THREE MONTHS ON THE *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLER LIST

DICK FRANCIS

HOT MONEY

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HOT MONEY

Dick Francis

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With love and thanks as usual
to
Merrick and Felix

THE PEMBROKES

Malcolm Pembroke

His Wives	1	*Vivien*
	2	*Joyce*
	3	*Alicia*
	4	*Coochie*
	5	*Moira*
Vivien's Children	1	*Donald*, married to *Helen*
	2	*Lucy*, married to *Edwin*
	3	*Thomas*, married to *Berenice*
Joyce's Child	1	*Ian*, unmarried
Alicia's Children	1	*Gervase*, married to *Ursula*
	2	*Ferdinand*, married to *Debs*
	3	*Serena*, unmarried
Coochie's Children	1	*Robin*
	2	*Peter*, dead

1

I intensely disliked my father's fifth wife, but not to the point of murder.

I, the fruit of his second ill-considered gallop up the aisle, had gone dutifully to the next two of his subsequent nuptials, the changes of "mother" punctuating my life at six and fourteen.

At thirty, however, I'd revolted: wild horses couldn't have dragged me to witness his wedding to the sharp-eyed, honey-tongued Moira, his fifth choice. Moira had been the subject of the bitterest quarrel my father and I ever had and the direct cause of a nonspeaking wilderness that had lasted three years.

After Moira was murdered the police came bristling with suspicion to my door, and it was by the merest fluke that I could prove I'd been geographically elsewhere when her grasping little soul had left her carefully tended body. I didn't go to her funeral, but I wasn't alone in that. My father didn't go either.

A month after her death he telephoned me, and it was so long since I'd heard his voice that it seemed that of a stranger.

"Ian?"

"Yes," I said.

"Malcolm."

"Hello," I said.

"Are you doing anything?"

"Reading the price of gold."

"No, dammit," he said testily. "In general, are you busy?"

"In general," I said, "fairly."

The newspaper lay on my lap, an empty wine glass at my elbow. It was late evening, after eleven, growing cold. I had that day quit my job and put on idleness like a comfortable coat.

He sighed down the line. "I suppose you know about Moira?"

"Front-page news," I agreed. "The price of gold is on . . . er . . . page thirty-two."

"If you want me to apologize," he said, "I'm not going to."

His image stood sharp and clear in my mind: a stocky gray-haired man with bright blue eyes and a fizzing vitality that flowed from him in sparks of static electricity

in cold weather. He was to my mind stubborn, opinionated, rash and often stupid. He was also financially canny, intuitive, quick-brained and courageous, and hadn't been nicknamed Midas for nothing.

"Are you still there?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"Well . . . I need your help."

He said it as if it were an everyday requirement, but I couldn't remember his asking anyone for help ever before, certainly not me.

"Er . . ." I said uncertainly. "What sort of help?"

"I'll tell you when you get here."

"Where is 'here'?"

"Newmarket," he said. "Come to the sales tomorrow afternoon."

There was a note in his voice that couldn't be called entreaty but was far from a direct order and I was accustomed only to orders.

"All right," I said slowly.

"Good."

He hung up immediately, letting me ask no questions, and I thought of the last time I'd seen him, when I'd tried to dissuade him from marrying Moira, describing her progressively, in face of his implacable purpose, as a bad misjudgment on his part and as a skillful untruthful manipulator and finally as a rapacious bloodsucking tramp. He'd knocked me down to the floor with one fast, dreadful blow, which he'd been quite capable of at sixty-five, three years ago. Striding furiously away, he'd left me lying dazed on my carpet and had afterward behaved as if I no longer existed, packing into

boxes everything I'd left in my old room in his house and sending them by parcel post to my apartment.

Time had proved me right about Moira, but the unforgivable words had remained unforgiven to her death and, it had seemed, beyond. On this October evening, though, perhaps they were provisionally on ice.

I, Ian Pembroke, the fifth of my father's nine children, had from the mists of infancy loved him blindly through thunderous years of domestic infighting that had left me permanently impervious to fortissimo voices and slammed doors. In a totally confused chaotic upbringing I'd spent scattered unhappy periods with my bitter mother but had mostly been passed from wife to wife in my father's house as part of the furniture and fittings, treated by him throughout with the same random but genuine affection he gave to his dogs.

Only with the advent of Coochie, his fourth wife, had there been peace, but by the time she took over I was fourteen and world-weary, cynically expecting a resumption of hostilities within a year of the honeymoon.

Coochie, however, had been different. Coochie of all of them had been my only real mother, the only one who'd given me a sense of worth and identity, who'd listened and encouraged and offered good advice. Coochie produced twin boys, my half-brothers Robin and Peter, and it had seemed that at last Malcolm Pembroke had achieved a friendly family unit, albeit a sort of sunny clearing surrounded by jungle thickets of ex-wives and discontented siblings.

I grew up and left home but went back often, feeling never excluded. Coochie would have seen Malcolm into

a happy old age but, when she was forty and the twins eleven, a hit-and-run driver swerved her car off the road and downhill into rocks. Coochie and Peter had been killed outright. Robin, the elder twin, suffered brain damage. I had been away. Malcolm was in his office: a policeman went to him to tell him, and he let me know soon after. I'd learned the meaning of grief on that drizzly afternoon, and still mourned them all, their loss irreparable.

On the October evening of Malcolm's telephone call, I glanced at them as usual as I went to bed, their three bright faces grinning out from a silver frame on my chest of drawers. Robin lived—just—in serene twilight in a nursing home. I went to see him now and again. He no longer looked like the boy in the photograph, but was five years older, growing tall, empty-eyed.

I wondered what Malcolm could possibly want. He was rich enough to buy anything he needed, maybe—only maybe—excluding the whole of Fort Knox. I couldn't think of anything I could do for him that he couldn't get from anyone else.

Newmarket, I thought. The sales.

Newmarket was all very well for me because I'd been working as an assistant to a racehorse trainer. But Newmarket for Malcolm? Malcolm never gambled on horses, only on gold. Malcolm had made several immense consecutive fortunes from buying and selling the hard yellow stuff, and had years ago reacted to my stated choice of occupation by saying merely, "Horses? Racing? Good Lord! Well, if that's what you want, my boy, off you go. But don't expect me to know the first

thing about anything." And as far as I knew he was still as ignorant of the subject as he'd been all along.

Malcolm and Newmarket bloodstock sales simply didn't mix. Not the Malcolm I'd known, anyway.

I drove the next day to the isolated Suffolk town whose major industry was the sport of kings, and among the scattered purposeful crowd found my father standing bareheaded in the area outside the sale-ring building, eyes intently focused on a catalogue.

He looked just the same. Brushed gray hair, smooth brown vicuña knee-length overcoat, charcoal business suit, silk tie, polished black shoes; confidently bringing his City presence into the casual sophistication of the country.

It was a golden day, crisp and clear, the sky a cold cloudless blue. I walked across to him in my own brand of working clothes: cavalry twill trousers, checked wool shirt, padded olive green jacket, tweed cap. A surface contrast that went personality deep.

"Good afternoon," I said neutrally.

He raised his eyes and gave me a stare as blue as the sky.

"So you came."

"Well . . . yes."

He nodded vaguely, looking me over. "You look older," he said.

"Three years."

"Three years and a crooked nose." He observed it dispassionately. "I suppose you broke that falling off a horse."

"No . . . You broke it."

"Did I?" He seemed only mildly surprised. "You deserved it."

I didn't answer. He shrugged. "Do you want some coffee?"

"OK."

We hadn't touched each other, I thought. Not a hug, not a handshake, not a passing pat on the arm. Three years' silence couldn't easily be bridged.

He set off not in the direction of the regular refreshment room, but toward one of the private rooms set aside for the privileged. I followed in his footsteps, remembering wryly that it took him roughly two minutes any time to talk himself into the plushiest recesses, wherever.

The Newmarket sales building was in the form of an amphitheater, sloping banks of seats rising up all around from the ground-level ring where each horse was led around while being auctioned. Underneath the seating and in a large adjacent building were rooms used as offices by auctioneers and bloodstock agents, and as entertainment rooms by commercial firms, such as Ebury Jewelers, Malcolm's present willing hosts.

I was used to the basic concrete boxes of the bloodstock agents' offices. Ebury's space was decorated in contrast as an expensive showroom, with well-lit glass display cases around three walls shining with silver and sparkling with baubles, everything locked away safely but temptingly visible. Down the center of the room, on brown wall-to-wall carpeting, stood a long polished table surrounded with armed, leather-covered dining chairs. Before each chair was neatly laid a leather-edged

blotter alongside a gold-tooled tub containing pens, suggesting that all any client needed to provide here was his checkbook.

A smooth young gentleman welcomed Malcolm with enthusiastic tact and offered drinks and goodies from the well-stocked buffet table that filled most of the fourth wall. Lunch, it seemed, was an all-day affair. Malcolm and I took cups of coffee and sat at a table, I, at any rate, feeling awkward. Malcolm fiddled with his spoon. A large loud lady came in and began talking to the smooth young man about having one of her dogs modeled in silver. Malcolm raised his eyes to them briefly and then looked down again at his cup.

"What sort of help?" I said.

I suppose I expected him to say he wanted help in some way with horses, in view of the venue he'd chosen, but it seemed to be nothing as straightforward.

"I want you beside me," he said.

I frowned, puzzled. "How do you mean?"

"Beside me," he said. "All the time."

"I don't understand."

"I don't suppose you do," he said. He looked up at my face. "I'm going to travel a bit. I want you with me."

I made no fast reply and he said abruptly, explosively, "Dammit, Ian, I'm not asking the world. A bit of your time, a bit of your attention, that's all."

"Why now, and why me?"

"You're my son." He stopped fiddling with the spoon and dropped it onto the blotter, where it left a round

stain. He leaned back in his chair. "I trust you." He paused. "I need someone I can trust."

"Why?"

He didn't tell me why. He said, "Can't you get some time off from work? Have a holiday?"

I thought of the trainer I'd just left, whose daughter had made my job untenable because she wanted it for her fiancé. There was no immediate need for me to find another place, save for paying the rent. At thirty-three I'd worked for three different trainers, and had lately come to feel I was growing too old to carry on as anyone's assistant. The natural progression was toward becoming a trainer myself, a dicey course without money.

"What are you thinking?" Malcolm asked.

"Roughly whether you would lend me half a million quid."

"No," he said.

I smiled. "That's what I thought."

"I'll pay your fares and your hotel bills."

Across the room the loud lady was giving the smooth young man her address. A waitress had arrived and was busy unpacking fresh sandwiches and more alcohol onto the white-clothed table. I watched her idly for a few seconds, then looked back to Malcolm's face, and surprised there an expression that could only be interpreted as anxiety.

I was unexpectedly moved. I'd never wanted to quarrel with him: I'd wanted him to see Moira as I did, as a calculating sweet-talking honeypot who was after his money, and who had used the devastation of Coochie's death to insinuate herself with him, turning up

constantly with sympathy and offers to cook. Malcolm, deep in grief, had been helpless and grateful and seemed hardly to notice when she began threading her arm through his in company, and saying "we." I had for the whole three silent years wanted peace with my father, but I couldn't bear to go to his house and see Moira smirking in Coochie's place, even if he would have let me in through the door.

Now that Moira was dead, peace was maybe possible, and it seemed now as though he really wanted it also. I thought fleetingly that peace wasn't his prime object, that peace was only a preliminary necessary for some other purpose, but all the same it was enough.

"Yes," I said, "all right. I can take time off."

His relief was visible. "Good. Good. Come along, then, I may as well buy a horse." He stood up, full of sudden energy, waving his catalogue. "Which do you suggest?"

"Why on earth do you want a horse?"

"To race, of course."

"But you've never been interested . . ."

"Everyone should have a hobby," he said briskly, though he'd never had one in his life. "Mine is racing." And as an afterthought he added, "Henceforth," and began to walk to the door.

The smooth young man detached himself from the dog lady and begged Malcolm to come back any time. Malcolm assured him he would, then wheeled around away from him again and marched across to one of the display cabinets.

"While I was waiting for you I bought a cup," he

said to me over his shoulder. "Want to see? One rather like that." He pointed. "It's being engraved."

The cup in question was a highly decorated and graceful elongated jug, eighteen inches tall and made undoubtedly of sterling silver.

"What's it for?" I asked.

"I don't know yet. Haven't made up my mind."

"But . . . the engraving?"

"Mm. The Coochie Pembroke Memorial Challenge Trophy. Rather good, don't you think?"

"Yes," I said.

He gave me a sidelong glance. "I thought you'd think so." He retraced his steps to the door. "Right, then, a horse."

Just like old times, I thought with half-forgotten pleasure. The sudden impulses that might or might not turn out to be thoroughly sensible, the intemperate enthusiasms needing instant gratification . . . and sometimes afterward the abandoning of a debacle as if it didn't exist. The Coochie Pembroke Memorial Challenge Trophy might achieve worldwide stature in competition or tarnish unpresented in an attic: with Malcolm it was always a toss-up.

I called him Malcolm, as all his children did, on his own instruction, and had grown up thinking it natural. Other boys might have Dad: I had my father, Malcolm.

Outside Ebury's room, he said, "What's the procedure, then? How do we set about it?"

"Er . . ." I said. "This is the first day of the Highflyer Sales."

"Well?" he demanded as I paused. "Go on."

"I just thought you ought to know—the minimum opening bid today is twenty thousand guineas."

It rocked him only slightly. "Opening bid? What do they sell them for?"

"Anything from a hundred thousand up. You'll be lucky today to get a top-class yearling for under a quarter of a million. This is generally the most expensive day of the year."

He wasn't noticeably deterred. He smiled. "Come on, then," he said. "Let's go and start bidding."

"You need to look up the breeding first," I said. "And then look at the animals, to see if you like them, and then get the help and advice of an agent . . ."

"Ian," he said with mock sorrow. "I don't know anything about the breeding, I can just about tell if a thing's got four legs, and I don't trust agents. So let's get on and bid."

It sounded crazy to me, but it was his money. We went into the sale-ring itself where the auction was already in progress, and Malcolm asked me where the richest bidders could be found, the ones that really meant business.

"In those banks of seats to the left of the auctioneers, or here, in the entrance, or just round there to the left . . ."

He looked and listened and then led the way up to a section of seats from where we could watch the places I'd pointed out. The amphitheater was already more than three-quarters full, and would later at times be crammed, especially whenever a tip-top lot came next.

"The very highest prices will probably be bid this