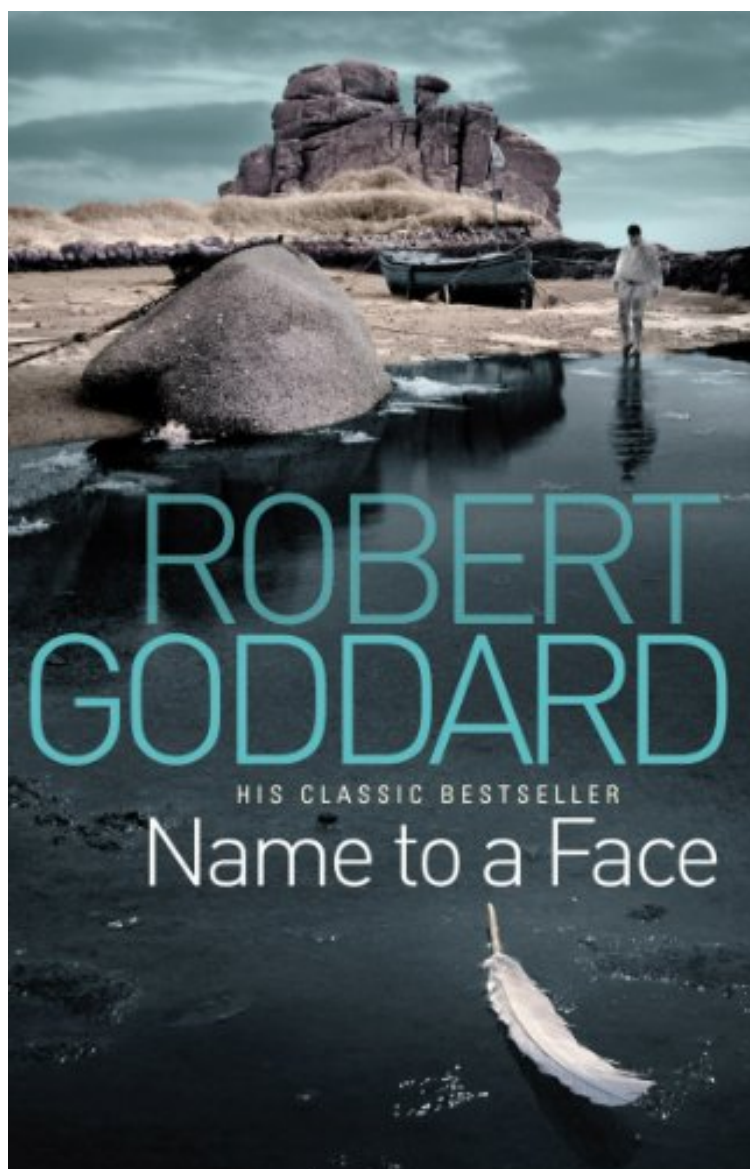


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Name To A Face



Par Robert Goddard
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWhen Tim Harding agrees to do a friend a favour by bidding for an antique ring at an auction on his behalf, he is unaware of the secrets tied up with it - secrets that date back three hundred years.But the ring is stolen before it can be sold, and a shocking murder follows. Harding is quickly thrown into a web of conspiracies surrounding the ring's origins. As he draws closer to the heart of the mystery, he comes across a young woman he is certain he recognizes, even though they have never met. But as he goes in search of her identity, his life begins to fall apart. Somewhere, a perilous truth awaits him, coupled with a terrible realization: those who uncover that truth cannot be allowed to live...ExtraitChapter OneFew of Jardiniera's clients lived in Monaco, for the simple reason that few residents of the principality possessed a

garden. The high-rise apartment blocks jostling for a tax-free footing on its expensive square kilometre of the Cote d'Azur left little room for the landscaped riots of greenery to be found in the grounds of villas to east and west. An exception to this rule was, however, one of Jardiniera's best clients. Barney Tozer was in fact rather more than a client, having bought himself a slice of the company and with it the implicit right to prompt attention whenever he required it. He had also bought himself, at a price Tim Harding should only have been able to guess at but actually knew to the last eye-watering zero, the penthouse apartment in one of the most prestigious blocks in La Condamine. Thanks to the sheerness of the rock face against which the block had been built, the penthouse came complete with its own garden, perched at the level of the next road above, commanding a fine view of the yacht-crammed Port de Monaco and the sparkling blue vastness of the Mediterranean. An electronically operated shutter-door set in the high stone rear wall of the garden gave access to a double garage, sparing its owner the need to squeeze his four-wheel-drive giant into the communal garage in the block's basement and allowing Harding to drive his Jardiniera truck in off the road after entering the four-digit code he had been trusted with on the number-panel attached to the entryphone. Harding was a well-built, broad-shouldered man in his late forties, brown hair bleached blond enough by the sun to camouflage the streaks of grey, skin so deeply tanned that his blue-grey eyes sparked brightly, frown- and smile-lines more or less equally pronounced on his evenly featured face. Gardening for a living had kept him physically fit, but something in his faze, something wounded and wary, suggested that people had always been a greater mystery to him than plants. He parked the truck on the hardstanding in front of the garage and climbed out into the cool, clear, light-filled air as the shutter-door completed its well-lubricated descent behind him with a reassuringly solid clunk. Harding was dressed for work, in jeans, boots and skiing jacket, although he happened to know that no soil would be turned or shrub pruned this morning. He happened to know, but was obliged to pretend he did not. Which was only one of the reasons for the discomfort he felt. The morning was fine but chill. Winter and spring were still taking turns this early in the year, even on the Riviera, where the locals seemed to regard anything other than warm, settled weather as a personal affront. It was a quiet time for Jardiniera. Many of their clients were away. Most of the gardens they tended were ticking over gently, with little need of anything beyond routine maintenance. Harding knew he would be unable to plead pressure of work as an objection to doing what was going to be asked of him. He knew, in fact, that he would be unable to raise an objection of any kind. Even though some instinct he suspected he ought to heed told him he should. Barney Tozer was on the terrace beyond the swimming pool, leaning back against the balustrade that guarded the drop to the roadway far below. He was in the middle of a phone conversation and did no more than raise a hand to acknowledge Harding's arrival. This was no surprise. He was a man who spent so much time on the phone that his right shoulder was permanently lower than his left, giving his whole body a slightly skewed, misshapen appearance. He was about the same age as Harding, but did not look so well on it, a substantial paunch filling out the loose sweater he wore above baggy trousers and deck shoes, his thinning hair cropped short, a second chin wobbling beneath his jaw as he spoke. But the obese and gleaming watch lolling on his wrist hinted at the other kind of pounds he had acquired an excess of over the years, not to mention the euros, dollars, yen and Swiss francs. He was, Harding needed no reminding, a seriously wealthy man. There was a vagueness about the source of this wealth. Barney Tozer's company, Starburst International, dealt in timeshare properties and the luxury end of the holiday market, but Harding had always found it difficult to believe that such business could yield profits on the scale its chairman and managing director's lifestyle suggested it did. Harding was no expert, of course. He knew that. And he knew there were other factors complicating his relationship with Barney. One of those was that he actually liked the guy. Barney was a generous, affable, garrulous, down-to-earth Cornishman who hardly fitted the tax-exile stereotype. He and Harding had become drinking buddies over the last couple of years, friends, for want of a better word, though there were in truth too many secrets between them to make it quite the right word. Harding crossed the modest but manicured lawn and made his way slowly round the pool to where Tozer was standing, scanning the lemon trees and hibiscuses as he went to confirm that they were looking well, even though he knew his host would be unlikely to notice their condition unless they shed their leaves and died in front of him. The phone call was ending in murmured farewells. By the time Harding reached the terrace, it was over. "Morning, Tim," said Tozer, slipping the phone into his pocket and smiling broadly. "Hope you haven't had to make too much of a detour to fit me in." "Not at all. There's a villa on Cap Martin I'm going to visit this afternoon. I might be in line for quite an ambitious landscaping job there." "Your speciality." "Well, it's supposed to be." So it was, although general care and maintenance accounted for more and more of Jardiniera's business. "Anyway, what can I do for

you, Barney?" "Come inside. We can talk over coffee. Unless you fancy something stronger." Tozer winked over his shoulder at him as he headed towards the patio doors leading into the apartment. "Coffee's fine, thanks." "Have it your way." But Harding was not going to have it his way. That he already knew. Forewarned was not in this case forearmed. "Carol's at the beautician," Tozer explained as they traversed the huge, modishly furnished lounge en route to the kitchen. "Seems to spend more and more time there. Says that's a sign of middle age. Could be a sign of covering up for torrid sessions with a gym-freak toy boy, of course. How's a husband to know?" "I expect she really is at the beautician, Barney." "Yeah?" Tozer smiled back at Harding. "You're probably right." He was right. There was no doubt about it. The real doubt surrounded the question of whether Barney knew why Harding could be so certain on the point. And that doubt seemed to have been growing recently, to a degree guilt alone could not explain. "Black, no sugar?" They had reached the kitchen, fitted out like the lounge in the very latest style and its most expensive version. "Please." Tozer flicked a couple of switches above the slate worktop. A kettle roared into life. A grinder devoured a hopperful of beans. In less than a minute, the coffee was brewing. Tozer lit a cigarette during the interval, not troubling to offer one to Harding, a confirmed non-smoker. "Planning something new for the garden, Barney?" "Hardly. That's Carol's province." "I just thought" "I didn't ask you round to discuss bloody pot plants." "No. I guessed not." "I bet you did." Tozer looked thoughtfully at him through a plume of cigarette smoke. "What's old Barney up to now, hey? What bee has he got in his bonnet?" He chuckled, pushed down the plunger on the cafetiere and poured their coffees, adding sugar to his own. "Let's sit down." They settled round a corner of the large table at the far end of the room. Harding sipped his coffee, which was as excellent as ever Colombian, he reckoned. Tozer flicked ash into a wooden ashtray the diameter of a dinner plate and glanced at his watch. There was in the movement the first hint of nervousness on his part. "I'm ever so slightly pushed for time, actually, Tim. Tony's due in an hour. We're off on a' forty-eight to Abu Dhabi." Tony Whybrow, who had occasionally and somewhat half-heartedly joined them on their periodic boys' nights out, was Starburst's finance director and the only other representative of the company Harding had ever actually met. "Work, work, work, hey?" "But money, money, money." "Yeah. Anyway, like I say..." Tozer took another puff at his cigarette and started on the coffee. "Fact is, I need to ask you a favour." "Go ahead." "Thing is... Have I ever mentioned my brother?" "Had he? Harding had asked himself exactly that question during the drive from Villefranche. "Well, I know you have a brother, so... either you or Carol..." "Humphrey. Humphrey and Barnabas, hey? Bloody stupid names. But Barney's OK. Suits me, so I've been told. As for Humphrey, I used to call him Humpty when we were children. He's five years older than me. I couldn't get my mouth round the sound, see? And then there was the nursery rhyme. So, I thought Humpty was..." Tozer shrugged. "Funny." "Where does Humphrey live?" "Humph. That's what I settled for in the end. He's still stuck in Penzance." Tozer's roots in west Cornwall had definitely been mentioned to Harding, more than once. "Have you even been to Penzance, Tim? I can't remember if I've asked you." "Neither can I. But, yeah, I have. For what it's worth. A family holiday in Cornwall when I was ten. We stayed near Land's End. Sennen Cove. Must have gone through Penzance, but all I can recollect is a view of St. Michael's Mount. Does that count?" "Bet it rained a lot." "It did, as a matter of fact." "No surprise there." "So, this favour... has to do with... Humph?" "Yeah. A narrow-minded misery-guts if ever there was one. But..." Tozer gazed past Harding into some unfocused vision of his childhood. "He is my flesh and blood." His face creased into a rueful smile. "Worse luck." "And..." "He's asked for my help. My... personal help. That's some kind of world record, so I don't want to disappoint him. But it would mean I'd have to go to Penzance. Right away." "And you have business in Abu Dhabi?" "Oh, that could be postponed. No, no. That's not the problem. It's a... tax thing." Tozer lowered his voice, as if, despite the fact that there was no one else in the apartment, he was worried about being overheard. "I've used up my ninety-one days in the UK this fiscal year. I can't set foot in Penzance, or anywhere else in the old country, before April sixth. It's a no-no. An absolute no-can-do. But Humph'll just think I'm making an excuse if I turn him down because of that." "You will have to turn him down, though, won't you?" "As it stands, yeah. But... there's such a thing as cushioning the blow. What I really need... is for someone to go in my place." Tozer smiled cautiously at Harding. "Know anyone who might be available?" Harding returned the smile. "You mean me?" "It'll only take a few days. A week at most. I'll cover all your expenses. You can even bill me for your time at garden maintenance rates. It's the quietest time of the year for you anyway. Look on it as a second Cornish holiday. You might get better weather this time round." "I can't just drop everything and..." "Come on. You're always singing young Luc's praises. I'll bet he could cope without you for a month, let alone a week." "That much was undeniable. Luc could always be relied upon and would probably relish the extra responsibility. "Well,

maybe. But you haven't told me what Humph wants help with yet." "It's no big deal, believe me. It just needs... handling properly." "Wouldn't Carol be a better choice?" "She can't stick Humph at any price. And vice versa. It'd be better to turn him down flat than send Carol. But it has to be somebody I can trust, obviously. And you'd be surprised how few of my so-called friends I do trust. But there is you, Tim." Tozer stubbed out his cigarette and looked Harding in the eye. "You should be flattered." "Well, I am, of course. But..." "I still haven't told you what's involved." Tozer grinned. "Have I?" "Chapter Two You're going, then?" said Carol, breaking the post-coital silence into which they had descended. Sex had failed to distract her for long from the subject of the strange mission Harding had agreed to undertake on her husband's behalf. It was in Harding's mind also as he lay in bed with her at his apartment in Villefranche late that afternoon. It could hardly not be. Theoretically, of course, he could have joined Carol at the penthouse after Barney's departure for the Gulf. In some ways, it would have been more convenient, as it might often have been in the past, given the frequency of Barney's absences. But some scruple neither cared to put into words had always deterred them. The apartment in Villefranche was their territory. And they did not stray from it. "I thought you might be able to talk your way out of it." "Not a chance." "How hard did you try?" Carol propped herself up on one elbow and squinted slightly as she stared at him. Her face was still faintly flushed from their exertions and her highlighted brown hair tousled, but the lubricious twinkle he had been pleased to notice in her eye earlier had turned to a steely gleam. "As hard as I could in the circumstances. You know there was no way I could turn him down." "I suppose not." Carol sighed and flopped back down on the pillow. "And what exactly does he want you to do?" "I've already told you." "Told me some of it, you mean. I want to hear the whole thing." "OK. His uncle their uncle, Barney and Humph's died just before Christmas." "I know. Uncle Gabriel. Lived in Penzance in a house full of junk." "Junk or valuable antiques. Take your pick. The locals will be able to next week when the contents are auctioned. It appears Barney's uncle specified in his will that's how his possessions were to be disposed of. No bequests to relatives. No opportunity for them to help themselves to a memento of the old boy. Just... everything to the highest bidder. Proceeds to charity... or some such." "Nice." "There was a feud between him and Barney's dad. You know about this too?" "Not really. Their dad died before I met Barney. And he doesn't say much about him. Or his mother. Anyway, what family doesn't have its feuds?" "Revue de presse Mysterious, dramatic, intricate, fascinating and unputdownable... The crime writers' crime writer. --The Daily Mirror An absorbing read... Both an excellent introduction to his work and a treat for diehard fans. --The Guardian