

High Flying Doves

Jessie looked at her bedroom window and stabbed her speed-dial.

"This is Garnetfauld Housing Association, please select fro. . ."

She stabbed "8" for Complaints. The familiar cheery air-head voice burred.

"Hi, Ash here, sorry I'm away from my desk, right? Leave a wee message and I'll get back to you soon as."

Jessie knew this empty promise of old. Ash would not reply. Never once had she had a conversation or communication of any kind with this girl/woman.

'Mrs Devlin here at flat 5/12 Fauld's View. Listen, Ash, you *must* do something. My windows are all plastered with bird poo. That's twenty-nine times I've called you about Bobby Cleishy and his pigeons in flat 5/13. The man's a menace, always has been. Did I tell you he was in my class at school, big runny nose, arse hanging out his trousers and wearing wellies every day of the year. He was never out of the middens looking for lemonade bottles and jam jars to get to the pictures. Well, it's still running and he still smells like a midden. I bet you he hasn't had a bath in years. Did I tell you he worked with the cleansing? Anyway, see these pigeons, there are hundreds of them, landing on my window, looking in at me, pecking at the glass and doing you know what. It's like living in a war zone here. The care team girls say they're not allowed to clean windows in high rise flats. Oh, aye, and while I'm on, that funny smell in the lift is back *and* its only stopping at even numbers, so I can't get down to see Sadie Madden on level 5. Remember I told you last week about it being off for three days. With me in my wheelchair, I was trapped, as you well know. Look, if you don't stop him I'm going to go to Hamish Mulvaney my MSP. This is your last chance, Ash. Action this day, or else. I've got every call I've made to you logged in my complaints book. Check your records and you'll see this bird poo assault has been going on for nearly six months. Oh, and while I'm on, those wee tiny black flies are back again, so I can't even open my windows. It's ridiculous, Ash, I'm boiling like a lobster in here. We don't get many nice summers like this. Oh, and while I'm on, the drains at the entry beside the what used to be the old Concierge office are blocked and there's smelly grey water everywhere. We'll all get cholera if you don't get something done. Let me see, yes, I've reported it every week for the last seven weeks . . .'

BEEEEEEEP. The computer-generated voice cut in: "The tape is full. Please change the tape. The tape is full. Please change the tape. The tape is. . ."

Jessie searched for Hamish Mulvaney's email address on Google and found his shaven-headed smirking face with its designer stubble staring back at her. It took her

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back to Garnetfauld Academy. She had been Catering Manager and he had been Head of Technical Studies, twenty-years her junior. He had caught her unawares. She was doing a stock-check in the large walk-in stores cupboard and he had sneaked in, locked the door on them and pawed at her.

'Come on Jessie, you know it's what you want. I've seen you giving me the eye. Now your man's run off with that wee lassie from the Honeywell.'

She smiled again at the memory: she had brought her knee hard up into his crotch then thumped her forehead into his nose, causing it to bleed.

"Aw Christ, Jessie, what's wrong with you?"

He had stumbled away and two weeks later resigned to take up a post as a double-glazing sales manager.

Her smile faded and she closed her iPad on him. What was the point? Mulvaney would do nothing to help. Instead she speed-dialled Sadie Madden.

'Sadie, I've been onto that Ash one at the Housing, but it was her answering machine again.'

'I know, Sadie, I know. You're right. When we had a Concierge service we could get on to them.'

'Yes, Sadie, yes, you're right, I know, I know. They say it's going to be twenty-five degrees by tea-time. Look, Sadie, would you do me a big favour. Would you get your Tommy to go up have a wee word with Bobby Cleishy about these pigeons?'

'What? He's taking you to Madeira for three weeks? Well, lucky you! Did Tommy win the lottery?'

'Oh, the Bingo. I see, yes, of course, of course. Well, Sadie, do get on with your packing, you don't want to miss your flight, do you.'

She hit the speed dial again, this time to her son, PC Benjamin Devlin.'

'This is the personal voicemail of Ben Devlin. Please leave a message and I'll get back to you soon as. Speak after the tone.'

'Ben it's your Mum here. Look, I know you're busy and I know Tuesday night is your bowling night, but could you come up afterwards. Please. I need a bit of help with Bobby Cleishy and his bloody pigeons. The Housing are throwing me the rubber ear. . . .'

'Mum, it's me. Look, I'm just going off duty. I could pop up now, if that would do?'

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'Oh, Ben, you're a godsend. See you soon.'

Ben Devlin pressed the bell of flat 5/13 and waited to a count of twenty then pressed and kept holding. His nose wrinkled at the smell. Still pressing the bell, he stooped and opened the flap causing the smell to increase tenfold. The bedroom door was ajar and flies buzzed to and from into the hallway.

Ben knew what to expect. He had been in similar situations before, several times. It was why he had done the courses to become a 'digital cop', to get away from the day-to-day round of dealing with the crappy end of policing.

He tried the door handle and found it unlocked. He pushed it open against the pile of mail and advertising leaflets. On top of the pile was a flyer for Hamish Mulvaney giving details of his local surgery times and proclaiming:

"Always here to help, pick up your phone and call me, anytime."

Ben shouted:

'POLICE! Is there anyone here?'

The sound of birds' wings flapping was the only reply. The flies swarmed up from the corpse's head and swirled towards him and he held his handkerchief to his face to protect his nose and mouth. Lying just inside the doorway was the remains of Bobby Cleishy. His empty eye sockets declared him to be long dead. He had been rake thin when alive, now he looked like a skeleton. His long grey pony-tail hair was matted, his unshaven face grey and gaunt. He was wearing soiled pyjamas his ankles were trapped in the bedclothes. To Ben it looked as if Cleishy had been trying to crawl towards the hallway. Oddly, he was wearing wellingtons.

When Ben stepped over him into the bedroom, the pigeons panicked and flew round and round causing a storm of dust and feathers. It took a few minutes until they all made an escape through wide-open window. In the corner of the bedroom, beside the bedside table were the well-pecked remains of a paper sack with a label advising it had contained wild bird food.

A quick check confirmed the house was empty. The main concentration of bird shit was in the bedroom, but the pigeons had also been in the sitting room and kitchen. The bath was filled to the brim with empty beer cans.

Ben phoned it in to 102. It was answered by the new girl, the dishy one who had joined the ten-pin bowling group last week.

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'Hi, Ash here, how can I help?'

'PC Ben Devlin. I'm at flat 5/13 at Fauld's View. Can you arrange for the police surgeon and the morgue team to come and collect a corpse? So far as I can tell there's nothing suspicious, death by natural causes. Looks like he might have been dead for months.'

'Sure, Ben. But hey, you're off duty, right? So, you're *definitely* going to be at bowling tonight, right?'

'Yes, Ash. Remember, these calls are recorded, OK?'

'Of course, gotcha! Yeah, right. OK, I'll get onto it top priority, in fact I'm typing it in as we speak:

"Police surgeon and morgue team to flat 5/13, Garnetfauld Tower, Robert Cleishy, bachelor, deceased."

'OK? Right, Ben, see you later, alligator.'

'Ash, how do you know his name, I didn't tell you, did I?'

'Ah, gotcha! Remember I told you I used to work at the housing association until about a year ago, right? Then they outsourced the complaints section and I moved here, right? Well somehow his details seemed to stick, because my Dad used to work with him, on the bin lorries. Dad said he used to stink to high heaven, right. So that's why they called him Clarty Cleishy. Hey, Ben, was he wearing his wellies? Dad says he never saw him in anything else. They all reckoned Clarty Cleishy hadn't washed his feet in years. Ugh! So, Ben, you just stay put and I'll get a patrol to come and take over the scene, right? Then you'll be free, right? See you later, alligator.'