

Sanctuary

'David, honeybun, will you be here for the kids' run tonight to the Junior Praise Choir?'

'Sure, Holls, I'll be back by five at the latest. If you need me, I'll probably be at The Sanctuary, or maybe out visiting, depends how it goes.'

'Yeah, OK. I'm at the WRVS café at Gartnavel, from ten till half after two. I'll take the van, OK?'

'Sure, I'll bike it, do me good.'

David Taylor-Woods waved as she reversed out of the drive, returning her blown kiss. They had been married for sixteen years. Holly (Holls) Taylor-Woods had once been four stones slimmer, a catwalk model and fastidious about her appearance. Now she was heavy, slower and often sloppy in her dress. But they still had a good relationship and, so far as he could tell, she was still happy with their sex life, even though she seemed less interested in recent years. The important thing was that they still gave the appearance of a perfect, happy couple at their Church.

Holly Woods was from Birmingham, Alabama, her African genes much diluted by her Anglo-American forebears. The effect was to give her beautiful golden skin, dark purple lips and fine facial lines, all features their children had inherited. Her face was still attractive; it was her figure that had expanded, making her large, round and "cuddly", as she now described herself. Holls was a hugger, an earth mother, caring for everyone in her orbit: she always had been.

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It was Holls who had found God first.

She was pregnant with Hazel, their second daughter, when the tests had confirmed that their first child Rowan had a developmental defect. Finding God, (*again*, as she always insisted), had been Holly Woods' way of making sense of why she was the unlucky one with the not quite perfect child, and to bulwark herself against possible future failure.

"Trust in God" was their mantra, under Holly's new regime. Further children had arrived in quick succession. Now their family comprised Rowan (15), called Rowe, Hazel (13), called Haze, Birch (11), a name she professed to hate and insisted on being called Bee, Ash (9), now Ashley and finally Chestnut (7) who nowadays would answer only to Chesney.

To someone who did not understand her condition, Rowe Taylor-Woods seemed normal. And she was enchantingly beautiful, alluring, with soft darker skin, deep brown hair and a very slightly oriental cast to her big brown eyes. She drew attention in every company. And she had a wonderfully warm alto singing voice.

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Although Rowe functioned well in familiar situations, with an IQ less than 70, she could be easily led.

Holls had ambitions for Rowe. God would provide success. Rowe had already started on a career as a photo-shoot model; mainly clothing and household appliances, so far. David had provided her first portfolio, mostly softly-lit indoor shots which emphasised, her youth, her openness, and her vulnerability. Holls had circulated this portfolio with great enthusiasm and over these last few months Rowe had been much in demand. The extra cash was welcomed in a family whose budget was under constant pressure.

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The Taylor-Woods journey from moderate wealth into much reduced circumstances had been gradual. They had once lived in a large blonde sandstone four-level town house in Glasgow's West End. Now they were squeezed into a squat four-bed sixties Wimpy villa in Bishopbriggs. The aging Renault Espace people carrier, that Holly always called their van, was creakingly old, needing replaced.

In his heady days as a Fund Manager in Edinburgh, with the prospect of a Partnership in the offing, David's rise to fame and fortune had ended suddenly. Only Holly knew his version of his secret.

It had happened after a Christmas Drinks party at the Office. According to David, while uncharacteristically inebriated, he had succumbed to the approaches of the Senior Partner's new third wife, a twenty-six year old ex-weather presenter. Trish had snared him in a broom cupboard and opened her legs to him, he confessed. The next day at her exclusive Barton Gym, Trish had foolishly shared her exploits with a group of friends of her own ilk. Gossip spread. Her husband Torquil Henderson acted swiftly.

By mid-January David had been "moved on" in a re-shuffle of resources. The word was out against David Taylor-Woods as a womanizer. No HR Department was interested in hiring a "loose cannon", an employee who might bring sexual harassment claims upon them.

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David Taylor was a man with a dark history.

Born in in the slums of Londonderry, of Irish Catholic stock, he had been recruited as a child into the Real IRA by his uncle, Tommo Delaney. At age ten the quietly spoken fresh-faced Gerry had been a courier. The close-knit group which formed the Real IRA hierarchy had seen his potential. They had quickly removed

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the clever boy from the front-line, sending him to Liverpool to be educated, then to Birmingham University where he graduated with a degree in Electronic Engineering. He would become their bomb-maker.

Three years after graduation and now well established in his chosen career, Gerry had been collared by the Met's Special Investigations Team. After five days of "special treatment", Gerard Thomas Maguire had agreed to sell out his Real IRA cell in exchange for a new life and a passport. He was given a bank account with £150,000 of the great British Taxpayers' money. A plan was suggested to him and a batch of qualifications provided: but it was entirely up to him now. The only conditions were that he must never go back to Ireland and he must never contact his Met handlers again. This was a one-shot deal. He was on his own.

His new passport revealed that he was now six years "younger", and that he was David Taylor from Sydney, Australia. He took a flight to Sydney and spent a month walking its streets, soaking up its atmosphere. He bummed around Oz for a further year before returning to the UK, to Glasgow, now in tow with an older woman, Jean Hislop.

After a few months, Jean had decided to return to her husband Gavin, who had been promoted to Head of Sales during their estrangement.

David used his batch of 'authentic' qualifications to enroll as a student at Glasgow University. Four years and many women later, he graduated with an Upper Second class degree in Mathematics and Economics.

During his final year he met Holly Woods when she served him as his Hostess at the TGI Friday restaurant in Buchanan Street. She had travelled to the UK hoping for fame as a photographic model. At first he thought she was hamming her accent, but no, she was actually American.

To her he was a good looking Australian. To him she was a stunning American.

Neither had ties they wanted to hold onto or discuss. Both were in rented accommodation. Within a week Holls moved in with him and within a few months Rowan was on the way. They married and, with an eye to future work, Holly had insisted that they re-style themselves as the double-barreled "Taylor-Woods".

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Unknown to Torquil Henderson, there was a hidden truth in his smear campaign against his wife's gigolo. David Taylor had always attracted women, and he had almost always succumbed, regardless of their marital status. It had been

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through this weakness that the Metropolitan Police had snagged him initially. After Trish he had been extra careful not to be discovered, but despite his "confession" to Holly, his extra-marital affairs had continued unabated.

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It was Holly who had heard of the opening for a Pastor at "The Sanctuary Evangelical Church" in Springburn. It was an independent church in the Gospel Hall tradition, which had been slowly dying for many years. David made a pitch for the post, and since he had a degree and was willing to take on the ailing church, he had been quickly accepted by its leaders, in case he should find another charge which offered more.

The Taylor-Woods had downsized and moved to Bishopbriggs, using their capital and savings to supplement his meagre stipend. "Living by Faith" was what Holly called this new way of living with less.

David, Holls and their Congregation had been running almost on "empty" for nearly two years. And then then along came Alice Warren, a widow willing to fund their Church.

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Alice Warren was softly spoken and seemed gentle, but she was very demanding, in her own quiet way.

Alice Warren had been in partnership with her husband and his brother. Together, slowly at first, they had built up a chain of medium-sized, high-end woman's clothing outlets under the brand, "Unique Boutique". Alice had contributed the initial inspiration and most of the ideas, and thereafter she had been the driving force. Between them the Warrens had built their business up into a chain of 143 outlets before taking it public, making them very rich.

Within a few months of the sale of their business, Alice's husband Roger had developed Motor Neuron Disease and was dead within six weeks, making Alice doubly wealthy and alone in a large home in Lenzie, near Glasgow, a few miles from Bishopbriggs.

Alice had always looked after herself, refusing to tread the path of motherhood. Widowed at forty-eight, and after some treatment, she looked ten years younger. Now she needed something to fill her life.

One day, six months after Roger's death, she met Pastor David at the Tesco Supermarket in Bishopbriggs. While loading shopping into her car, her trolley had

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rolled away, still half-full. It had thudded into his people carrier. The Pastor had accepted her apologies with good grace, and then helped her load her car. She had asked about his work. David clicked into Evangelical Mode. Their mini-discussion extended to a snack lunch in the Tesco café, which she insisted on paying for.

The following Sunday she had dressed down into jeans and a tee-shirt and attended the Sunday morning service at The Sanctuary. She returned again in the evening. Three weeks later she found God, as part of her plan. She had been smart enough to make her take-over seem natural, but she had done so effectively, completely and ruthlessly, remorselessly pursuing her own vision of what God intended for the poor people of Springburn.

It took her less than a year. She had bought the premises first, scrapped their rent, and took over responsibility for paying Utilities. She focused on a music-based worship approach, putting Holls Taylor-Woods and her girls centre stage. She also developed a family orientated programme called Family Fun and Well-Being and sponsored a free Outings Programme, including bus hires.

On weekday evenings there was a Young People's Café and Club run by a full-time Youth Organiser, a childless thirty-seven year old divorcee called Katie McAllister, a rather hard-faced woman who had also found God at The Sanctuary.

Following Sunday morning services, the Worship Centre was converted to an eatery, where serve-yourself free healthy eating meals were on offer. These were meals that Holls and her girls had prepared, purchasing the ingredients using The Sanctuary credit card which Alice provided.

As Church Secretary and Treasurer, Alice was an important person in the Taylor-Woods' family. She was the mainstay of the Church financially. It was her fiefdom, and David was at her beck and call. This control was never discussed openly with her, nor by David and Holly: to do so would be to question God's Bounty. But all three understood that this was the framework in which they operated. Alice called all the shots.

Alice, Katie and Holls made a good team, and had been dubbed "The Sisters" by their Congregation.

Numbers swelled and full members and adherents now comprised mainly of struggling single mums and quite a few not-so-elderly grannies.

The Congregation at The Sanctuary gave genuine thanks to God for sending them such a wonderful easy-going Pastor in David Taylor-Woods, a man who was so pleasing on the eye. And Pastor David was always kind, courteous and thoughtful, a man who always brought little gifts to their homes to mark birthdays and

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anniversaries, and to offer little personal prayers, and more, when the opportunity arose.

During the second year of her reign, when the private prayer sessions with David had begun, Alice funded the increase to his stipend. He was now earning £45,000 per year, gross. This amount was, considering inflation, well below what he had once earned, but sufficient for them to pretend again that they were middle class.

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His darkest secret was of last summer, when Hollis and Alice had organised a "Girls Alive Together" camp, a week living under canvas in the Trossachs. Two days before the Camp was due to begin, a photo-shoot opportunity had come up for Rowe, working on location to promote Donegal Tweed.

That evening, with Rowe safely asleep, he went downstairs to try his luck with the raven-haired waitress who had been smiling knowingly at him.

Rosheen was open to offers, she always had been, and two glasses of Pinot Grigio later she went off to make her call as David headed upstairs to shower.

Rosheen phoned her husband Johnno and advised that she had to work late and stay again to do the early breakfasts because Orla, the Owner's wife, was stuck in Londonderry as her mother had taken another turn. She would use the Staff bedroom, as in the past. Johnno was to make sure he got the kids to brush their teeth before he put them out to school and to put the dishwasher on, she hated returning to dirty plates.

Minutes later the busty Rosheen used her pass key to join that handsome stranger with the odd local burr, for a night of unrestrained and rather noisy passion. The man insisted that he was Australian, and that no, his parents were not Irish.

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The Pastor arrived at "The Sanctuary Evangelical Centre" at noon, wheeling his bike round to the rear fire escape door, where he chained it beside her car. The building had been a small scale shopping centre in its 1960's Springburn housing estate. Before David's time in charge The Sanctuary Evangelical Church had taken it over and partially re-modelled it, in an amateurish fashion.

The main Worship Centre was on the ground floor, now open plan, and completely refurbished with a state of the art sound and projection system. Alice Warren's black Mercedes Sports car was tucked under the new car porch, well hidden.

Ostensibly they were meeting to pray for her uncle in Aberdeen, who was in

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his final throws after a long fight with prostate cancer. It was their fifth session of prayer for this uncle, a man called Kenneth Montrose, if such a man existed. David and Alice had been meeting like this, regularly, for five years. Alice had a long list of people who needed prayed for.

Above the Worship Centre, on the upper level, there had been six small independent bed-sitting room housing units intended for elderly couples. Five had been converted to meeting and activity rooms. The sixth had been refurbished into a self-contained flat, which could be used by visiting Preachers.

David slipped up the external stairs and, after checking all around, fished the key from his pocket and opened the door to this flat.

The smell from the incense stick filled his nostrils. Sandalwood: it would be the traditional missionary position today. He opened the door to the bed-sitting room. The room was warm and dim, the blinds down, a small candle on the table providing the only light. Alice was already showered, already in her white robe, kneeling beside the bed, praying for them, asking ahead for forgiveness for the fornication and adultery to come.

'Hi, Alice. I'll just shower, OK?'

'Hi, David. No, I like you sweaty. And I've been waiting nearly an hour. Come, kneel and pray with me. Now.'

He slipped off his clothes and knelt beside her.

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Two hundred metres from the door that David had entered, the dapper man lowered his binoculars. He was sitting in an old silver car, parked on the street above The Sanctuary. He wore a dark green jacket of Donegal Tweed jacket. He placed his binoculars on the passenger seat. He checked his watch: he had a ferry to catch today.

'Oh Gerry Boy, the grave, the grave is a calling...' the man hummed to himself.

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At three o'clock Alice left first, leaving David to tidy up, wash the dishes, put the bed-clothes through the washing machine and tumble drier, removing the stains from their three couplings.

The man in the dark green jacket watched her go. He had been watching his target for almost six weeks, tracking his every move. He waited for thirty minutes

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then slipped up the steps as David had done. He listened at the door. The washing machine was trundling through its programme, nearing its spin cycle.

He put on his surgical gloves. He used a pick and opened the door, as he had done several time previously, checking the layout.

David was sitting on the chair at the kitchen table, texting Katie, to see if she was free for a quickie tomorrow morning, while the "Tums with Bumps" were meeting downstairs. Not once had it occurred to him that some of the Bumps might his own doing.

The spin cycle was ramping up to 1100 rpm.

The dapper man reached forward from behind with his syringe.

The washing machine had been re-loaded with David's clothes.

Twenty minutes later the visitor slipped down the steps into the gathering gloom of the late November afternoon. Four hours later, now in his own BMW, he drove up the ramp onto the Cairnryan ferry heading for Larne. On arrival he would drive to his large home in the outskirts of Belfast, back at last from a long business trip, back to his wife, his grown-up children and his grand-children.

At eight o'clock the Police Surgeon confirmed the Pastor's death by electrocution. He failed to spot the tiny red mark caused by the stab of the syringe. It was near the top of his spine under the mop of curly black hair now peppered with grey. The syringe had contained an immobilising drug which froze its victim, but left him otherwise conscious, aware of what was being said and done to him.

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Why Pastor David Taylor-Wood committed suicide by attaching bare wires to his own testicles would remain an unsolved mystery.

No record exists of what the dapper man said to Gerard Thomas Maguire as he attached the wires with superglue.

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The Sanctuary Evangelical Centre is no more. It was burned down by vandals two weeks after the Church imploded amid acrimonious claims about their Pastor's multiple inseminations.

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Funded by Alice, The Sisters stuck together, keeping their secrets from each other, while denying that Pastor David would take such liberties with his vulnerable flock.

The insurance money has had now been paid and the site is under redevelopment to become a new Lidl store, in association with Warren Developments Ltd.

With the support of Alice Warren, and under her direction, "Holly Woods and Her Girls" are currently making their second UK Summer Tour with their "The Gospel Sings Out" choir.' The Choir has two CD albums in the US Gospel Hits Charts and a new one due out in October, to catch the Christmas Market.

The Sisters are planning a "New Sanctuary Evangelical Church", perhaps in Kirkintilloch, where Alice owns a suitable site. But Alice has insisted that first they must find a suitable Pastor to lead them, a man who must have excellent hands-on abilities.

The question "Why did he do it?" would haunt his family and close friends for the rest of their lives.