by the Italian film director Federico Fellini, who used the word as a description of a “gossip” photographer in the film *La Dolce Vita* in 1960. A paparazzo is a photographer who, like any hired assassin, lies in wait to capture the rich and famous in his viewfinder. Among paparazzi, the English term for a good and well-executed shot of a celebrity is the same word as hired assassins use about a contract – a “hit”. A good hit can earn the lucky and ingenious photographer many thousands of dollars. Occasionally, several million.

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There is no way of knowing when everything could shatter and your life be turned upside down - one minute secure and familiar and the next minute a nightmare in which you're running on the spot in slow motion, trying to wake up to reality. But the nightmare is reality. You feel safe by the time you've got halfway through your life, grateful that you managed to find love even though it came late, that you brought a child into the world to carry on the family name. Maybe that's an old-fashioned attitude, but continuity mattered to me as I approached 50 and had to acknowledge that I was now nearer to my death than my birth.

It began with my mobile phone beeping. I knew I shouldn't answer it, but I couldn't stop myself. You never know what lies in store. Good news, bad news, business, bills, bogus calls, death, maybe something significant. You don't know what you might be missing, and even though I was getting older, I wasn't too old to take on the assignments and opportunities that presented themselves. But with age had come disgust and conscience. I'm writing the words in Danish and there they are on my laptop's white screen and I'm surprised how easily they flow, considering that I've been speaking and in particular writing in English and Spanish for so many years. But it seems wrong to use a foreign language here, now that I'm trying to write more than just a brief article, a picture caption, a memo or a love letter.

I was on my stomach, the sun beating down on me. I was lying awkwardly on the weathered, rocky ground where, in spite of the distance down to the beach, little black grains of sand had been blown up by the wind and had found shelter in every cranny. I lay like a sniper in Bosnia, breathing calmly and slowly, conscious of the sun through my thin, pale t-shirt and blue jeans and on my neck below the rim of my white sunhat. Brown, parched mountains rose behind me. If you followed them further inland, you'd see how they increase in size, becoming high and inaccessible, but out here at the coast they were gentler, yet still burnished harsh and arid by the sun and the wind which blows off the Mediterranean in the winter, colder and more fiercely than you might think.

Down below me the little bay was deserted. It was one of the many small coves which over thousands of years the sea had cut into the Costa Brava. The French-Spanish border was a few kilometres to the north, to the south the tourist hell began, where over a couple of decades human greed had succeeded in destroying an area in which generation after generation had lived their lives without spoiling or altering their surroundings. The Spanish Mediterranean coastline has undergone a more radical transformation in a few years than in the previous two millennia. But up here near the border, the landscape was still relatively unchanged. The sea lay azure and glittering under the bright, golden sun, like a computer-enhanced postcard. I could see yachts tacking across the sea breeze and a couple of expensive speedboats dragging white streaks through the water, but there was no sign of life in the bay below me. I felt like an explorer seeing it for the first time. It was one of many coves that could only be reached from the sea. The rocky coastline rose sharply, and an experienced mountaineer might be able to breach the overhang of the cliffs, but ordinary tourists would be wise to keep away. The cove was what the holiday brochures

promised: a private, beautiful and unspoilt spot on the bustling, efficiently run tourist coast.

I was lying at an angle, so I had a clear sightline both out to sea and down onto the cove's sandy beach, which was protected from prying eyes by the rugged cliffs. If you didn't know to look, you would never discover that there was a beautiful little cove beneath the overhang. Two jagged rocks a few metres out even hid the grey, powdery sand from the sea. Unless someone who knew what they were looking for took the trouble to use binoculars, the cove was hidden. It was a perfect place to be alone. Or for two to be alone.

The lovebirds had chosen a good spot. I was thinking in Danish, as I often did when I was waiting for a hit, concentrating my thoughts on the few hundredths of a second that separated me from success or failure, letting my mind wander and wind through the labyrinth of memory, thinking about my two loved ones; or recalling films and books and love affairs in an attempt to let time become nothingness. Become *nada*, a non-existent state, so that boredom didn't turn into impatience, leaving me unready when the moment, the moment of truth, arrived.

I kept an eye on the speedboats. One of them was streaking along the coastline, dragging a ruler-straight trail in its wake, but the other one changed course, slowed down and sailed into the little bay. It was a six-metre, gleaming white motorboat, with an elegant, svelte line. A young woman was lying on the foredeck, wearing black Ray-Bans and nothing else. They suited her. The man, naked from the waist up, was standing at the wheel, steering the boat in while he kept an eye on the echo sounder. There could be treacherous reefs and rocks this close to the coast, but either the white motorboat didn't draw a great deal of water, or he knew his way in between the two rocks. It was the latter, according to my informant.

I made my living from the public's insatiable craving to see the famous and rich disgracing themselves. Although I had 20 years' experience of our modern greed and lust for power, it still surprised me that so many high-ranking men were willing to sacrifice career, marriage and status for the sake of sex. They were so sure of their invulnerability that they took huge risks; just for the chance to prove that they were still men. Didn't they know that for every secret there was also someone willing to sell that very secret?

I had ended up here on the Costa Brava as the result of a tip several weeks earlier. It was always like that. The numerous informants and contacts that I had paid, nurtured, dined, praised, encouraged, buttered-up, massaged the egos of, were like an extensive intelligence network that kept me supplied with information about the affairs of the famous. A network that identified the target for me and gave me the essential raw material. Then it was up to me to work out the logistics, do a recce of the area and set up the hit. It had taken me the previous fortnight to get ready to strike this target who was now nearing the shore, blissfully unaware. My information had been extremely specific, right down to the name of the boat. When a new government takes charge after the old one has enjoyed the sweetness of power for many years, it ought to look over its shoulder more carefully. Especially if the new government is one founded on God, King and Country and hoists the moral banner so high that it has lost touch with dry land.

"Don't cast the first stone, my friend," I said under my breath in the Danish that still felt like my own language, even though for years I had spoken it regularly only to myself and then mostly in my own head. English was for business, Spanish for love and Danish for those innermost, secret thoughts which demand a profound understanding of the underlying nuance of each word; where it's not what is

said that counts, but the way in which it is said and thought.

The man manoeuvred the boat steadily towards the beach. I heard the sound of the motor cutting out and the boat slowly drifted the last few metres before the man threw an anchor overboard and let the boat swing round against the tide. I lifted my new camera, a marvel of computerised technology. I knew I had made the right choice in selecting a 400-mm telephoto lens. I could see them clearly in the viewfinder. She must have been in her 20s, with a smooth, brown body, her black pubic hair clearly visible in the sunlight. She was neither too thin nor too fat, but shapely. She reminded me of someone, but I couldn't place her. There were immaculate female bodies like hers from St Tropez to Marbella. They attracted rich, middle-aged, powerful men as rotting meat attracts flies. With their seemingly flawless, perpetually young beauty they allowed men to forget their own decay. These young women had so little experience of that particular torment that they thought decay would never strike them.

I pressed my damp but steady forefinger on the release button, let the motor run and took a quick series, before zooming out a little so I got a clear shot of the young woman with the man's face in sharp focus behind her. He was in his late 40s, with dark, Latin looks, a clean-shaven face and thick black hair. He had strong arms and shoulders, but the beginnings of a paunch under his dark body hair indicated that he was no longer in tip-top condition. He was very tanned and through the viewfinder I could see his even, white teeth as he smiled down at the woman.

He said something and threw a pair of rubber sandals over to her, and the woman smiled and said something back as she put them on. Then she picked up a mask and snorkel and slipped naked into the water. There were lots of sea urchins on the submerged rocks, but the couple seemed to

know about them and quite rightly had respect for the long prickly spines. I let the film run to the end and got a couple of shots of the woman's naked behind as it broke through the surface, before her legs stretched out straight and she disappeared under the water again as gracefully as a dolphin. She snorkelled in wide circles round the bobbing boat.

The man detached a rubber dinghy from the deck, lowered it into the water and rowed towards the beach. He was wearing red trunks and his legs were muscular yet elegant. Hadn't he once been a competitive swimmer? He paddled into the shallows and dragged the dinghy onto firm ground. He spread out a blanket on the sand and put a picnic hamper on it with a slender bottle sticking out of it. The woman swam to the beach and flung her snorkel and mask to the man, who caught them. She called to him and he threw himself into the water, breaking the surface with hardly any spray, and crawled with long steady strokes out to where the water was deep. The woman followed him. I changed the film and let the motor shoot frame after frame of the couple in the water. I had a momentary stab of conscience, or was it envy? They played like children and were beautiful as the drops flew off their bodies and sparkled in the sunlight with every colour of the rainbow. But there was no point thinking about that. Now it was a question of concentrating on the moment. Purely practical things like aperture, shutter, focus, definition. The woman pulled off his swimming trunks and let them float away like a red jellyfish. He lifted her right out of the water and kissed her breasts. The motor in the reflex camera whizzed like a flicking whip and instead of changing the film I changed the camera and took another batch. Sweat broke through the fabric of my t-shirt. I could feel a big wet patch spreading down my back. They were playing like puppies. He swam between her legs and lifted her half out of the water and let her fall over backwards, the spray encircling

their bodies like a halo. Then she swam over to him and put her arms round his neck and wound her legs round his loins. It was a wonderful picture, full of love and eroticism and yet not revealing the actual act. Not being able to see the penetration made it more arousing. I also shot a couple of films as they finished their lovemaking on the blanket on the beach, although those pictures probably wouldn't find a buyer. It was no longer erotic, but pornographic, and I wasn't a pornographer.

Afterwards, the couple lay happily in the sun, as people do when they think they're safe in their nakedness. When they think they're alone in the Garden of Eden, forgetting to think about the serpent in the form of a 50-centimetre-long, sophisticated, high-tech, Japanese telephoto lens, which catches the moment and freezes it for all eternity and for everyone to behold.

The man rubbed her with suntan oil and I had enough experience to know that the best picture, the picture that would swell my bank account by as much as \$200,000 over the next couple of years, was the least sexual, but at the same time the most erotic. It was when the Minister took his lover's feet in his hands and massaged them slowly and sensually. Maybe a sea urchin spine had found its way into the delicate skin of her small, shapely feet after all. She sat leaning back on her outstretched arms and gazed at a point behind his head. Her face was calm and satisfied and she smiled gently as he put her big toe in his mouth and then, as lovingly as a child with a sweet, sucked each one of her shapely toes.

"Bingo," I said, and was about to crawl away so as to give the couple at least a little time alone together before their happiness and lives were smashed for ever, when my mobile phone rang in the bag beside me. They couldn't possibly hear the weak beeping down on the beach. They were too far away and the gentle murmur of the sea would have smothered the sound even if the wind had carried it

down towards them. But powerful men have become powerful men because of a sixth sense, a gut feeling for danger, for political minefields. It's as if they know in advance, maybe feel that something is niggling at their aura, nudging their self-confidence. He lifted his head at the very moment my mobile rang and squinted towards me, as if he fleetingly sensed danger lurking. Just as animals drinking at a water hole on the savannah know that a leopard is approaching even though they can't see, hear or smell their predator. We made the same movement. I thrust my hand into the bag and fished out my phone, while he pulled a mobile from the hamper and keyed in a number, looking up towards my hiding place. I crawled back from the cliff edge and flicked open my phone. I ought to have anticipated it. Of course he would have a bodyguard or two nearby. He might be reckless, but he was still vigilant and far from stupid.

"Hello," I said.

It was a woman's voice on the other end. She pronounced my surname the Danish way.

"Peter Lime?" Her voice was strong and clear, youngish and didn't have a dialect that I could pinpoint. The mobile phone is a remarkable invention. It has made life significantly easier for people like me, but it is also a curse.

In Denmark my name is pronounced like the Danish word for glue, but I always introduce myself using the same pronunciation as that of the small, sour, lime fruit. And, although the apostrophe isn't used this way in Danish, I put one after my name when referring to Lime's photographs. Sometimes when I'm abroad, I have to explain that I don't have any connection to Orson Welles and the Viennese sewers, but that the name has its origins in a little town in Jutland: Lime, between Ebeltoft and Randers.

When I was still quite young, I had decided to insist that my surname be pronounced in English. I didn't want a name that suggested sticky, made-in-Denmark glue. My

name is all I have in common with that particular backwater, but I come from a place just like it. It's a speck on the planet, like I was a speck in the cities I called my own - those jungles where, more often than not, I've hunted my quarry and bagged it when it thought itself alone and safe. I love the anonymity that cities wrap round us, but not round the famous people whose lives I ruined for a living. They couldn't stay inside their protective cocoons all the time, they had to emerge, and when they did I was ready. Perhaps they exposed themselves because, deep down, they liked the game of cat-and-mouse too. Because, when all's said and done, they were narcissists who needed affirmation of their existence. Maybe what they feared most was that no one was lying in wait for them, because that would mean they were no longer interesting, and their 15 minutes in the seductive glare of the flash-bulb was over. It's like a drug for thousands of people on our media-intoxicated planet.

"Who's asking?" I said.

"Clara Hoffmann, National Security Service, Copenhagen," she said.

"Where the hell did you get this number?" I asked as I crawled backwards until I was sure I could stand up without being seen from the beach and began walking down to the car. My t-shirt stuck to my back and the cameras jolted against my hip as I sped up.

"That doesn't really matter. Have you got a moment?"

"No. I haven't."

"It's rather important."

"I'm sure it is, but I haven't got time."

"I would like to meet with you."

"I'm not in Madrid," I said.

I had parked where a little dirt track leading down across a field came to an abrupt halt, blocked by two boulders. The shepherd I had seen when I arrived was standing pretty much in the same place, surrounded by

sheep trying to find bits of rough grass between the scorched rocks. He was wearing a broad-brimmed hat which concealed his face. All I could see was the end of a hand-rolled cigarette sticking out from the corner of his mouth. He had an old knapsack on his shoulder and was leaning picturesquely on his crook. A large, shaggy dog was sitting at his feet. Another one was patrolling the perimeter of the flock.

"Where are you?" asked the calm, distinct voice coming through clearly from Copenhagen – if that's where she was.

"I don't think that's any of your business."

"It's important. If we could meet as soon as possible ..."

"Ring in a couple of hours," I said.

"It's better if we meet. I'm ringing from Madrid."

"You're pretty sure of yourself, but I'm not in Madrid," I said, although she couldn't have known where I was, since she had rung my mobile.

"I'm sure you'd be glad to help your old country," she said.

"I don't owe Denmark anything," I said.

She laughed. Her laughter was melodious, like her voice.

"I'm staying at the Hotel Victoria," she said.

"OK," I answered. I closed the mobile and broke into a slow run down towards the car. It was a brand-new, four-wheel-drive jeep that I had rented a week before. I threw my gear onto the back seat and drove off, spraying gravel behind me. The shepherd turned his head slowly, as if it was a camera mounted on a tripod, and followed me with his eyes as the jeep bumped and lurched away from the coast. The sheep carried on searching for grass and weeds and only a couple of them lifted their heads and huddled together as I left in a cloud of dust which, I realised much too late, might be visible from down on the beach.

I had made my headquarters in Llanca, a little holiday resort about 20 kilometres to the south. I tried to press the

jeep on the steep, narrow and winding roads, which meandered along the rugged coastline like an asphalt-black ribbon. The heat was making the asphalt steam. It was only the beginning of June, but it was already very hot. It seemed it was going to be yet another long, hot and dry summer. The tourist season had begun and it was difficult to find an opening to overtake the slow-moving cars towing heavy caravans, already making the long trek to the beaches of the south coast. I drove like a Spaniard, letting the jeep gather speed going downhill and braking hard just before the hairpin bend and the next slope. Now and then I got lucky and found room to overtake a holidaymaker or a stinking lorry emitting thick fumes that danced like a greasy sash around my face in the open-topped jeep. The sea was on my left, blue as the sky, and from time to time a little white town would come into sight down below. I felt good with the wind in my hair and the result of the hit in the bag on the back seat. I looked forward to getting home to Amelia and Maria Luisa, home to my city. And as usual the feeling of victory, of having accomplished a difficult job, was indescribably gratifying. I didn't actually need to take on as much work any more, but I wasn't sure how I would fill my days if I didn't. When pressed by Amelia I'd had to admit that the work, the hunt itself and bagging the quarry, gave me an almost brutal satisfaction. Even though I had lived in Spain for more than 20 years, my Danish Protestant background was probably a factor too. By the sweat of thy brow thou shalt earn bread. Without work you have no identity. Danes ask you what you do before they'll tell you their name.

It was slow going even though I pressed the jeep in and out of the hairpin bends. There was too much traffic and it took me nearly two hours to travel 20 kilometres. Twice I got caught in tailbacks because of roadworks. It was getting on for 3 p.m. when I drove into Llanca. The town had shut down in the heat of the siesta, or at least

holidaymakers were still strutting around while the residents sat at home and had lunch and watched television. My hotel was down by the harbour, which had a lovely natural sandy beach. It was packed with families sunning themselves on the yellow sand or bathing in the tranquil green water. Voices sounded as if they were muffled by soft cotton wool. Gentle hands rubbed suntan oil into a bare back. A father was carefully helping a toddler with a bathing ring. A mother was scolding a boy for teasing his little sister. A teenager was doing crawl with splashing strokes, showing off to a couple of girls with braces on their teeth and hormones in every fibre of their bodies. A couple exchanged a kiss. A man lazily turned the page of a novel. A pair of infatuated lovers got up and walked arm-in-arm towards their hotel. Afternoon lovemaking awaited them.

I was thirsty, sweaty and hungry. There had been a time when I would have looked down my nose at happy families on the beach. At dad, mum and the kids, as they sat there all sunburnt, together and self-sufficient. There had been a time when I would have been a little bit envious, even though I would never have admitted it to anyone, or to myself. But now I felt fine about families with their joys and sorrows. I had a family myself. I had been known for saying, and considering it the only right way to go about things, that wolves live and hunt best when alone. That there's a difference between being lonely and being alone, and that I was alone and not lonely. But now I loved my life with my family and realised that I had been both alone and lonely before. Being indispensable – that others were dependent on me and that my actions would have an effect on those dearest to me – gave me great satisfaction. My family: just being able to say that made me happy now, as did the fact that the money I earned wasn't for me alone, but also contributed to the welfare and happiness of others.

I parked the jeep in a side street near my hotel. Before picking up my key, I stood at the bar and drank a large glass of freshly pressed orange juice and ate a tortilla with small pieces of potato and onion, which was light and delicate. The bar was next to the hotel. Like so many Spanish bars it was rather noisy, with a television blaring in one corner, litter and cigarette-ends on the floor, laminated tables, the smell of oil and garlic; and an agreeable chinking and hissing and clatter of cups, glasses and the espresso machine creating an animated wall-to-wall muzak. The walls were adorned with a couple of aged travel posters showing the Costa Brava's rugged coast and various Barcelona football teams from past years. A young Michael Laudrup was smiling confidently in several of them, from the days when he led the team to one championship after the other. Most of the customers were locals having lunch. I smoked a cigarette and drank a double espresso as the edge wore off my adrenalin and I settled down. I talked football with the bartender. He had read about Barcelona's collapse in his midday paper. The club wasn't top of the division any more, but third. In Catalonia that counts as a collapse. Barcelona has to win the championship, otherwise the team's a disaster. I'm a Real Madrid man myself, but we talked amicably as I tried to unwind. After a hit I always felt like I had done two hours with the Japanese in the karate institute on Calle Echegaray. I was refreshed, elated and exhausted all at once. So much planning, so much preparation, so many logistical considerations, and then the difference between success and failure was just a few hundredths of a second anyway. There could be a fault with the film or camera. A microscopic grain of sand in the shutter might have ruined the frames. For once my hands had shaken. The light calculation wasn't right. The victim was blurred and unrecognisable. Umpteen things could have gone wrong.

I showered and packed before ringing Madrid. The exposed films were in the locked camera case, my clothes in a handy bag that could be taken on a plane as cabin luggage. I travel light and get the hotel to do my washing en route or buy a new t-shirt.

Oscar usually turned up at his office around 4 p.m., whereas lots of offices in Madrid didn't open again until 5 p.m. That was changing. Their rhythm was becoming more and more European, but getting hold of people during the conventional siesta time was still difficult, especially in any kind of public administration office. The siesta hours were for business lunches, family, or for conducting affairs in secluded hotel rooms or in the small apartments of mistresses. I had the phone number of Oscar's current mistress, but just for emergencies. You could generally only reach Oscar at home with his wife on Sundays; that was how he and Gloria had arranged their lives. Gloria was a big woman and still very attractive, but she could no longer hide the fact that we were approaching 50. That didn't seem to bother her, and when she wasn't taking care of her flourishing legal practice, she saw to it that younger lovers confirmed her desirability. Spaniards are a pragmatic people when it comes to affairs of the heart and neither Oscar nor Gloria would dream of getting divorced. Not because they were Catholics, the law gave them the choice. But they were well matched and their private life and joint business transactions were so intertwined that the only people who would profit from a divorce would be the army of lawyers employed to unravel their assets.

They were both my friends and my business partners and we had known each other for more than 20 years. We had met during the chaotic, expectant years following Franco's death. Back then Oscar was a six-foot German journalist who wrote for a number of left-wing papers, and Gloria was a beautiful law student who carried her membership card of the outlawed Communist party as if it

was one of the Tsar's missing crown jewels. We had a brief, intense affair, but everyone seemed to sleep with everyone in the days when we said "comrades" without blushing, and the affair ended quickly and without acrimony. Oscar and Gloria were another matter. They fell madly in love and had stayed together against the odds; not that fidelity had played a major role in recent years. We had been young, poor and revolutionary together, and we had become rich together. They were my second family. They had never had children. Gloria had once had an abortion in England, back when it was forbidden in Spain, and after that she had regarded her illicit supply of the Pill as a revolutionary sword to be brandished in front of the Pope and all the other old, dyed-in-the-wool, reactionary, ludicrous men who tried to control her life. By the time she began to want children, it was too late. The clock had apparently struck. She couldn't get pregnant, but if it was a big disappointment she hid it well. Oscar was pretty indifferent – if Gloria wanted a child, he was happy to be a father. She couldn't, and without missing a beat they returned to life as normal, and after a couple of years stopped talking about it.

I thought about them as I packed my sweat-soaked jeans and t-shirt into the holdall and put on a clean shirt and a pair of light-coloured trousers. I drank a couple of cold colas from the minibar. Lately, I had begun thinking quite a bit about my childhood and youth. I was too happy and contented with my life to be experiencing a mid-life crisis, but maybe life ensures that you're more inclined to look back when you accept that your youth is definitively over, that life has passed its peak, that there are some things you can't do any more, even though you'd like to. Perhaps remembering the past makes it easier to cope with the years ahead, as you gradually slip into old age and hopefully an easy death.

I rang Oscar's direct number and he answered straight away. Oscar didn't speak Spanish when we first met, so we had used English from the beginning. Even though he now spoke fluent Spanish, we still used English when it was just the two of us. That's what came most naturally.

"Well, old boy," said Oscar in his husky, deep voice. "Fire away."

"It's in the bag," I said.

"And?"

"Almost a Jacqueline," I said. "So put the wheels in motion."

"You're a clever, cynical boy."

"It's a Minister, on the right."

"Just as well or you'd have trouble with Amelia," he said, and I could hear the amusement in his voice. He liked Amelia, but had never quite got over the fact that I was now married and was faithful to my wife, had become bourgeois in my old age, and listened to her and respected her opinions. But luckily all four of us got on well.

"I'll bring in the material tomorrow," I said.

"I'll make sure there's a technician waiting."

"I'll do them myself," I said.

"What about a lawyer?"

"They're taken on a public beach."

Oscar and I seldom said things straight out over the phone. Spain has an extensive and powerful security apparatus and there isn't always complete respect for the laws on protection from wire-tapping. Spain is a European country with terrorism, and blood and violence have a way of getting the better of constitutional rights.

"How public?" he said.

"Totally public. It's not private property. Anyone with a boat can use it."

"I'll put the wheels in motion. When are you coming home?"

"I'll change cars and drive to Barcelona now and get the first flight."

"OK, signing off, old boy," he said with the kind of satisfaction in his voice that these days was nearly only ever induced by the thought of making money.

"Give my best to Gloria," I said.

"Will do, old boy."

I checked out and walked over to the jeep with my holdall in one hand and the camera bag containing the negatives, which would fill Oscar's and my bank account with many, many thousands of dollars over my shoulder.

A black Mercedes was parked at an angle in front of the jeep. Two men were leaning against the car, their arms crossed. One of them wouldn't be much trouble. He was short and podgy, with a broad, heavy face below a bald pate. He didn't look very fit. He looked exactly like what he undoubtedly was: an expensive spin-doctor employed to pull unfortunate chestnuts out of the fire for his lord and master. The other one was 30-odd, with beefy arms bulging under his jacket and a cocky little smile below his black sunglasses, but he didn't have the air of a bruiser. He looked like a body-builder, not a fighter. It was a case of pumped-up muscles, not the sinewy toughness that you got from the gym I used. They were both in suits, despite the heat. Well-cut tropical wear, and they didn't seem to be sweating. The shepherd had talked. The shepherd could read and write, at least the numbers and letters on a licence plate belonging to Avis.

"*Oyes, hijo de puta,*" the heavy said. He straightened himself up, letting his hands hang down beside his body. He seemed relaxed, but I could read the signs.

The side street was deserted. The hum of the traffic starting up again drifted from the main street and I could hear the metallic sound of shop shutters being rolled up.

"Son of a bitch yourself," I said.

He took a step forward so that he was obstructing my access to the jeep.

"You're blocking my way," I said.

"Hand it over!" was all he said in reply and pointed at the camera bag.

"It's private property," I said.

"The films aren't. You'll get the cameras back, don't worry. Hand it over!"

I put the holdall down on the road. I could feel myself sweating, and my heart was racing. The noise from the main street grew imperceptibly fainter, as if it was filtered, while my concentration focused on the man in front of me. He wasn't quite as composed as he appeared. There was a frailty in his eyes and beads of perspiration on his upper lip. I shoved the camera bag round to my back and waited, hoping that someone might show up in the side street so he wouldn't be able to get violent, but he took a step forwards and made the mistake of sticking out his hand as if he was going to rip the bag from my shoulder. I grabbed hold of his hand, took a short step backwards, so I made use of his own momentum, found his little finger and twisted it while I wrenched his arm round and upwards. He gave a startled gasp, but the sound got caught in his throat as I jammed my knee into his testicles while still pulling his shoulder until I heard the joint crack. He crumpled in front of me with a hollow groan, numbed by shock and pain.

I picked up my holdall. The short, fat driver stepped away from the Mercedes and raised his hands in a warding-off gesture. It had all happened so quickly that I doubt he had registered what had taken place. His partner was on his knees, retching with pain. His finger would swell up and his crotch would ache for several days.

"No," was all the short fatty said as he stepped pointedly aside. I walked passed him, threw my bags into the jeep and drove off. My hands were trembling from delayed shock and the back of my shirt was soaked through. A

family of holidaymakers with a couple of young children had come round the corner and stood gaping at me. The father put his arms protectively around the two youngsters. The woman had her hands over her face. It wouldn't make for a pleasant holiday, but that couldn't be helped.

I drove slowly and carefully down to the Avis office. It wasn't only the heat that was making my vision swim a little. I took three or four deep breaths to get my breathing under control.

At Avis I exchanged the jeep for a hard-topped, fast Audi, and it wasn't until I turned off onto the motorway and sped up that I calmed down, but I kept looking in the mirror to see if a Mercedes or a patrol car was pursuing me. I didn't feel completely safe until I was on the plane to Madrid. I put a Grateful Dead CD in my Discman and leaned back in my seat. The plane was half empty. I saw the Mediterranean disappear as we swung slowly round and headed inland across the vast, barren Spanish interior and the familiar, vicious craving for a drink overwhelmed me.

I thought about Amelia and Maria Luisa and asked the stewardess for a cola, as the plane carried me home to Madrid.