

# **Drugged**

By Jack English

## **Chapter One: Crash**

Jack English had just run four miles and was stepping out of the shower when something shook his house so hard it almost knocked him off his feet.

He lived in Yacht Harbor, a bayfront townhouse in Brigantine, New Jersey. The house was built above a carport which kept the living area high and dry should Mother Nature misbehave by staging a hurricane, storm surge or extra-high tide.

He slipped on a pair of pants, no time for underwear, shirt or socks, grabbed his phone and skittered down three flights of stairs to see what had happened. The entrance to the townhouse had an enclosed, ground-level stairway that lead up to the first floor living area. As soon as he reached those stairs, he knew what the problem was.

A large black Mercedes had crashed through his front door. Its bumper rested on the carpet of the second step. The hood was crumpled. Steam drifted up from the engine, and oil dripped into his entrance foyer.

He had lived there ten years but, until that moment, never thought about the fact that there was no rear entrance to his home. The only way out was down the stairs and over the hood of the

car. He crawled over the hood and slipped down onto the ground.

He checked the driver. The airbag had gone off. He couldn't see any obvious injuries, but the man wasn't breathing. English felt no pulse. He called 911.

An ambulance was there in minutes. They pulled the man out from under the airbag and laid him on a stretcher.

"Is he alive?" English asked.

"Barely," one of the paramedics said. "You know him?"

"Never seen him before," English said.

"Looks like a drug overdose," the medic said. He jammed a Narcan injector into the man's thigh and slipped an oxygen mask on him.

"What's this puncture on his neck?" one of the EMT's asked English as they were loading the man into the ambulance.

"No idea," English said.

They closed the ambulance doors, switched on the siren and were gone.

By this time, English's neighbors were standing around watching. A Brigantine Police Department car rolled up. It was driven by Walter Alvarez.

"Officer Alvarez," English said, "is this guy going to get a ticket?" He pointed to the car sticking out of his entrance foyer.

"We'll see. What happened?" Alvarez asked.

“I don’t know. I was getting out of the shower when I felt this enormous thump. I came downstairs and found this.”

“What did the paramedics say?” Alvarez asked.

“They said it looked like a drug overdose,” English said. “That’s consistent with what I saw. His pupils were tiny black dots, his skin was pale and his lips were blue.”

“Sounds like driving under the influence,” Alvarez said.

“Is it OK if I have this thing,” he pointed to the Mercedes, “dragged out of my house?”

“I’ll have it towed to the police impound,” Alvarez said. “I want to take a couple of pictures first and write up a report. Did you know the driver?”

“Never saw him before.” Everyone seemed to ask the same questions. He looked into the car. “He must have hit the house pretty hard. His glasses were knocked off.” They were laying on the floor of the car. “And it knocked the wallet out of his pocket.” It was lying next to the glasses. The man’s cell phone was also laying on the floor.

Alvarez reached in and retrieved the wallet. He glanced at the driver’s license. “Owen Olmstead,” he said. Then he poked through the wallet and pulled out a white business card. In larger gold letters it said *Owen Olmstead, White-Collar Crime*. The words *Attorney at Law* were printed in a muted charcoal gray across the bottom of the card

along with a Philadelphia address and phone number. He handed it to English.

“What do you think? Is he a refugee from one of the casinos?” English pointed in the direction of Atlantic City, three miles down the road and across the inlet bridge. “Or, was he here on business?”

“I don’t know,” Alverez said. “White-collar crime is over my pay grade.”

“There are two cards in his wallet. Mind if I keep one?” English asked.

“Can’t see any harm in it,” Alverez said.

“Could you keep me filled in on Olmstead’s condition and anything else you find?” English asked.

Alverez hesitated for a second and then said, “Sure, but it looks like a straightforward DUI.” Alverez shifted his weight from one foot to the other. “Is it possible to get collision insurance on a house? I mean, will your insurance company cover this?” He pointed to the smashed-in front door.

“They should, but they will probably try to get Olmstead’s auto policy to pay.”

“Damn insurance companies!” Alverez said under his breath.

“I feel the same way,” English said.

“Don’t tell anybody I said that. Beat cops aren’t supposed to have opinions.”

“Walter, it’s our secret,” English put a finger up to his lips.

## Chapter Two: Having a Ball?

Jack English met his long-time friends Jay Herndon, Roy Packett and Bernie Rothman for lunch at Flanagan's Bar and Grill. It was a short walk from the Atlantic County Courthouse. Rather than being a hole-in-the-wall bar, it was a hole-in-the-block bar. It was the product of a collision between the Casino Redevelopment Authority, Federal Urban Renewal and zoning laws. It was in the middle of a block with no direct street access. To get to Flanagan's you had to walk down an eight-foot wide, sixty-foot long blind alley and turn left. If you did, you'd come to a courtyard. Flanagan's Bar was wrapped around the courtyard. In good weather, most people sat at one of the outside tables. Trees provided shade in the summer and gave it a comfortable feel.

The reason Flanagan's was at the end of a blind alley, the reason there were no signs pointing the way, was that the Methodist Temperance League owned the buildings on either side of the alley and they refused to allow signs promoting alcohol consumption. So, the lawyers, who were Flanagan's regular customers, knew about it, and the tourists who weren't its regular customers, didn't. That was fine with the lawyers.

"We missed you at breakfast," Packett said. "Did you have a "friend" sleep over?" Roy Packett was the Atlantic County Prosecutor.

“I wish,” English said. “Truth is, I was investigating an accident.”

“What kind? What were the injuries?” Jay Herndon asked. He was the county’s most successful lawyer.

“Before you get too excited, Jay, I’m not representing the victim of the accident, I am the victim.”

“Who is representing you?” Herndon asked.

“Damned plaintiff’s lawyers,” Bernie Rothman said. “Always out to scam a buck.” Rothman was an insurance defense lawyer and the group’s only Harvard Law School graduate.

“And yet, you have breakfast and lunch with us every day,” Herndon said.

Rothman spread his hands wide and looked Herndon in the eye. “I like you and Jack despite the fact you are plaintiff’s lawyers.”

Herndon looked off into space for a few seconds then back at his friends. “I think I discovered a new legal theory, ‘plaintiff’s lawyer disability syndrome, PLDS.’ People afflicted with PLDS should be able to sue defense lawyers and insurance companies. Let’s see, what would be the elements of PLDS. First, they must be a lawyer. Then they must be a plaintiff’s lawyer. And then, they must be tortured by defense lawyers and insurance companies.”

“Torture sounds like quality of life damages,” English said. “Wow! To be able to sue defense

attorneys for harassment, their bullshit defenses, the incomplete discovery, the late payments...”

“The law’s delay, the insolence of office,”

Packett planted an elbow on the table and clasped his forehead with his hand. “To be, or not to be, that is the question. Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them, to die, to sleep, and by sleep to say to end the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to...”

“Thank you, counselor,” English said. “Your Hamlet is somewhat mangled, but we get the point.”

“So, what about the accident?” Herndon asked.

“A big Mercedes crashed into my house about seven this morning.”

“Anybody hurt?” Packett asked.

“My front door was smashed in. I’ve got workmen putting up a temporary door. The driver is in a bad way.”

“What do you mean?” Rothman asked.

“It looks like a drug overdose,” English said.

“Apparently, the driver lost control and smashed into my house. He was barely breathing when I got to him. I called 911. They scooped him up, wacked him with Narcan, slapped on an oxygen mask and carted him away.”

“We see a lot of drug overdoses,” Packett said, “and, we see a lot of DUIs. But we don’t see many

at seven in the morning. There must be a story there. Was he a druggie?”

“He was an attorney,” English handed him Olmstead’s card. Packett passed it to Herndon who passed it to Rothman who handed it back.

“A Philly lawyer in Atlantic County... he was out of his bailiwick. Maybe he was here to gamble,” Packett said.

“Then how did he get so lost that he made it to Brigantine and crashed into Jack’s house?” Rothman asked.

“Bad luck,” Herndon said, then he changed the subject. “Say, are any of you going to the charity ball Saturday?”

“Are you going?” Rothman asked.

“Samantha and I are going,” Herndon said.

“It’s a thousand dollars a plate!” Rothman said. “I can’t afford that. I’m just a humble defense attorney.”

“Well,” Packett threw his napkin on the table, “I have to go. It’s the politic thing to do, to see and be seen by the rich and famous, the near famous and the wannabe famous. What about you, Jack?”

“If you guys are going, I’m in,” English said. “The law’s been good to me this year so I can afford a charitable deduction. It’s at the Borgata, right? Black tie?”

“I’ve got an invitation right here,” Packett reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a rectangular black card, a quarter the size of a sheet of notebook paper. It had gold trim around the

outside and gold lettering inside. He handed it to English.

It read, *Brenda O'Rourke, Chair of the Greater Atlantic Civic Association, invites you to an evening of music and dancing at the Borgata Casino to raise funds for Atlantic County Charities. Underneath that were the words \$1,000 per person. This was followed by the words Dinner will be served, and underneath that were the words Black tie.*

English handed the invitation back to Packett. "For a thousand bucks a head, they damned well better serve dinner." That's when he got a call. It was Walter Alvarez of the Brigantine Police Department. "What's up Walter?" he asked.

"Owen Olmstead died in the hospital about an hour ago," Alvarez said.

"That's too bad. Would you mind if I called his office and gave them a heads-up? They might not know where he is, and he might have pending depositions or court appearances," English said. "You can't leave judges and clients hanging."

"Not a problem," Alvarez said. "If you get any information on how to contact his next of kin, let me know."

"Glad to do it," English said.

"And Mr. English," Alvarez continued, "we found something funny in his car. I think we should talk."

## Chapter Three: Dart Pie

After lunch, Jay Herndon, Roy Packett, and Bernie Rothman returned to their respective offices. Jack English stayed behind at Flanagan's and nursed a Scotch. He pulled Olmstead's business card out of his pocket and held it between his thumb and forefinger trying to decide whether it contained a hidden message. In gold letters it said, *Owen Olmstead White-Collar Crime*, underneath that in pale gray letters, barely visible were the words *Attorney at Law*. What message, if any, was Olmstead trying to send by emphasizing white-collar crime, and de-emphasizing attorney at law? Did he defend white-collar criminals? Or was he using the law to facilitate white-collar crime? Maybe the pressure of doing what he was doing got to be too much, and he turned to drugs. He called Olmstead's office.

The receptionist answered, "Law office."

Most law firms repeat their name as many times as possible so it sticks in the caller's memory. The words law office sounded suspiciously vague.

"May I speak to the managing partner?" English asked.

"He's not in the office," the receptionist said.

"Do you have a director of litigation? Anything like that?" he asked.

"No, may I ask what this is about?"

"I'd prefer to speak to the senior attorney in the firm," he said.

“No one is here,” the receptionist said. “May I take your name and number and I’ll have someone call you?”

“My name is Jack English. I’m an Atlantic City lawyer. You may reach me at...”

“Mr. English!” she cut him off, “My boss was on his way to see you this morning. Did he miss you?”

“Would your boss be Owen Olmstead?” he asked.

“The one and only,” she said.

“I regret to inform you that Mr. Olmstead passed away an hour ago,” English said.

“Impossible!” she said. “He called me at six thirty this morning from the Atlantic City Expressway. Are you sure you have the right man?”

“Does Mr. Olmstead drive a black Mercedes?”

“Yes.”

“Is he fiftyish and overweight?”

“Yes.”

“Does he have black hair with little flecks of gray in it?”

“Yes.”

“He crashed his car into my house. The paramedics said he overdosed. Is there anything I can do?”

“I... I... don’t know,” she said.

“Can you have one of the other attorneys in the firm call me?”

“There are no other attorneys. Mr. Olmstead was a one man show.”

“Do you know why he wanted to meet with me? Was it a case?” English pressed.

“He said he had a case in New Jersey, Atlantic County to be specific, and wanted to partner with a local lawyer.”

“Did he mention what kind of case?”

“No,” she said, “it was something new. I’m his secretary, paralegal and girl Friday so I usually know about everything that comes in. Unfortunately, I’ve been out of town for a couple of weeks, so I’m behind the curve.”

“May I know your name?”

“Amy Pie,” she said.

“Amy, does he have anyone to take over his cases? A firm he works with or refers cases to?”

“Not really,” she said.

“Is he married?”

“No.”

“Do you know who his next of kin is?” English asked.

“He never spoke about anyone. It was just me and him, and I never saw him outside of the office so I don’t know anything about his personal life.”

“His card lists a Philly address and phone number. Did he have many cases in New Jersey?”

“The one he was going to talk to you about was the only one. All his other cases were in Philadelphia,” Pie said.

“As grim as this sounds, you can’t leave his clients high and dry. You need to contact the Philadelphia Bar Association. Cases have value, so the Bar Association will probably get a court order to assign cases to bar members and remit proceeds to Mr. Olmstead’s estate. Does that make sense?”

“I can’t get my head around it all,” Pie said.  
“I...”

“Is there someone you can call, to be with you for a while?”

“My sister is in Atlanta but she can’t...”

English heard sobbing on the other end of the line.

“Would you mind if I came to your office?” English asked. “Maybe I could call the Bar Association for you?”

“I... I don’t know what to say,” she said.

“I’ll be there in an hour.”

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Once he was on the Atlantic City Expressway, headed to Philadelphia, he called Walter Alvarez. “Walter? It’s Jack English, I called Olmstead’s office. He was a sole practitioner. His secretary knows of no next of kin. She is upset so I’m headed to Philadelphia to see what I can do. She said he was on his way to see me about a case.”

“What case?” Alvarez asked.

“She didn’t know. Apparently, a new case came in while she was on vacation. Did you find any files in his car?” English asked.

“There were some notes and things in his briefcase. Nothing looked particularly relevant,” Alverez said.

“I probably won’t get back to Brigantine until late. You said there was something I should see. Can you tell me what it is?”

“We searched Olmstead’s car and bagged everything we found,” Alverez said.

“And?”

“We found a dart.”

“A dart like a pub dart? Or a lawn dart?”

“A tranquilizer dart like when a zoo wants to do a physical on a lion, they shoot it with a tranquilizer dart, that kind of dart,” Alverez said.

“We showed it to the paramedics. They said it was consistent with the puncture on the side of this neck. Maybe he wasn’t a druggie. Maybe this was something else.”

“A hit?”

“Maybe.”

“You’re a good man, Walter Alverez,” English said. “We’ll be in touch.”

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