

Janey

'Well Janey, what's on your agenda for the weekend? Over to Rothesay again?'

'Yes, I suppose so, Mr Henry, but only if Mum's up for it.'

'I'll leave you to tidy up then?'

'Yes, see you Monday, Mr Henry.'

'Thanks, eh, yes, Monday. Monday it is then, Janey.'

Sometimes he would hang about, sitting at the computer, humming to himself but tonight he seemed keen to be away. He had probably been given a deadline by Gertrude.

Henry Thom thundered down the stairs, along the corridor and through the back door, slamming it behind him, as usual. She moved to the window and looked down into the car park at the rear of the building to watch as he eased his bulk into his new Audi TT. Black again. He had agonised for weeks about changing to classic silver or the new midnight blue that Janey had preferred but had not dared to mention. As always, Henry chose black.

ooOoo

Elite Cosmetic Dentistry was quiet now, the others long gone to their Friday night revels. She glanced up: six-twenty-three. Her own surgery was spick and span. As the Dental Nurse for the Senior Partner she had additional responsibilities. She moved to check the other four surgeries and the two hygienists' rooms, pleased they were also acceptable. Janey had taken on this duty five years ago when Henry had bought out the retiring founder and changed the name and ethos of the practice, moving upmarket, 'expanding and re-tooling', as he called it.

It had taken Janey a while to get the other nurses and hygienists up to her high standards. She had taken things slowly. Her method was to wait until the others left for the night and then go over everything they had done and re-do it her way. Those who did not like it left. Those who benefited from her training stayed. Now the place mostly ran like clockwork. But Janey still checked everything, every night, moving things about a little.

A car horn peeped. She looked into the car park. Her sister Brenda, older by two years, was waving up impatiently. Brenda had become more dominating since her

Songbird

husband Trevor had died of an overdose three years earlier. She was the reason Janey was going to Rothesay tonight. Now that Brenda and their older sister Annette had taken over the Rothesay project, Janey had been resisting these visits. However Brenda had cornered her last week by unexpectedly breezing into their Mum's flat in Knightswood while Janey was washing Jean's hair. By putting Janey on the spot, in front of Mum, she extracted a promise that she would go with them this weekend.

Nowadays everything had to be done at a rush and exactly as Brenda had planned. Brenda was good at planning, and she made sure everyone knew it. By planning Brenda had risen through the ranks of local government to become Chief Executive. By planning she had snared Trevor from his then fiancée. But Brenda had failed in one thing. Children had refused to spring forth from her womb in accord with her plan, despite every treatment known to medical science. Perhaps that was why she had increasingly taken Janey under her wing, helping and guiding her along life's bumpy road, nurturing her, in her bossy, irritating way, as the successful all-knowing older sister.

Janey waved and mouthed 'two minutes'. She sorted her make-up and tidied her hair. Taking a few deep breaths, she donned her coat, grabbed her handbag and weekend roller rucksack, and slowly made her way out to face the familiar verbal onslaught.

Janey Wren was not in the least prepared for what was about to happen.

Nor was Henry Thom, who was leaving Majestic Wines, his car loaded with his weekend supplies. He was heading for Treetops, the mansion five miles away where he lived with Gertrude, his elderly mother.

Watching

Henry Thom and Janey Wren were almost opposites. He was tall, bulky, sloppy, generous and almost careless with money. Easy for him, she thought, he has plenty. She was small, thin, fastidious, smartly dressed from M&S, careful with money and almost frugal. He was 49, she was 51. They had worked together for twenty-four years. She thought of it as her marriage. When he was at the Practice, under her influence, she tended and protected him with wifely care.

When he was not there with Janey, Henry Thom was controlled by Gertrude. The Audi TT was the only toy he was allowed, or so he claimed. At other times he drove the 500 SEL Mercedes, in his role as Gertrude's chauffeur and dutiful son. For weekdays there was a day carer, currently Francia, from Care4U@Home and a cleaning lady, currently Elisha, from ExecuMoppets. The names of these women changed continually, under Gertrude's complaining whine.

For years, mainly in the summer months, Janey had been secretly watching Henry from a hill about a mile from Treetops. Initially her cover for the occasional passer-by was bird watching, using a cheap pair of binoculars she had bought from the Marie Curie shop at Bearsden Cross, near the Practice. But very soon, by sitting quietly for hours as she did, she became enthralled by birds and began to bring food for them that she bought in bulk online from Wild Bird Direct. She concealed bird feeders and fat balls in the bushes and spread seeds and dried mealworms for ground feeders. She bought bashed apples from Alfie at Roots and Fruits and sliced them up for the blackbirds. It became increasingly important to make the effort to feed them in winter, especially when the weather was cold, wet and windy. She came to think of them as her friends. She upgraded to expensive and more powerful binoculars and joined the Scottish Wildlife Trust who owned Loch Ardinning nearby, where she was a voluntary litter-picker.

She knew it was silly but she gave names to her bird friends. When she was in her Henry-watching niche, she often talked to them about her plans for them all, after Gertrude's demise, when she would make them a proper wildlife garden at Treetops.

As Janey became more of an outdoors person she began to walk more in the area surrounding Treetops, hoping that she might meet Henry, but without success. As she walked, she bagged many new species, watching for migrants and any unusual visitors.

Songbird

Often she used the shuttle bus from Milngavie Station to Mugdock Country Park, where she walked its many wooded trails, listening for the woodpecker rattling out his territory and calling for a mate. Each spring she looked forward to her first cuckoo with his distinctive *cuck-oo, cuck-oo* booming across the moors. She had read that the female also sang, but that hers was a quieter burble, a sound that Janey still hoped to hear.

Her Mum and sisters had found the new outdoors Janey strange. The Wrens, despite their name, were not outdoors people, except maybe Brenda, after a fashion, with her horses.

Treetops was modern, huge, and set in four and a half acres, with its own pond and waterfall, surrounded to the south by a semi-circle of tall beech trees. The views to the North and West were spectacular, out over the Camel's Hump that is Dumgoyne, to the sliver of Loch Lomond, with Ben Lomond and the Arrochar Alps in the distance.

Even with her new binoculars Janey could not see any birds near the house but she knew they would be there in abundance, especially blackbirds and thrushes who love lawns. From early spring to late autumn Gertrude could often be seen in the garden, her assistant Henry working under the close direction of Mummy. Sheltered from the winds in her cosy little niche among the rocks, Janey had tracked his every move, watching as he frequently dismounted to help the portly Gertrude, easing her up from her kneeling pad onto her Zimmer then supporting her as she waddled to the next place before helping her ease herself down again.

From her vantage point Janey had also scrutinised Racetops, the stud farm which Gertrude owned. It lay below Treetops about a mile away to the east. Gertrude, who had once hoped to become a Vet, had inherited her mother's passion for racing and racehorses. Despite her advanced years and many ailments, Gertrude was an active owner. When she was not tormenting her day-carers and domestics, she was often to be found at Racetops, terrorising her Manager, Alistair Ross, his assistant Nikki, and the stable girls.

ooOoo

At the Practice, Helen, the Receptionist had learned to immediately pass Gertrude's frequent calls upstairs. Janey had become accustomed to receiving the sharp edge of Gertrude's overbearing and strongly accented tongue, particularly if her son was treating a patient and unable to respond instantly.

Songbird

By listening to Henry's daily grumbles over many years Janey knew of Mummy's continuing dirge at her son's choice of Dentistry over Medicine. It seemed to Janey that Gertrude used this disappointment and Henry's many other perceived failures, to demean her son, all part of her regime of control. Indeed there was little that Janey Wren did not know of this ageing tyrant who had kept her son completely focussed on her selfish and exacting needs, stealing his life from him, and denying Janey her dream.

Gertrude

Gertrude Thom, born Gertrude Amelia Hellf, 1932, Munich, was the only child of a German Jewish father, Henrik Alberto Hellf, and a Scottish Presbyterian mother, Marjory Ann Sanderson. When Gertrude was two-years old they had hurried to Scotland to inherit the family home and business on the death of Marjory's widowed father, James Sanderson, a wealthy shipping agent and ship-owner.

In Munich, Dr Henrik Hellf had been a General Practitioner pandering to the wealthy Jewish community. Henrik, despite his poor English, proved to be a natural businessman and took readily to running The Sanderson Line, which flourished during and after the war. When Gertrude was four years old, Marjory fell from her horse and inconveniently broke her neck, leaving Henrik to dote on an ever more demanding Gertrude, spoiling her badly.

At 32, the rather manly Gertrude was yet to marry. The handsome fair-haired Viking that was George Thom worked as an accountant for Henrik. At her father's behest, and hoping for a life of ease, George had been induced to marry the apple of Henrik's eye. George, closing his eyes and his ears, did his duty, siring them an heir, after which he was remaindered.

Spurned and relieved in equal measure, George found his satisfaction elsewhere but, with an eye on the money, persisted as a nominal husband for a further five years. He then pocketed a generous divorce settlement; married the most promising of his string of fillies, and moved to South Africa to grow wine and shoot big game, disappearing from their lives.

Soon after the divorce, Henrik had sold up the business to create a substantial investment portfolio, before completing his comfortable life with a comfortable death, slipping under while cruising in the Caribbean.

The persisting reminder of Papa Henrik and his legacy, scowled over Janey and Henry from the Surgery Wall of Fame and Family. The dominant image was of Henrik Alberto Hellf, in sepia, standing tall, be-whiskered in the fashion of the Kaiser, alone and stern on his graduation day before the first great war.

To his left hung the obligatory wedding portrait showing George sporting a smirk while being clutched fiercely by his hefty wife, she forcing a wide mouthed smile to reveal large widely spaced teeth.

Songbird

To the right of Henrik's photograph hung the graduation photograph of a young Henry with Mummy in attendance, dressed as for a state funeral, posed in the Quadrangle of Glasgow University. In this image Gertrude offered a resonance of Henrik's scowl, while the youthful Henry evinced an unsure smile, probably springing more from relief than joy at being allowed, at last, to escape the rigours of academia.

The fourth heavy black frame held Henry's Degree parchment. It had been eventually awarded in the (very) Ordinary, and only after many resits plus a generous donation from Gertrude towards "Ongoing Research within the Faculty of Medicine".

In that long ago photograph the young Henry Thom was slimmer, blonder and passingly attractive, a distant echo of his handsome father. Although he had inherited his mother's thick lips at least he had been spared her teeth. This picture of the younger Henry was the one that Janey carried in her heart and to her bed each night, for many years blind to the steady morphing into middle age of her perceived Adonis.

As the years passed Janey came to realise that it was most probably living with Gertrude's horsey teeth that had led Henry to dentistry.

Waiting

Janey loved Henry and, although she had no verbal or physical evidence to back it up, she believed he loved her. In the beginning, and the absence of a wife or lady-friend, Janey had wondered if he was otherwise inclined. Over time she realised that, despite his bluster, he was shy and inexperienced.

Over the years she had fallen into a habit. At a random time each day, always when they had a patient trapped in the chair, she would accidentally touch or brush against him. More recently she had wondered if he had lost interest, but no, she still felt his stare, now and then catching him before his eyes flicked away. She used these moments to fuel her late night fantasies.

Unlike her three sisters Janey was not experienced. In fact what she knew of intimacy came second-hand from books, magazines, television and films. During their first years together her fantasy nocturnal encounters with him were nearly platonic, a modern version of Jane Austen. She knew that she was supposed to want children but for Janey they had never featured in her list of longings. She could not imagine coping with the clutter, fuss and disruption they would cause.

About five years into their relationship, while on a Dental Nurse Refresher course in Manchester, Janey had dared, in the anonymity of her hotel bedroom, to view an adult movie innocuously entitled: "Boy meets Special Girl". She had been aghast at the penetrations and mess portrayed as normal and necessary. She almost switched it off but, fired by curiosity, longing, and that recurring sense of needing to find out what she was missing, she had watched it to the final exultant ersatz cries and lewd smiles that heralded the fulfilment of true love.

This singular excursion into eroticism had set her afire for several months, spurring her to establish her habit of touching Henry. But as she matured, unrequited during the remainder of her thirties and through her forties, these smouldering dreams slowly cooled. Gradually her dreams faded to meeting of minds rather than bodies. Nowadays, when she envisaged herself and Henry enjoying Treetops after Gertrude had galloped off to horsey heaven, she saw herself with her birds and wildlife garden, and Henry with his ride-on mower and his horses. Of course, Henry would insist on one or more dogs.

First love

Janey's first love was singing. She had sung all her life; in Sunday School, in the church choir, and in a ladies-only choir. Eventually, at her Dad's insistence, she had plucked up courage and auditioned for the Bearsden Choir. There, for the last eighteen years, she had sung second soprano, embedded between Colette and Rita, in the third row, amongst the group of older women. Colette and Rita were the only two people in the choir she spoke to and she stuck close to them; avoiding the social evenings that served to renew the underlying bickering endemic in every choir.

From time to time a new man would join the choir. In the main these men were older, married or otherwise unappealing. On two occasions when a suitable man had joined, she had dared to smile at him. It seemed she was invisible. Both men were had soon taken into marriage by others. In the choir as in the rest of her life, Janey was someone you would not easily notice.

Apart from her Mum, her sisters, and the odd coffee with Helen from Reception at weekends, Janey had no one else in her life but Henry and her bird friends.

Nowadays her focus was much more on Henry's health, on his increasing obesity and breathlessness. In recent times she had brought him salads and other low-fat snacks for his lunch. He always thanked her, greedily scoffing her calorie-counted offerings, before ringing down to confirm his standard order to Helen. Ten minutes later Helen's assistant, Anita, would breeze in from Murdo's Corner Shop with three bacon and egg rolls, smothered with brown sauce, a maxi bag of salt and vinegar crisps and a magnum sized, double shot, full cream latte. Janey never commented. She knew about his fragile ego and his own ability to hold a grudge over long years.

While there was Gertrude, Janey must bide her time and continue to fuel her hope with his reactions to her small daily excursions.

Do-it-yourself

Janey was already buying her own flat in Partickhill when her parents, Jean and Alec, got the chance as sitting tenants, to buy their four-in-a-block cottage flat in Knightswood.

At Alec's repeated request Janey had re-mortgaged and funded the purchase. He had always wanted to be seen as a home owner. Over the next two years she had also helped with the upgrading of the kitchen, the windows and the new bathroom. She led and Alec assisted as goffer. Alec followed up by painting and decorating to Jean's bizarre taste for garish embossed vinyl wallpaper and bright psychedelic colours.

When Brenda uncovered Janey's financial involvement, she tried to muscle in, and buy Janey out. Janey, with the staunch support of Alec, had resisted. When interest rates dipped Janey had re-mortgaged a second time and paid for new central heating.

In the process of renovating her own one-bedroomed flat in Caird Drive, and helping with Knightswood, Janey had learned a lot about DIY. She had taken evening classes in joinery, plastering and basic plumbing. When Alec died Janey took over the day to day maintenance of Knightswood. But she hated being up ladders. The only thing that defeated her was painting and papering. However her sister Annette had found Graham who was quiet, quick and affordable. And Graham actually listened to what she wanted done.

Although it had never been formally discussed, Janey believed that the understanding between her Mum and her sisters was that the Knightswood flat would become hers in due course. Brenda, ever carping from the side-lines, and Connie during her infrequent impromptu visits from Australia, had repeatedly told Janey that she was wasting her time and money on Knightswood. Annette had told she was mad; that Knightswood would be a poor investment. They had been wrong. Ten years on Janey saw what these flats sold for. And they were always in high demand as rentals. And *hers* was in a good location, handy for buses, trains and shopping.

Her back-up retirement plan was doing well.

Brenda

Brenda's pale blue Jaguar sat in the narrow driveway, its right indicator flashing. A steady stream of pedestrians were crossing in front of the car, both ways. The digital display showed 18.34. The usual Friday night grid-lock was blocking the exit from the practice onto Drymen Road. Getting out and turning right would require boldness.

Janey did not drive. She had tried, taking more than forty lessons and failing three times before giving up. It seemed that although she was good with her hands, her feet were the problem. In the end she came to the view that the cost of running even a small car would be too much of a drain on her retirement fund.

'Brenda, your seat belt light is flashing.'

'Wimp! There are no seat belts on horses, Janey.'

Brenda drummed her hands on the steering wheel, beating out a tattoo of exasperation. 'Come on, give us a break. Come on, you arseholes.'

The traffic unlocked and started to flow. Brenda edged the car out of the driveway across the pavement, forcing the pedestrians to give way. Riding the clutch, she inched the front of the car onto the road, forcing the oncoming traffic to move over the centre line, slowing the opposing stream of traffic. No one gave way to her. Some drivers honked at her and she snarled back a curse.

'Fuck off, arseholes.'

A queue of people built up on the pavement on both sides of the car. A dog was barking loudly and leaping up, its claws scratching the door on Janey's side. A slight girl in a Bearsden Primary uniform was hauling on its leash but the Alsatian was it too powerful. The child's mother stood behind a pushchair laden with several bags of messages, watching with tired, exasperated eyes.

Brenda rolled down the window on Janey's side.

'I know you. You're Moira Chisholm. You used to work for me in Land Services. Expect a bill for the damage your dog has done to this vehicle. Start saving your pennies, Moira. It'll be thousands of pounds. Rely on it.'

She closed the window.

Songbird

Janey cringed away from the woman's angry, disbelieving face. Unlike her sisters, Janey hated conflict. As she looked away to her right, past the glowering Brenda, Janey saw a small red car coming slowly towards them, driven by a white-haired man. It had a long tail of cars backed up in its wake.

'Brenda, look, there's going to be a gap.'

What neither she nor Brenda saw was that several cars back a Porsche was pulling out to overtake the red car. Looking to the right they see the white Transit van screaming out a side street and hurtling towards them from the left.

Brenda let in the clutch and gunned the blue car into the path of the accelerating Porsche. Half a second after the head-on impact with the Porsche, the Transit van thumped into the rear of the Jaguar which was already climbing the sloping bonnet of the Porsche. The additional energy from the shunt fired the Jaguar up and over. The Porsche, its driver already dead but with his foot jammed on the accelerator, continued to power forwards, forcing the Transit backwards, both vehicles slewing sideways into the pedestrians frozen to the pavement.

The Jaguar completed its trajectory to crunch into a lighting standard. Brenda's head was subjected to severe trauma. Janey lurched forward into the airbag, mildly concussed by the sudden deceleration. The red car stopped just before it hit the back end of the Porsche. ooOoo

The following week the headline in the Milngavie & Bearsden Herald read:

Horror Smash on Drymen Road:

Three drivers and four pedestrians die.

Young family and dog have miracle escape.

Henry

As the first ambulance was arriving at the crash scene on Drymen Road, Henry sat outside the main gate at Treetops. He waved at the CCTV camera. The gate did not open as expected. After a short wait, he scrabbled in the glove compartment for his remote, used it to open the gates open, then accelerated the car up the long driveway.

Henry used the dongle on his car key fob to open the door of the left hand garage. The garage lights fluttered to life and Henry rolled the Audi TT sports car forward into its slot beside his ride-on mower and other garden machinery. When the sensors detected the rear end was clear, the heavy duty garage door hummed closed and the all-round locking system fired the bolts to secure it.

He closed his eyes and waited, counting under his breath: 'one thousand, two thousand, three thousand...'

When he reached twenty thousand he began to feel uneasy and stopped. Normally by this point his mother would have unlocked the side door, her strident whine listing her usual litany of complaints and demands.

Easing the car door open, he fiddled his long legs round and out then heaved himself up, arched his spine, and rolled his shoulders and neck to relieve the chronic pain that was part of a dentist's lot. He reached across to the passenger seat for the box of fine wines that Mummy had ordered him to bring from Majestic Wines. He would leave the illicit port, brandy, beer and crisps in the boot to collect later, when Mummy was securely asleep. Only then would he settle down with his secret DVDs to indulge in his usual Friday late night fantasy session. As he moved to the pass-door he saw that it was ajar.

His chest tightened. He could not get air in or out. His heart began to pound. How could the door be unlocked? His mother kept every perimeter door and window locked and alarmed, always, even when he was at home with her. The attempted burglary four years earlier had spooked them both badly. They were now highly disciplined.

He could not make his legs work. As he fumbled for his mobile phone, the case of wine tumbled and smashed onto the green painted garage floor. A puddle of wine oozed out sparking in his mind the rhyme: 'Red and green should never be seen.'

Songbird

He stabbed "Home". After a few seconds he could hear the loud slow "Drinng, Drinng" from the phone console on the reception hall table and then, twenty-five seconds later, the louder insistent "Ring-Ring-Ring-Ring" of the two internal back-up bells. There were three even louder bells outside in the garden. Maybe Mummy was outside, at the far side of the house. The back-up bells rang for ninety seconds and then he heard his own voice announce, fiercely:

"This is the Thom Residence. If this is a sales call, be warned that I will report you to the Telephone Preference Service! Otherwise, leave a short message." Mummy had made him record this five times before she was satisfied.

The apparent normality of this familiar message released Henry from his spasm and he found he was able to breathe. He focussed on taking large gulps, as he had been taught as a child by the psychologist. He made his right leg move. It was the hardest thing he had ever done in his life.

A thousand possibilities flashed through his mind at once. Hairdresser: had he forgotten to collect her? Shopping with that Killearn woman from the Glasgow-German Society? Was Mummy at Racetops, a problem with one of the horses? Had she taken a taxi to Dobbies? How could she not have set the alarm, not discovered the door was unset?

His hands drifted up to the handle and slowly pulled the pass-door open. He wanted his voice to be firm, commanding, but it came as a squeak: 'Mummy, are you there? Mummy? Mummy are you all right?'

He moved to the kitchen where he saw the spatters of blood on the floor. His eyes raced along the line of spots to the half-open door to the morning conservatory. He saw Mummy's feet and legs pointing towards him. One shoe was missing. Her dress was rucked up and he could see a dark stain at the crotch of the fawn coloured support stockings that encased her heavy thighs. Only then did he notice the rank smell of urine and faeces. His knees gave way and his large lunch returned depositing itself in front of him.

He was outside his body now, high in a safe corner of the room, watching himself crawl through his own vomit towards Mummy. He saw what looked like pale mince leaking from her cranium.

Was it called the frontal lobe and or the temporal lobe? This uncertainty brought the immediate humiliating memory of Dr Pattison in Physiology springing a round-the-class quiz on them, moving his long wooden pointer from one part of the

Songbird

brain to another, shouting randomly the name of the person to answer; and his own miserable score of six wrong answers out of six questions.

His breakfast ejected and splattered over his mother's legs.

He heard a deep animal wail but did not recognise his own voice.

Taken

The Police estimated it had taken Henry Thom around seventy minutes to make his fingers dial 999. It took the call handler nine minutes and forty-three seconds to make sense of his incoherent gabble. They needed the Fire Service to cut open the main gates to allow access for the emergency vehicles but two younger policemen had already shinned over the high fence to run ahead and report back to Control. The Scene of Crime Officers began their work.

Six hours passed during which DI Willie McMaster questioned Henry closely. After conferring privately with DS Neil Jackson, McMaster's preliminary conclusion was that Henry was innocent of administering the repeated blows which had killed his mother: Henry was nearly six feet tall and left-handed. The assailant was short, right-handed, and perhaps female. There was no sign of the murder weapon. Willie was one of Henry's patients and knew that he was a Mummy's boy. The possibility remained that Henry had contracted the killing but it seemed unlikely. Bearsden's finest elected to leave him to stew and keep an eye on his movements, telephone calls and emails. They left Henry in the morning room, stunned, covered in vomit, unable to comprehend what was happening.

The recording unit from the CCTV system was missing, ripped out. There was no jewellery in either the safe or bedroom drawers. The artwork had been taken. Henry's extensive stamp collection was gone as were the Mercedes and the new Range Rover, used for trailing the horsebox and for winter snows.

Why they had killed Gertrude rather than leave her bound and gagged, no one could immediately fathom. Perhaps several hundred carers and cleaners who had been lashed by her tongue over the years could have offered a clue.

A young policewoman was assigned to sit with Henry. Gemma Brownlee had been a patient before Henry had moved the Practice to Denplan. But he did not recognise her. As next-of-kin, he signed the forms to authorise Gertrude's autopsy, ticking the box to donate her remains to medical science, as she had always insisted she would do for him if he passed through before her. Gemma suggested that he call his GP. Was it Dr Mathieson from the Bearsden Medical Centre adjacent to the Practice? He nodded. She phoned. Bill Mathieson arrived quickly. He lived nearby, in Blanefield. After checking Henry over, he declared him alive, and supplied two sleeping tablets plus a script for more.

Songbird

With Henry's agreement, the doctor ordered up an Agency Nurse to care for Henry until he was over the worst.

Bill Mathieson had known Henry and his mother for many years. His parting advice to Henry was, 'Pull yourself together man, and get a dog.'

Fleeced

"Rapide Responders" eventually arrived. Johan Marianovicz, the alarm guru and founder of his fast growing company, checked the alarm system over with the Police. Together they deduced that the perpetrator(s) had known the code and understood the workings of the system.

Johan cornered Henry and suggested that Rapide post a security van across the entrance, a cost not covered by the annual contract, he regretted. This would only be until the CCTV System and Entry Gate could be repaired and until Mr Thom had recovered.

Johan would do his very best to effect the necessary repairs but this might take a week to ten days, provided the parts could be sourced from China. Air freighting would, sadly, be another extra, a cost not included etc.

Henry agreed and signed the document. By doing so he was unaware that this five minute consultation, given on a no-fault basis, had committed Henry to the payment a further Advice and Arrangement fee amounting to £535 plus VAT. It also authorised further extra charges, not covered by the Contract, which would be also added to the existing monthly Direct Debit (variable). Johan had brow-beaten Henry into setting this up four years earlier, as a condition of releasing the codes for the original Rapide installation. Johan was merely adhering to his personal mantra of making every call a sales call.

The temporary Rapide security van was never seen. Perhaps it was extremely well camouflaged. Nonetheless it cost Henry £125 +VAT per hour, twenty four hours a day for seven days, as per the agreement he had signed.

Nibbled

At five-thirty the next morning Henry Thom lay asleep in his bed, showered, dressed in his Calvin Klein pyjamas and doped with the much more powerful sleeping pills supplied and administered by Philip Brown, the tall black muscular nurse from the @Your Command nursing agency.

Philip had waited in a layby near Treetops until he was sure that the last of the police vehicles had left before driving through the unguarded gate to Henry's assistance.

His real name was Felipe Debroune. His mother's roots were in West Africa but when Filipe was born she was living in Manchester. His father, from the Irish community, had donated his genes before moving on, leaving Felipe, aged three, and his mother aged twenty to fend for themselves. Filipe was soon claimed by the care system and now alone against the world, had started his long climb out of poverty and abuse.

Felipe was sprawled on the sofa in the larger of the two home cinemas speed-watching his way through Henry's DVD cache. Being highly experienced, Filipe had easily winkled this hoard from its hiding place. Perhaps he might see himself starring in one of those still to be viewed. He watched dispassionately, as a form of Continuous Professional Development for the other strand to his late night hands-on nursing/massage activities, and the daytime home visits which complimented his intermittent career as a porn star and as a male escort.

He sipped an excellent coffee from the Thom Nespresso machine which was now relocated to the boot of his modest work vehicle, an ageing white Fiat Panda. Meanwhile under a protective shroud, in the secure underground car park of his anonymous Glasgow city-centre penthouse, was a red Honda S2000 soft top convertible. This vehicle was used for personal pleasure or when providing services for the Elegante Escorts agency. He found this escort work to be useful means of grooming the late night 'nursing' clients who provided the most profitable part of his portfolio of inter-locking enterprises.

In the secret compartment of Felipe's large red medical rucksack were several objects of value which the raiders had missed, due to their haste. He had lots of time to make another sweep later, in full daylight. On past experience, Henry would be out cold for a minimum of eight hours. Felipe was on a schedule. He worked hard. He had a plan.

Songbird

In parallel to viewing Henry's DVDs, the nurse was working on his laptop editing his first batch of video clips for this latest gig. Later he would upload the finished version to his secure website, Nurse Philip Calls. This site was accessible only to his flock of well-heeled Subscribers, mostly older women, some of whom were ageing celebs. Each paid £100 per month to share in his erotic exploits which he filmed with a head-cam and/or his iPhone strategically mounted on its mini-tripod.

His technique was to create voyeuristic scenarios of his magnificent body by walking naked through the rooms of whichever house he found himself in. During editing he added lewd commentary in which he described in detail what the lucky recipient of the ministrations of Nurse Philip would soon enjoy.

Treetops was the biggest and most promising venue he had ever visited. It had everything; a Jacuzzi, a sauna with an ice water plunge pool, a Canadian hot tub located beside the smaller conservatory, an internal swimming pool with two twenty-five metre jogging lanes, a smaller external pool with a diving board, a billiard room, a separate pool room, two other conservatories, four lounges, a banquet-sized dining room, a smaller family-sized dining room, twelve bedrooms, (all en suite), two home cinemas and three studies and a large library. He intended to make full use of them and, by careful editing, take enough footage to create a mini-series.

Filipe neither touched alcohol nor consorted with men; both for religious reasons. Nor did he smoke or take drugs. He kept himself in good shape and reckoned that with a following wind he had another fifteen good years ahead as a top earner.

ooOoo

In his slumbers Henry was not thinking of his mother. In his sleep he smiled. His dreams were filled with thoughts of Janey dressed as one of his ladies of the night. Now Mummy was gone, Janey could come to him at last.

When Henry re-surfaced from his torpor, Filipe used gentle intimidation to ensure that Henry completed the necessary paperwork. Unfortunately this had been overlooked on the previous evening when Henry had been delicate, Felipe explained. But now it was urgent. During this process Henry was too muddled by his medication to detect that he was revealing his bank account details, password, Credit Card numbers and the pin numbers.

Filipe then helped Henry to shower and dress then returned him to his bed. At his suggestion he made Henry scrambled egg on toast and poured him a small

Songbird

brandy to help settle his nerves. The brandy was laced. Henry drank greedily and within minutes had drifted below the horizon of consciousness, his face sinking into his congealing late breakfast.

After wiping Henry's the egg from Henry's face, Felipe tucked the duvet around his patient. He carried the tray back to the kitchen and left it on the work surface, meticulously washed, dried and polished the brandy glass before returning to the middle of a shelf of similar glasses.

Picking up his rucksack he left Henry gently snoring and went to start a new phase of his life, by starting start the cautious process of transferring Henry's wealth. He would be discreet and not over greedy, using a technique known as *nibbling*, in order not to alert the Bank. In the unlikely event that the police would investigate the nurse's visit, they would find almost no trace of him. He had worn surgical gloves throughout his time at Treetops.

Filipe did not return as promised. He now had far more than he had hoped for. He emailed his resignation to @Your Command. When he needed another job, there were many other nursing agencies. He had excellent references in a variety of names.

For Henry the nightmares of what had happened would return in the days and nights to follow. He would attempt to escape them by diving into a series of bottles.

Annette

Twenty four hours after the Drymen Road crash Janey drifted up from her medication.

Annette, her older sister by twelve years, was at her bedside. Janey's corner of the four-bed ward was dominated by a small jungle of flowers from her sister Connie, younger by three years. Bob and Connie had emigrated to Sydney fifteen years earlier, on his promotion to become one of several Vice-Presidents of HSBC (Australasia).

'Ah you've come back to me then, Janey darling.'

'Mmm. Where am I?'

'Ward 47 in the Western. You're fine, just mild concussion.'

'What happened?'

'Later, Janey. Just take it easy, darling. You'll be fine, just give it time.'

Janey drifted down again and the background chatter of voices faded.

Annette, aware of the regulations on the use of mobile phones, went outside to use her mobile.

'Mum, Janey's doing well. Is Sadie there with you?'

'Annette, honey, how could it happen? First your Daddy goes to Australia with Connie and now Janey's in the same ward as you? Has she got cancer too? What about me Annette? Who's left to look after me with my diabetes and that other thing, you know, that used to be called asthma.'

'It's called COPD Mum, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disorder. It just means you have to take it easy, try not to stress yourself. It's all that to-ing and fro-ing to Rothesay that's wearing you down. Is Sadie still there with you?'

'No, honey, she's gone downstairs to take Benjie to the pictures. But she said she would bring in a Chinese so we can watch Strictly together.'

Annette smiled at the thought of Sadie, Jean's neighbour from the flat below and Benjie, her Staffordshire bull terrier, sitting side by side at the cinema. These

Songbird

odd images were one of the funny aspects of her mother's dementia that Annette and her sisters enjoyed sharing.

'Right then Mum, I'll call you again, when I get home. So, it'll be about eleven when I ring you. So, make sure to take the phone to bed with you, OK?'

'Annette, where's Brenda? She said she was taking me for a sail down the Clyde to Rothesay, to measure it up for new curtains. Did she go to the pictures with Benjie too?'

'I'll tell you later, Mum, don't worry about it. So, I've got to go now, Mum. Ring you later, bye-bye.'

ooOoo

Annette had got used to coping without her husband, Carson. And now that Brenda had gone on ahead too, she would have to watch out for Mum alone. And try to get Janey to help with Rothesay.

Annette had worked across the city at The Royal, for Dr Kahn, in Urology. Eight years ago Carson had been found to have prostate cancer. Dr Kahn had arranged to have him transferred to his list. Annette had tracked Carson's rapid demise. Fourteen weeks from its discovery the cancer had left her high and dry in a tidy mortgage-free semi-detached in Bearsden, hatching a substantial nest-egg of ISAs and Investment Bonds.

She and Carson had suffered and survived three miscarriages before settling to a life for two. At forty-nine Carson had given up as a Purser on Cruise Ships to take on a job in accounts alongside her at The Royal. Both were cautious. She had always had her garden and house, Carson his new car every three years and his growing collection of model ships. Although they had bickered, mostly they had got along fine. In the past she had enjoyed the free cruises, had seen as much of the world as she wanted to see, and had lots of good memories. Now her focus was Bearsden, Knightswood and Rothesay.

Carson had always resisted her ideas for the house, claiming the cost/benefit ratio was against it. But Annette knew that it was because he had been unwilling to put up with the slightest interference to his model-building. His models dominated every room in the house. She wanted rid of them. Declan, a lab tech in Haematology that Carson had made friends with, came to look at Carson's ship models and advised that they were high-quality, worth money. She agreed that he could put a few on eBay. They sold well. Over a six month period she and Declan sold them all, garnering nearly a hundred thousand pounds in total. She gave Declan seven

Songbird

thousand pounds towards a replacement car. He in return acted as her chauffeur, although she was careful not to abuse his kindness, always paying for his petrol and a bit over.

And then Daddy, Alec Wren, had died of a heart attack while running to catch a bus, throwing the burden of looking after Jean onto her. But Janey was a good help with Jean, when she not bird-watching.

With the cash from the models she had embarked on her dream projects; a small Kitchen extension that gave her a utility room and an extra toilet, a new bathroom, fitted wardrobes, re-roofing, new garden fences, and a new garden hut, in memory of Carson and his ship models. Within two years of his death nearly everything was the way Annette had always dreamed it could be. But now, six years on, it was looking a bit tired. She wanted to get smartened up, just in case.

Living alone again had suited her. She lived quietly, continued working until the first bout of pancreatic cancer struck five years ago. She had the chemo and radio-therapy. Janey had stayed until she recovered. She went into remission which lasted for two years. More chemo and more radio-therapy and Janey had come again to help her. Again it receded.

Three months ago her appetite vanished overnight. She knew what would follow. She had always been thin, like her sisters. Now she was very thin. But she was a fighter, like Brenda and Connie. She told everyone who would listen that she would fight it. Her next course of a new chemo would start on Monday. Janey had promised to stay with her in Bearsden again. She had the painter, Graham coming on Monday too. And Rothesay was only half-finished.

Brenda had told her she had recently bought a re-possession nearly-new flat in Troon and that it needed redecorating. She would ask Graham. And then there were Brenda's other properties, the rental ones at Glasgow Harbour that Trevor had bought up in the slump. And Brenda's big place in Thortonhall with her string of horses; her substitute children. And her ten holiday rental villas on Tenerife and her twenty-unit apartment block on Majorca. Brenda had hinted at other investments, deals that Trevor had done over the years, but she had never given any details. It was all too much to think about. She already had enough on her plate with Rothesay.

But the Rothesay house was a menace, a curse. The family place, as their mother had immediately started calling it, was a large sandstone villa on the front, near the pier. It was a run-down shabby wreck, just as the alcoholic bachelor Thomas Devine,

Songbird

Turf Accountant (retired), had been all of his life. If only he had left it to someone other than their Mum, Annette had thought.

But Thomas had no other relatives to leave it to but his sister Jean. Annette had agreed with Brenda that it should be dumped at once. But it was legally their Mum's and Jean would not have it, taken by delusions of grandeur and the impossible dream of living there as some sort of Duchess from one of her Peoples' Friend stories. And of course Janey had sided with their Mum against them, supplying small amounts of cash for sticking plaster repairs, fuelling Jean's fantasy.

Brenda had eventually intervened with the offer of cash to refurbish it, promising Jean that it would be magnificent. After a bit of pressure, and working together, they had persuaded Jean to sign the papers. Janey was legally out of the loop.

But their plan was to do it up only to a standard sufficient to make it presentable enough to sell in the future, when Jean Wren had flown up to be with her Alec and Thomas. It was accepted between Annette and Brenda that it would be unlikely to make a profit but hopefully they would make it wash its face. This aspiration was never discussed with Jean or Janey.

Annette's contribution would be to project manage it, and try to keep the costs to a minimum which she had done single-handed. But it was a struggle. Janey was suddenly too busy bird-watching, some project for the Scottish Wildlife people, she had claimed.

Annette was an outsider to the tribe of tradesmen who plied their wares on Bute. They saw her as a wealthy incomer, a small, quietly spoken woman, no male to support her, ripe for plucking. She had fought them over every missed deadline, every bit of shoddy workmanship and every penny claimed above the agreed lump sums. In short, Annette had enjoyed herself.

But with her illness and with Mum increasingly forgetful and needing watching, the Rothesay project had dragged on. For the millionth time Annette wished she had learned to drive, like Brenda and Connie. But Carson had always said: "Why bother, honey, I'm here at your beck and call, my girl. And we have trains and buses galore on our doorstep." Annette thought this ripe from a man who had not been on a train or a bus since he had learned to drive at seventeen.

Annette was tired. It was all too much to worry about. Janey would not want to help or even want to discuss anything to do with Brenda or Trevor. Annette had tried hard to involve Janey in the Rothesay project, to take a bit of pressure off

Songbird

Brenda who had been increasing flaky since Trevor's accident, as Brenda always called it. Annette understood that Janey disliked Brenda. They had fought as children and then squabbled all of their adult lives. But Annette could never understand why Janey loathed Trevor. On the few occasions she had met him, Trevor had seemed such a nice man, refined. Debonair was the word that came to mind. But Trevor and Brenda had moved in different circles from the rest of the family. None of them had ever been invited or encouraged to visit Thortonhall, not even Mum and Dad.

ooOoo

The nurse came every hour or so to check on Janey. All was normal. The nursing team expected that Janey would be released into Annette's care tomorrow, after Mr Barclay's rounds.

Annette headed for the exit, stopping to speak briefly to Sister Mahoney on her way out, checking that she had her contact details.

Annette did not have the energy to try to find a cab or a late night bus. In the corridor she rang Declan. He was at his Bowling Club. He would come for her right away, run her out to Bearsden, as he had offered earlier when he had visited the hospital again to see how Janey was.

Declan

'There you are Annette, home at last, safe and sound. It's so terrible about Brenda. Who could've imagined a thing like that happening? Thank goodness that Janey was spared.'

'Thanks Declan. I seem to be on a losing streak again. First Carson, then Daddy, then Uncle Thomas and now Brenda. I've...,' she sobbed.

It was so unlike her to give way. It must be the shock, she realised, and being asked to formally identify Brenda for the Police, in the hospital mortuary. Dr Neil Hughes and his A&E team had tried hard, but she understood their medical jargon. Brenda's brain had been smashed to mush when it met the lighting pole. She had always refused to use a seat belt. As the named next-of-kin Annette had signed the forms and the life-support machine had been switched off.

'Annette, what if I come in for a wee while, eh, and make us a nice wee cup of tea? Give you a chance to talk it out, what do you say?'

'Yes, thanks Declan. I'll just phone Mum, check she's OK. This is when her Alzheimers is a blessing. There's no way that I can tell her about Brenda, it would kill her. If she asks again I'll just say Brenda has gone to Majorca for a while.'

ooOoo

Declan brought the tray as she came off the phone. He was a good looking guy, fresh faced, younger looking than his age, slim and fit, nice curly brown hair with a few greys. The word distinguished came to mind. She had heard the rumours but nothing definite. He was discreet, they said, good fun, and proficient, whatever they meant by that. Only once had he seemed out of sorts, after he was mugged sustaining two black eyes, a badly broken nose and a lot of bruising. Mr Souter the plastic surgeon had done a great job on him, calling him "one of our own". Declan had healed well, back to his good-looking cheery self within in a few months.

Down through these last years, since Carson had flown up ahead, Annette often found herself thinking about Declan. To her he was definitely a man of mystery. She had probed him gently for clues but he always clammed up at once. In a way she liked that; private, reserved, as she was herself.

She had noticed his interest in Janey. Hard luck Declan, she had thought. Janey is not interested in men, never has been. Only singing and a bit of DIY, and now

Songbird

bird-watching. Anyway, Annette knew that Declan could do much better than Janey, and he probably did, in his own careful way. There were a lot of lonely and available women around, and not all unmarried, as she knew from her days at The Royal.

As she looked across at him pouring the tea, she knew she was lucky to have him as a friend. She could see that some people thought they were a couple when he drove her places. She liked that.

ooOoo

Aged 16, on the same day he left school, Declan left home, shutting the door on his fraught childhood and his parents, with whom he had had no further contact. His Uncle Sidney gave him a job as a fish porter at the Glasgow Fish Market and helped him find digs in Berkeley Street, near the Mitchell Library.

At 23 he left Glasgow for Canada to make a new life away from Glasgow, away from his alcoholic father and chain-smoking Bingo-obsessed mother.

A few years after he emigrated, he heard from his Uncle Sidney that his parents Billy and Agnes had been admitted to Hardgate Hospital where they had persisted for a less than a year, dying within a day of each other. He had not returned for the funeral, leaving his older brother Brad and his partner Cris to sort out the mess of debts that Billy and Agnes had left behind. Declan and Brad had never seen eye to eye. Brad, being very much brighter, had always made Declan feel inadequate.

By the time he left Glasgow, Declan had Chemistry, Physics and Maths at Higher, Grade and English, Geography and Arithmetic at O-level, gained by attending evening classes at Anniesland College. He had haunted the Mitchell Library at nights and weekends, using it as a study base, making friends with May Watson, a middle-aged spinster librarian who lived in Dowanhill in a rented flat. She offered her spare room and Declan became the son she had never had. May tutored him and kept him focussed. She was strict, a disciplinarian and she believed in him. It rubbed off, and he began to believe in himself. She was not satisfied with his first batch of O-Levels. He must try for more, and Highers. He worked hard and success came, as she said it would. He had to do his share of housework. She taught him to cook and to eat properly.

One Saturday Miss Watson did not return from work. Declan had made her favourite meal, roast lamb with mint sauce and roasted potatoes, with rhubarb crumble and custard to follow. He expected her at six-thirty or earlier. He waited until eight then surmised that she had forgotten and had met with her long term

Songbird

friend, Wilma. He ate alone. At just after nine o'clock that evening a policeman knocked at the door. May Watson had suffered a massive cerebral haemorrhage while stamping books at the Loan Desk. She had often talked of the time that she nearly took the plunge and moved to Canada as a young woman but she had stayed to look after her invalid mother. Her then boyfriend had gone alone, never to return, or even to write to her.

On arrival in Toronto, Declan's wealth consisted of one hundred and £145 of his own and a £1,500 gift/loan from Uncle Sidney. He had answered an advertisement for a job as a trainee hospital technician in nearby Hamilton. Despite zero experience or background, he got the job. His boss, Deputy Head of the Unit, was MarLucia Cortez, a Portuguese woman ten years his senior. MarLucia was widowed with three children; a five-year old girl Tonina and twin two-year olds Jose and Jorge. MarLucia mentored him and arranged for the hospital to sponsor him through college. She was a passionate woman with needs. Declan was a virgin but a quick learner under demanding tutelage. Within a few months Declan had moved into her house, and into her life, rent free in return for baby-sitting and other services.

Six months after moving in with her he had sent a bank draft to Uncle Sidney in the dollar equivalent of £1,700, cancelling the debt with interest. Declan and MarLucia had enjoyed thirteen reasonably happy years by which time he saved the dollar equivalent of £35,000.

MarLucia was in Vancouver at a conference the first time Tonina crept into his bed. It happened every night that week. On her return MarLucia picked up on it immediately and ejected him. Working beside her day by day had proved impossible. Declan decided he would make a complete break and go back to Glasgow.

He applied to The Royal and got a job in the Haematology Laboratory. That was twelve years ago. At 48 he was second in charge, limited only by his lack of a degree.

Financially, Declan had remained focussed and planned to clear his remaining mortgage before his fiftieth birthday. Then he would own his large two-bedroomed flat in Dowanhill, the first floor of a split-occupancy red sandstone terraced townhouse.

One of the other residents, Charles, had encouraged him to try bowling. Declan discovered he was very good at it, a natural. And as a teetotaler he was very popular as the nominated driver for Away matches.

Songbird

Since his return Declan had enjoyed several serial relationships, all nurses at The Royal, all married: Angie, (three years), Dionne, (five years), and Kimberly. The Kimberley affair had ended badly after only a few months. Her husband David, an oil worker, had returned unexpectedly from Nigeria, arriving in the early hours of the morning to find Declan in bed with his wife, (now his ex-wife). David was a violent man. Declan had passed it off as a mugging. He had remained almost celibate since, apart from a few carefully planned excursions into the bed of Jackie, a leading light in the Ladies' Bowling Team. But only when her husband was off on his golfing holidays to Spain or Turkey.

During his second week at The Royal he had met the ebullient Carson in the canteen and learned of Model Building. Encouraged by Carson, he made a start. He built reasonable copies of several of Carson's most complicated vessels, visiting him in his workshop-shed in Bearsden on a few occasions and meeting Annette. He had volunteered to replace an external light for her and twice had unblocked the filter on her washing machine. He saw that she was dominated by Carson but he liked her quiet determined manner.

When Carson died he had waited a few months before approaching Annette with his idea. She bought into it. He had been right and it had worked. She had offered all of Carson's tools and equipment, refusing payment. And she had insisted on writing him a cheque towards his dream, his first ever new car, a dark blue Honda Jazz.

Declan was happy to act as Annette's taxi service. She was always courteous and asked only occasionally, when there was a special reason. When Annette's cancer had first appeared he had immediately cast himself in the role of her transport manager. Now, over these years of keeping in regular touch, Annette seemed more like the sister he had never had. He the listener, she sharing her thoughts and fears, her trials and tribulations.

That was how he had met Janey, a younger version of Annette but prettier, her ginger hair darker, thicker. Janey was quieter, and seemed more vulnerable. Immediately he had fancied her. He could not explain it. Perhaps it was that she was so different from the other women he had been with. He had smiled his winning smile and tried to make conversation but she did not respond. This had seldom happened before and made him want her more. When Annette went into remission Janey disappeared from his life.

To see her, he went to her next choir concert. He was hooked and immediately began to download and listen to choral music. He tried singing along to it. He

Songbird

thought he might be quite good. He saw a flyer for a singing workshop and enrolled. He really enjoyed it and did a few more workshops then an evening class at Strathclyde University.

He had thought of joining the Bearsden Choir but discovered that it was audition only and that their waiting list was closed. He looked up choirs online. He found the nearby Kelvin Choir, an audition-free community choir, and went along. He discovered he was a high bass, a first bass, and that he could sing most of the tenor parts, except the highest notes. His hope was to become good enough to join the Bearsden Choir, alongside Janey.

Aftermath

After the crash Janey's nights had been filled with flash-backs, mainly the astonished face of the florid heavy-jowled face of the Porsche driver, his mouth wide open and his eyes filled with terror. There was also the curious detail from her peripheral vision of a large tortoiseshell cat sitting on a high wall before slinking down onto the pavement. Had it survived unhurt?

Her neck had ached from whiplash. She phoned Iain Gray, the Practice Manager, and had sent in a Doctor's certificate as he had requested, with a short note of apology.

Iain had sent a bunch of flowers and a *Get Well Soon* card signed by everyone. Everyone except Henry, who was still off work on compassionate leave.

Because Henry had been a workaholic - Gertrude had loathed sleeping in strange, dirty beds - Janey had seldom taken the full quota of her holidays, preferring to stay and support Henry. When the Doctor's certificate expired she asked for and received additional certificates so that she could care for Annette. Over the years she had accumulated many weeks of untaken holidays, often losing them when they time expired. Iain did not mention this, nor did she. And Iain had had the good grace not to pressurise her to return.

She had sent a condolences card to Henry, at the Practice, not his house, signing it "From your Friend, Janey Wren". She had hoped for a card or a phone call in return. Clearly Henry had too much on his plate.

For Janey, the next three months were devastating and disorientating. Her previously ordered, tranquil life was swept away. Increasingly she felt control slipping, driven by events.

Annette had not responded well to her treatments and Janey was fully occupied caring for her. She lost track of what was happening at the Practice. The only news that Janey had of Henry were a few snippets from Helen. But it was hard to get away to meet her, even for a few hours. Looking after Annette was a full-time occupation.

And now there was Declan to think about. He seemed to be in her mind almost every minute she was awake. It was worse when she tried to sleep.

Brenda flies up

Brenda's funeral was a huge affair, organised by her solicitor, a portly man called Desmond B. MacMillan, in accordance with her strict instructions. He had written to this effect advising Annette that attendant costs were to be met from her Estate, on her prior mandate.

The instructions required a Rock Choir, and several set-piece speeches read by C-list professional actors. It was held at the Barony Hall at Strathclyde University. Apparently Trevor had been a Patron. There were several important looking men in attendance in variously coloured robes and mortars. Janey thought of them as vultures in costume, hoping to pick valuable morsels from the carcass of Brenda's Estate.

On arrival, each mourner received an elaborate memento booklet entitled:

"Brenda Gilmour - A Service of Song and Celebration".

It was thick and glossy, full of extravagant words and photographs. It provided the words and music for the bizarre songs to be sung in unison. The Rock Choir would provide the actions and lead the dance. Should anyone wish to come forward and join them, they would be most welcome.

The brochure had been compiled and printed by Susan at Purple Edge Graphics, Bearsden Cross. Janey smiled, remembering the friendly and helpful people in this shop where she always shopped for birthday and other cards. They also designed and printed stationery sundries for the Practice.

As she had done for Trevor's lower-key funeral, Connie sent Brenda off with an OTT wreath in the Australian fashion. It was larger than a small car and sculpted as a Pelican standing with its mouth partly open and several plastic bananas captured in its beak. The effigy stood on a base of thick artificial blue grass. At the birds' feet were scattered additional plastic bananas, several Bounty bars, Mars bars and assorted tins of Coke and Irn Bru, all unopened. When the wreath arrived, it required to be shoe-horned into the garage until people from Jonathan Harvey Funerals brought a high-sided van to re-home it until the funeral.

The monstrosity had been delivered from "Floral Excellence of Knightsbridge". It was backed by a pink hoarding standing high on black poles, towering above the bird's head, proclaiming to the assembled throng:

Songbird

“Sorry Brenda, darling,

I have to be at the G8 Summit in Davos, which is in Switzerland (!), with Bob and the Oz Team.

Got to be there, it’s a once in a lifetime chance!

I know you will understand.

See you Up There, but not too soon, I hope.

Love Connie, (your fave sis).

PS Remember that day at Edinburgh Zoo for my 18th Birthday?

What a laugh that was!”

Mr James Henderson the Funeral Director, in sombre morning dress, (mourning dress, as Janey thought), clutching a top-hat, stood on the raised platform amidst the field of floral displays which shepherded Brenda to her final resting place. Connie’s offering certainly had an effect and a titter of amusement rippled around the large building, dispelling any pretence of gloom.

Janey recognised Jim Henderson from the Bearsden Cross Church Choir where she annually attended their Carols Singing at Christmas concert. Seeing this tall, elegant man walking about Bearsden always reminded her of a heron. Now, seeing him in his ceremonial dress, the word regal came to mind. She found his mellifluous basso-profundo, calming, dignified and immensely comforting. It was the actual words that had made her want to giggle.

“We are gathered here to celebrate and, to bear witness, to the life of Mrs Brenda Gilmour, so tragically snatched, from us.

Thank you for coming, this morning, to be, with us.

Brenda Gilmour was a dynamic force who, will be greatly missed by, all who knew her. Brenda was kind, generous and, thoughtful in every, aspect of, her life.

She has left written Instructions to me that, I tell you of her love for, each and every one, of you, with every fibre of, her being and, that, she wishes you to know, that, she and Trevor will, at this very moment, be smiling down, on us.

Brenda has also asked that, you open your hearts and, let your souls sing, with joy for,

Songbird

all the good times that, she and Trevor enjoyed, with you, in this life and, she wishes you to know, that she rejoices above, certain that you can, all look forward to, being, with her again, when you own time comes, to fly up, to join her.

And, she has also asked me to point out that, in the speeches which are to follow, and, in every song that she has chosen, there is, something that she believes will speak, to each and every one of you, because, every single word has been chosen and crafted, with special care, in order to uplift you and, to bring you joy..."

There had been more of this guff but Janey had stopped listening to the words in order to more fully enjoy the cadences of his intonations.

As they had shuffled out to the strains of the Douglas Park All-Stars Jazz Trio playing, 'Oh when the Saints', Janey had overheard a pompous woman, a retired Councillor, whispering not so quietly "Heard it all before! A straight download from that Famous Farewell Epitaphs website. Just like her. Quick fix Brenda, we used to call her. All bling and no brains. Good riddance."

Further departures.

Two weeks after Brenda's send-off, Jean Wren had answered a phone call from her friend Celia offering condolences for her loss. She had been in Sardinia visiting her daughter and the grandkids. Celia was a talker. After half an hour she thought Jean had fallen asleep as she often did, and had hung up. Later, in the afternoon, Sadie, had found Jean with the phone gripped in her hand, face down in front of the television blaring out a re-run of *Only Fools and Horses*.

Jean's funeral had been a smaller affair, with only Sadie, Annette, Declan, Janey and a few elderly neighbours from Knightswood. As the Cortège was about to leave from Bearsden for the Crematorium it was halted by a small vivid pink van which had slewed to stop in front of it.

Flowers had arrived from Connie in Australia. This offering, somewhat smaller in size than Brenda's wreath, was fashioned after two swallows, one emblazoned Jean, the other Alec. Another inane note of excuse ended with "Have a Good Flight, Mum."

Janey took the confection from the sixty-something woman. *I am Zelda - your flower girl*, her name tag proclaimed. Zelda wore a fluorescent pink tee-shirt with sequins that winked Flowery Designs of Balerno. It transpired she had tried but failed to find them the previous day.

"Look, ah'm sorry, eh? Ah'm Edinburra born and bred, ye ken, the nice bit o' Leith, an aw ma daluvuries ur aroon an about the toon. Thus wis like an expedishun tae the North Pole, or raither, tae the West Pole, as Cedric ma boss sayed when I had goat back las' night, eh? Ah think ah migh' huv been near ye yesterday, ye ken. Ah wiz somewhere in Bearsden, ah think, but ah cannae be sure. But urr thay floors no nice, eh? Whiddiyethink? So, so cute, eh? Yer sister sent us a photay ower the Inturnet, so we cood dae it tae hur idea, eh?"

Janey managed to hold in her giggles. She deduced from these floral love bombs, that Connie had delegated the implementation of her instructions to a PA who clearly thought of the UK as tiny.

As Zelda gunned her tiny van off up the street, Declan helped Janey carry the display around the side of the house where they rammed it into the green garden recycling bin, which was due for collection the next day.

Songbird

They held Jean's funeral reception at the Pond Hotel then fed stale bread to the ducks at Bingham's Pond which had always been one of Jean's favourite places.

ooOoo

Annette became frenetic, obsessed with finishing Rothesay and, in parallel, starting to gut Jean's Knightswood home saying it would never sell with its mad décor. Janey pointed out several times that, actually, the Knightswood property would pass to her in due course, and she would prefer to leave it and do it herself. Annette seemed deaf to this notion, and simultaneously set about completing dozens of minor projects in Bearsden.

Declan was helpful, transporting Annette to and from chemo and radio-therapy sessions. Graham the painter came and went, visiting Rothesay several times as rooms became ready for painting. At Annette's behest Graham took the keys and went alone to visit to the flat in Troon. He found that new paper and paint had been recently applied, very poorly, in his opinion. Annette asked him to re-do it to his own taste, agreed a price and the work was duly completed.

After Brenda's upward flight, Annette had attended lots of meetings with Desmond B. MacMillan. Annette insisted that she should go alone, taking taxis to and fro. Knowing how poorly Annette felt some days, Janey had felt uneasy about this but, as usual, said nothing.

Rothesay

Declan became a frequent visitor to Bearsden, bringing an optimistic cheery lightness to the otherwise heavy blue greyness of Annette's decline. Janey enjoyed watching him work; in the garden, pruning the trees, changing light bulbs, taking down curtains for dry-cleaning. Nothing was too much trouble and he was both skilled and quick, and had to have any monies due forced on him.

He was a good driver, careful, not too fast. And when Annette was poorly but still desperate to go to Rothesay, he insisted on taking them, throwing himself into whatever task Annette asked of him.

He had stayed over with them on several occasions, once taking a week of his holidays, sleeping in the room across from her and Annette.

Several times Janey saw him his underpants, on his way for a shower. It suddenly felt as if she was in a film. Strange urges started to affect her, making it hard to get to sleep, bringing her suddenly awake to lie in the dark, unable to escape from thinking thoughts in a new erotic version of her future life with Henry out at Treetops. The new Henry of these dreams had a slim, fit body like Declan's and thick, curly salted, dark brown hair, rather than thin greying, blonde hair that hovered near her face each day at work.

Now that the tasks were bigger, more complex, she saw that Declan was a real DIY expert, much better than she was.

He talked about the Kelvin Choir. She had heard that they had a scratch Fauré Requiem planned and she enrolled.

She did not go to the rehearsal, only the performance. Sadie came by taxi to sit with Annette while she was away. He had stood not far behind her, over her left shoulder. He sang well and she was impressed. But she had been careful not to encourage his advances, if that was what they were. She must remain faithful to Henry.

Connie

Annette's final journey had been slow but certain, full of pain.

The three of them were making the best of it until Connie flew in, unannounced, five weeks before the end. Declan arrived to cut the grass, parking his car behind Connie's hire car. Without bothering to ring the doorbell, he made his way round to the garage to get the lawnmower. Connie spotted him. Janey tried to explain his role, Carson's friend, helping them with Rothesay, driving them and...

Connie flew out of the back door, Janey in her wake.

'Look, who the bloody hell are you mate, eh? I got a hire car here and if we need a bloody taxi we will bloody well pay for one. What is your game, mate? Ambulance chasing are we, eh?'

Declan had said nothing. He turned and left.

Annette took to her bed.

Connie demanded the keys for the Knightswood house and drove off to sort it out. On her return two hours later she started again.

'What are playing at, you lazy cow, eh? Could you not even get the place cleared out, get it painted, get it up for sale, eh?'

'But Connie, we've both not been well and although Declan is a great help, he has his work to...'

'I suppose that Uncle Thomas's place is still mouldering, is it, eh?'

'No, actually, we've done quite a bit on it. You see, Annette thought we had to prioritise. Whenever she feels up to it, and when Declan's free to take us, we go down and do what we can. But Declan has his bowling matches and...'

'Declan this and Declan that. Has someone finally figured a way into your knickers, eh? Ah, I can see you blushing. He's your toy boy, eh? Get real Janey, get real! It's the money he smells! Get it, eh? Oldest trick in the book. Look in the mirror why don't, stupid cow. You're ancient, Janey, well past your sell by date. I betcha there's a scheming wife tucked away ready to pounce as well? He must be half your age.'

Songbird

Janey, crying openly for the first time in her adult life, walked past her sister to collect her coat and handbag. Before she left she checked on Annette who was pretending to be asleep.

'Connie, I'm off to my place for a bit. There's plenty to eat in the fridge and the freezer and there are those Carry Out places around the corner. Try to tempt Annette to something, please, even if it's just a vanilla or coconut yogurt. I've made up the bed in the back bedroom for you. There's a baby alarm so you can listen out for Annette. Oh, and please do **not** smoke indoors, or leave you dog ends all over the garden like the last time. I've left the hut door open, you can smoke in there if you have to, and there is an old flowerpot you can use as an ashtray, but empty it out into the grey wheelie bin. I hate touching ashtrays.'

'Fuck off, you moaning faced sanctimonious bitch!

Back home in Caird Drive Janey had sent a text apologising. Declan had not replied.

ooOoo

Janey was back at Bearsden the next day, unwilling to leave Annette to the unreliable care of Connie.

The problem solved itself after only a week of hostilities. When Connie learned that Annette was scheduled to meet Brenda's solicitor, she insisted on going with her. Janey took the chance to pop down to Partickhill to check her own place and collect the mail.

When Janey arrived back at Bearsden, Annette was being helped out of the taxi by Eric, a driver they knew well. It seemed that Connie had stormed out of the meeting, had driven back to collect her things and then departed, presumably for Australia.

All that Annette would say was 'She always was hard to please, our Connie. She's got everything, including three kids and still she wants more. Poor Connie, maybe she'll never be happy.'

ooOoo

Janey waited two days to be sure Connie was really gone, then texted Declan. He turned up straight from work and started where he had left off cutting the grass before moving on to repair the leaking gutters on the garage roof and trimming the hedge. He did not mention Brenda's verbal assault, and neither did Janey.

Hope

For a few weeks the three of them went on as before but the chemo had drained the fight from Annette. When she slipped away in the Hospice, Janey and Declan organised a repeat of her mother's funeral. This time it was just herself and Declan who fed the ducks. She threw them proper duck food this time. There was none of Annette's stale bread this time. Janey knew it was bad for them.

After Annette's funeral Janey stayed mostly at Bearsden, popping back to Caird Drive for an hour every other day, shopping at her usual shops, and buying her bread at the nice Home Bakery on Hyndland Street.

Declan visited several times, always texting ahead, and helped to transport Annette's clothes and other things to the Marie Curie shop. She had not been in his company alone before. It made her feel risqué, girlish and guilty. She had flashbacks to the time she had allowed Colin Taggart to see her home from the Second Year Dance. He had been nice at first, just talking. Then he had kissed her, her first and only real kiss. He had bad breath, which she always remembered but tried to block out. Then he had suddenly forced his hand up her skirt and she had yelped, then slapped him hard, the only time she had ever hit anyone in her life. He had shuffled off muttering "Sorry Janey. Really, really sorry. It's just that I thought you wanted, you know, to do it."

Now as she switched off her bedside light, her dreams were of a different Henry, one that looked like Declan. Even as she dreamt she knew that these new longings were impossible. They were not at all like her platonic dreams of the past; dreams that she had always believed could come true one day, after Gertrude.

She had looked in the mirror. Connie had been right. Declan was not a real possibility for her. He was Annette and Carson's friend who was kind, helping her get over bereavements. Declan would drift away soon, and everything would settle down.

Callander

Contrary to her thinking, the following Saturday, after dropping another load at the charity shop, he suggested a run out to Callander. There was a place he knew called CCW Country Clothing, with a nice lunch place upstairs.

On the way she looked into the distance towards Henry's place, wondering if he was there, on his ride-on mower. Then she looked over to her Henry-watching hidey-hole which sparked her to talk about bird-watching.

She found herself telling him about her bird friends, even telling him their names and some of the conversations she had with them. As she spoke, she knew she was being too open, being teenage and very silly but could not help it. He listened without making fun of her and encouraged her with lots of interested questions about birds, as if genuinely wanting to learn about them. The journey flew by and suddenly they were at Callander.

At CCW she bought a pale green anorak, a pair of light-weight walking boots, a selection of socks, and a pair of Nordic walking poles. Declan bought a pair of water-proof over-trousers that had been reduced to half-price, to use for bowling on drizzly days.

As he had promised, The Atrium was excellent. While they ate she almost told him of her plan to walk the West Highland Way, spotting birds along the way and hoping to see a golden eagle. She held back in case, perhaps, he might take it as an invitation to join her, causing him the embarrassment of having to invent an excuse.

During the return journey he played a CD of the Fauré, by Harry Christophers and the Sixteen, the same CD she had bought herself. They sang along together. He knew all the words by heart, as did she. She forgot to look at Treetops as they passed.

It was one of the best days of her adult life. Declan had a fund of stories. Although she thought some of them were probably made up, she enjoyed his burblings, laughing and giggling in a way that surprised her. It was nearly seven o'clock when they arrived back at Bearsden.

'Declan, would you like to come in? I could make us something, and we could sit out in the garden. It's quite warm, still.'

Songbird

'Ah, that would be really nice, Janey. But well, I can't. You see there is a meeting, more of a get-together really. I meant to tell you about it earlier but, well. Anyway, Jackie, the Ladies' Captain, she's organised a bowling week in Portugal. And well, my rink has been at me to go and, now that Annette has, well. Anyway, I gave in and said yes. She wants us to discuss the final arrangements. It's in Jackie's house tonight, and I sort of promised I would be there.'

'Oh, I see. That will be something different for you. When is the trip?'

'Eh, we fly out next Thursday, for a week.'

'Oh, well. Thanks for a great day, Declan. That was a real treat. Bye-bye.'

'Yes, bye-bye Janey. I'll ring you before I go, OK.'

'Yes, bye-bye.'

The perfect day had been spoiled.

She missed Declan from the minute she closed the door. For the first time in years she felt lonely. Tears welled up. She blew her nose and told herself not to be silly. Had she not expected that it would end sometime? Today's outing must have been his way of saying a gentle goodbye. Tomorrow she would go to Knightswood and get stuck in, take her mind off everything.

She switched out the bedside light. She began to cry. She felt old, stupid and unwanted. Connie had been right. She had to get real.

Best foot forward

As Janey walked back from Knightswood the following night, she began to look ahead. It had gone well today. She had phoned Graham who said he could make a start on Thursday. He would call in for a key on his way there. When Knightswood was finished she would start to think about Rothesay.

At five past nine on Monday, she rang the practice. Helen put her through to Iain right away, no time to chat. There were problems. Anita was off sick, and calls were waiting.

'Janey! You'll come back next Monday? A week today? So, there is a God after all!'

'Yes Iain, I'm fine now and it's time to move on, get back into harness.'

'Thank heavens, Janey. That's the best news I had since before your ... Oops, sorry. Miriam has been subbing for you and we've been juggling her list with a locum Hygienist from the Agency. But they say they can't find a Dental Nurse who'll work with Henry now, the word's out on him. I had to promise Miriam an extra week during the school holidays so that they can take the kids to France. But that's just making another rod for my back. You know what it's like during the summer holidays. Complete madness. My blood pressure is all over the place. I'm looking about for another position. This place is killing me. Henry's hardly here nowadays but I'll ring him and tell him the good news. Miriam will be pleased.'

Janey rang Jeanette's to book a hair appointment for Friday morning. She accepted the only slot left, 8.30 am. Jeanette did not do late nights nowadays and Friday was always busy.

She would pop round to Caird Drive on the way back to Bearsden. Life without the complications of caring for someone seemed more attractive, somehow. She would get back to her old life eventually. There was no choir just now but it would be starting again soon. She would watch out for one of the many Summer Singing Workshops that Cappella Nova organised in Glasgow.

After the pressure of summer holidays, she would request two weeks holiday and do the West Highland Way, the easy way, using Travel-Lite to transfer her roller rucksack and make the bookings for B&Bs along the route. Maybe she would have Rothesay finished by then and would have done her bit for Mum's memory.

Songbird

She put her old work clothes into her rucksack with a sandwich, a banana and a pack of ground coffee. Another three days at Knightswood and then she would be ready for Graham, she hoped. Having made her plans for the week ahead, she set out to walk again to Knightswood. She heard her mobile sing a Robin's plaintive song heralding a text message. She fished it out of her handbag.

Declan: "Forgot to say thanks back to you for Saturday. Really, really enjoyed it. Have a nice day."

She found herself singing as she walked. And smiling at everyone she passed.

ooOoo

He phoned on Wednesday evening, late, almost eleven o'clock. She was already in bed, trying to read herself tired enough to get over to sleep.

They were flying out of Edinburgh first thing next day, he said. He sounded a bit odd, formal, not like himself. She wanted to ask if he was alright but decided not to. He was not her responsibility. There was no offer to meet when he came back.

She was cast into her now familiar grey-blue gloom. She tried and failed many times to get to sleep, each time switching on her reading light to see if reading would distract and tire her. The dawn chorus was in full voice when she drifted into a horrible re-run of Annette's last few hours.

ooOoo

The next morning, Thursday, when she switched on her phone, her Robin told of a new text waiting:

Declan: "Stuck in Edinburgh. North Sea haar in off the Forth. Almost zero visibility and very cold. It's supposed be summer. Have a nicer day than I'm having!"

She struggled to think of a reply. In the end she had sent: "Sorry for your sea of troubles. Hope it's not too hot in Portugal. It's perfect summer weather here in Bearsden. Saw a hen sparrow-hawk in the garden this morning. It got a feral pigeon, not my favourite bird anyway. That was my first sparrow-hawk this year. Just starting to walk to Knightswood. Decided to meet Graham there, to save him a bit of time. Enjoy your break, when it comes.'

After she had sent it she wanted to take it back. Why was she giving him all this unnecessary detail?

Songbird

The next day, Friday, everything in her life changed, again.

Inheritance

After her hair-do at Jeanette's, Janey went round the corner to Caird Drive, to her second floor flat.

Before she had taken off her jacket the door entry buzzer sounded. On the video-screen she saw an elderly man, smartly dressed.

'Ms Wren, I have a package of documents for you from Moncur & MacMillan, Solicitors.'

She signed his receipt book and carried the heavy envelope through to the kitchen table. It had arrived sooner than she had expected. It was an impressive envelope, sealed with red wax embossed with a design showing the scales of justice and stamped, "By Messenger. Most Urgent." in dark blue ink.

She made a strong black coffee before slicing open the envelope. She read slowly, stopping to re-read where she came across contorted legalise. She disliked such letters. They made her feel insecure, anxious, and irritated. Why could people not use plain English? When she reached clause ten she froze in disbelief. There was something badly wrong with her stomach and her bladder and she had to rush to the toilet.

Ten minutes later she returned to the table and the letter, this time armed with the highlighter she always carried in her handbag. It was a habit she had picked up from the Choir, highlighting key phrases and the notes so that she could practise at home while listening to a download or a You Tube clip.

She started again. She read slowly from the salutation to the signature. Many times she stopped and waited for her body to settle and her brain to stop racing.

She lost track of time.

ooOoo

Songbird

Dear Ms Wren,

The Estates of Mrs Brenda Gilmour, Mrs Annette Fallon and inter-alia Mrs Jean Wren

Firstly, I wish you to offer my sincere condolences on your recent bereavements. I knew your late sister Brenda her late husband Trevor over many years, both of whom I came to consider as friends.

Your late sister Annette I met only recently but over those last few weeks I would like to think that we too, became friends. Like Brenda, Annette was also a very determined and kind-hearted woman. I regret that I did not have the opportunity to meet your late mother, Mrs Jean Wren.

Part A:

1. I wish to assure you immediately, that your surviving sister Connie has no claim whatsoever on the property portfolio or any other parts of the heritable wealth deriving from Estates of the deceased to which this letter refers. Connie is aware of this fact - please see Clause 20 - as Annette may have told you.

5. Annette showed me a further letter which Brenda had provided to her, stating that on the demise of Mrs Jean Wren, these properties would be sold by Brenda, and the proceeds divided 70% Brenda, 30% Annette.

6. Annette explained that she and Brenda had a verbal agreement that you were to be provided with a lump sum of £15,000 in recognition of the monies that you loaned or gifted to your parents down through the years. Annette explained to me that Brenda had been very difficult on the actual amount of this gratuity but that, at the time of the Agreement she, Annette, had intended to share her 30% in equal shares with you. She also asked me to tell you in this letter that she was ashamed of what she did and that she had tried without success to find the words to tell you this directly.

8. *The above situation could have proved extremely messy.* I simplify here, this is not a legal terminology. However I think it conveys the predicament well to the lay mind. In the event, since the wealth under consideration will in effect fall to you, I am confident, after a Consultation with my friend and colleague Sir Crispin Burke-Wellton QC, that it will be in order to ignore these complications.

9. The above matters, as you will understand, will need to be ratified in the proper manner, by due process of law, over the weeks and months ahead. Thankfully the transfer of ownership of Annette's Bearsden property should be straightforward.

The Estate of Mrs Brenda Gilmour:

Songbird

10. For simplicity I will summarise in lay terms:-

In essence what has occurred is that Brenda left everything to Annette who, in turn, left everything to you.

To confirm, this means that you are the sole Inheritor of a considerable portfolio of properties deriving from Trevor and Brenda which, Annette has advised me, you will already have some knowledge. I have listed these properties in Schedule A, attached.

Property Portfolio at Schedule A, my Advisors estimate to be circa:

£13.2 million (thirteen million two hundred thousand pounds) Sterling.

13. There is also a net valuation of moveable and heritable items which may yield, further, circa:

£1.4 M (one million four hundred thousand pounds) Sterling.

16. Annette advised that, since you are a very competent DIY-er, you are well able to care for the Bearsden, Knightswood and Rothesay properties. However, if you need my assistance do not hesitate to ask.

17. I suspect that you would welcome an immediate injection of cash to assist you in these matters. If you would kindly complete Schedule B, attached, and have your signature notarised, I will immediately transfer an amount of £250,000 to your personal bank account, as an interim release of cash from the liquid assets I now control on your behalf.

20. Annette asked me to emphasise that she very much hoped that this wealth will bring you happiness, and that you will live long to enjoy it. I also wish to add my own reinforcement of these sentiments. At our last meeting, (the one that Connie attended, briefly), Annette asked me to include her words to you as follows:

“Poor Brenda, even with all that money she was never happy. Connie too, she has so much already and yet wants even more. I hope Janey, that you do not let this money rule your life.”

Part B:

This part, in my experience, is without precedent.

Songbird

21. Without my advice or knowledge Trevor and Brenda Gilmour employed the services of another firm of solicitors, Messrs Wheelers of London, to devise and implement The Gilmour Trust Document and its various Annexes.

24. I also hold a personal letter devised and written longhand then signed by Sir Beltam Wheeler, Senior Partner, confirming this situation, fully notarised by the Speaker of the House of Commons.

25. *In a nutshell, The Gilmour Trust Document, which I hold for you in my vault, is "watertight" and the wealth which would accrue to you from it, is legally secure.*

26. In round numbers, at bottom of the market valuations, should you choose to move to liquidate these assets over the next few months, assuming market conditions pertaining at today's prices, the total value accruing, net of transaction costs, fees and any HMRC tax payable is, according to Wheelers, circa:

£1,853 M.

27. At Schedule C, attached, I have listed an abstract of the Named Individuals (hereinafter referred to as Other Clients, a terminology preferred by Wheelers), with their addresses together with estimates of the values of their properties and businesses to which you hold legal title. As you will see many of these Other Clients are people who with an extremely high public profile and it appears that they owed Trevor exceedingly large sums of money.

30. I have, as is my duty to you, refused to reveal **you** as the sole beneficiary of this Trust. This displeased Sir Beltam greatly.

38. It would appear that these loans were made on an interest free basis and Sir Beltam has confirmed that this is true. Sir Bertram has asked me to emphasise that each one of his Other Clients entailed by The Gilmour Trust Document has always fully intended to reimburse Trevor and Brenda, albeit at some future date, when the economic climate improves and so on and so on.

39. The above provides a summary of the current position. Over these past months there has been almost daily pressure on me personally from Wheelers on behalf of their Other Clients who are said to be "at their wits end, fearing ruin with every telephone call, every letter delivery, and with every television news broadcast". In a nutshell, while

Songbird

Trevor and Brenda were alive the named individuals felt “secure in their friendship”: now they feel “fearful, tearful and suicidal”, Sir Beltam reports.

40. Fielding these distressing calls and the many, many letters on this matter, I find myself cast in the role of a gatekeeper of the souls, which is most stressful. But be assured, Miss Wren, I will soldier on, until you are ready to instruct me, or relieve me of my burden by appointing someone else in my place.

D. Brad MacMillan

Desmond Bradley MacMillan, Senior Partner,

Moncur and MacMillan LLP, Solicitors and Notaries Public.

Revelation

Given the verbosity and complexity of his letter, she was glad that Annette had spared her the inevitable confusion and stress that a conference with the garrulous Desmond Bradley MacMillan would have subjected her to.

Initially she simply could not take in what this letter sought to convey. The amounts were staggering, frightening. She read the letter again, more slowly, before skipping through the Schedules. Near the end of Schedule C she came to a halt, stunned.

She made another strong coffee and ate one of her bananas.

She concentrated on Schedule C and for the next few hours used her iPad, trying to learn more about the Other Clients. She found no negative feedback. To the contrary, according to what she read, these were all good people. A few seemed to be a bit wayward and accident prone, providing the tabloids with tittle tattle from time to time. Finally she returned to the only two names she knew personally:

Mrs Gertrude Amelia Hellf Thom and Mr Henrik Alberto Hellf Thom, "Treetops", Mugdock, near Glasgow.

- a) "Treetops" £3.2M. Property and grounds but excluding moveable contents, furnishings, artwork, jewellery, personal items and domestic sundries.
- b) "Racetops" £4.2M. Property, including livestock, contents, et cetera to be sold as a going concern but excluding all liabilities for Employees, Pensions and other employment liabilities.
- c) "Elite Cosmetic Dentistry Ltd" £1.7 M. Property and Business: sold as a going concern but excluding all liabilities for Salaried Partners, Employees, Pensions and other employment liabilities.

Wealth

A blackbird warbled his love song from the tall lime tree in the back court. Janey sat with her eyes closed, trying to get back to her normal self. She felt sweaty, sticky, dumbfounded by what had raced through her mind during the past few hours. Her thoughts were out of control, processing thousands of competing notions. But the main thing that Janey could not let go of was where all this wealth had come from. The properties in her normal inheritance made sense. It was a very great deal of money indeed. But as Annette had said in the letter and in their conversations it had not made Brenda happy. Janey had read that among lottery winners there was high number of suicides and drug and alcohol addicts.

After a while the same few questions started to dominate. How had Trevor made enough money to be able to **lend** £1,853M, apparently interest free, to such people? Was he really a saint as well as a financial genius?

Janey had only met Trevor a few times. She had never liked him. Sly, slimy, shifty, shallow and smarmy were the words that always came to mind. Perhaps it was because he did not seem to notice her that she had been able to see what everyone else missed.

Her recollection was that Trevor had been moderately attractive, of medium height and slightly tubby. He had always presented himself well, if perhaps a bit old fashioned, giving off the air of an elder statesman type, even when he was younger. She knew from Brenda and Annette that he was clever, very clever. And he had made a style of always having topical and amusing things to say. At least, his near permanent grin proclaimed, they seemed to amuse him.

Brenda had always portrayed herself as perfectly happy in her marriage. Perhaps, Janey thought, that what held them together was this planning, conniving streak. No doubt it helped them build their great wealth. But in Trevor's company the normally bossy and strident Brenda always seemed a different person, too deferential, always on edge; far too quick to agree with him and to echo his opinions and pontifications, to laugh at his jokes. Over the years Brenda had changed from the Brenda of old, the one that had returned, after a fashion, following his departure. To Janey theirs had not seemed like a normal husband and wife relationship that she observed in other couples.

Annette and Carson had both seemed overawed by Trevor and his wealth, his veneer of charm, his glad-handing generosity, his flowers and extravagant gifts on

Songbird

birthdays and at Christmas. Janey had received nothing. To Trevor, Janey seemed not to exist.

Trevor's sly face swam behind her closed eyelids, gloating at her. Her instinct told that there something else going on, something very nasty. Had the people on this list been taken in by his practised charm? How had he got to know them, such influential people? Why had he helped them? Had they been repaying him in some other hidden way? To Janey it seemed so out of character that Trevor would support them without getting something in return. What had he been planning for them, before his sudden death? She had read of contract killings. Had someone on this list had Trevor eliminated to try to escape their debt? At Sunday School she had been told "Money always corrupts". And she knew this to be true, it was reported almost every night on the News. Janey had always smiled when Henry had talked endlessly to their patients about their various security systems at Treetops and Racetops. And yet these systems had not saved Gertrude. Having great wealth and keeping it was a major problem. And having so much money made you a target and put you in the spotlight of publicity, taking away privacy.

Thoughts raced after each other like a pack of baying hounds.

Great wealth.

Power.

Subterfuge.

Retribution.

Drugs.

Insider trading.

Money laundering.

Human trafficking.

The Arms trade.

Horses and doping, race fixing.

Bribery and corruption.

Gambling and casinos.

Mafia and other gangs.

Songbird

The ideas sparked across her synapses at light speed and made her feel jittery, anxious.

The blackbird stopped singing. The lime tree was empty. She was alone.

She shivered with fear. She needed help. She needed to share with someone she could trust. It had to be a person. Talking it over with her bird friends could not sort this out. She looked at her iPhone and was surprised to find that it was nearly two o'clock. She ate her second banana and made another coffee, black and strong, to help her think.

She searched the letter again for the phrase that kept recurring.

20. Annette asked me to emphasise that she very much hoped that this wealth will bring you happiness, and that you will live long to enjoy it. I also wish to add my own reinforcement of these sentiments. At our last meeting, (after Connie had left in anger), Annette asked me to include these words to you:-

“Poor Brenda, even with all that money, she was never happy. Connie too, she has so much already, and yet wants even more. I hope Janey, that you do not let this great wealth rule your life.”

Was Annette trying to tell her something? Why have this clause here and not at the end of the letter where it belonged? Or had Annette just been worn out by all the pressure, and distracted by Connie's outburst at that final meeting.

Her thoughts whirled again. Then a different face came into focus. She used her iPhone to search the web for the number for MacParlands, Solicitors and Notaries Public, Bearsden.

The Receptionist listened and asked her to hold.

There was a short wait: Yes, Mrs MacParland would see her at four o'clock, the deep alto voice crooned reassuringly.

Janey packed her things into her rucksack, locked up Caird Drive, and set out to walk to Anniesland Cross. She would catch a train from there. The walk would do her good and she would discuss things with her bird friends at Bingham's Pond. It occurred to her that she knew nothing of Mr Bingham: another job for her iPad, later.

Her bird friends had proved very helpful. They got by very well without difficult letters to deal with, she realised. When Janey Wren boarded the train for

Songbird

Bearsden she had almost made her decision. But first there were certain things she needed to check.

Dilemma

Allison, the alto voice from Reception, guided Janey to a small meeting room then brought a strong black coffee. Colette teetered in on her tall heels and arranged herself at the other side of the small round table, her own coffee mug in hand.

'Janey, I'm so sorry about all your troubles. We've really missed you at the choir. Did you get our flowers? I wasn't sure where to send them. And I didn't want to intrude, with Annette being so unwell.'

'Yes thanks, Colette, they were very nice.'

'And how are you? Your hair is lovely.'

'Thanks. Yes, nearly back to normal. I start back at the Practice on Monday.'

'Good. So, how can I help?'

'Colette, do you know a solicitor called Desmond Bradley MacMillan?'

'Ah, Brad? Brad and Cris? Yes, indeed I do! Nice couple, very nice, both of them. They often come to my musical soirees, up at the house, you know, for East Park Home for Children. And very generous they are too. Usually my best donors. My mainstays I call them. Yes, very good people, the best. Why do you ask?'

'Who is Cris?'

'Sir Crispin Burke-Weldon QC. Brad and Cris have been an item for yonks. Since University days, almost before it was fully legal.'

'Colette, I need your help with something very important. You are the only Solicitor I know. Because you know Mr MacMillan that might, em, colour your thoughts, is that right?'

'Yes, I suppose it might, Janey. But at least I *do* know him. And, well, I think if you met him you would immediately know that although Brad is a bit pompous, a bit old-fashioned really, he is a very good person, very old school, trustworthy. Cris is too. They both are.'

Janey heard Annette's voice sound inside her head. The words escaped onto her lips.

Songbird

"You have to learn to trust people more Janey, you really do."

'Sorry?'

'Annette said that to me many times down through the years. I wish she was here to help me now.'

'Oh Janey, has Annette died? I'm so sorry. We were off on a Cruise. We just got back on Wednesday, still catching up. Oh Janey, I'm so, so sorry.'

'Thanks. It's just that although she was my sister, she was also my best friend. I really miss her.'

Janey decided to do what Annette had told her. She slid the envelope across to Colette.

Colette read it at speed. Janey watched her face and saw Colette's eyebrows rise sharply and her mouth sag open. Not like Colette at all. Then a frown appeared as she read on. The words, unspoken, formed on her lips, "Trevor Gilmour you devious, devious b..."

'Janey, this is the most shocking letter I've ever read. I had no idea that you were related to Trevor and Brenda Gilmour. No idea at all. Would you mind if I ask Tom to join us? He needs to see this, if that's OK with you?'

'Why?'

'I would prefer Tom to read it and tell you himself.'

'If you think that's for the best, yes, let him read it.'

Janey had seen Colette's husband Tom a few times in the audience at choir concerts and one time she had seen him jogging towards her at Mugdock Country Park. She had smiled and he had smiled back. But she knew he had not recognised her. She watched as he read the letter and saw him mouth a version of Colette's words. When he got to Schedule C, he exploded:

'My God in Heaven, so that's what he was up to! Unbelievable! Un - be - lievable!'

Tom slumped back in his chair, closed his eyes and let out a long, slow sigh. Over the next few minutes he re-read the letter, this time more slowly, shaking his head, clearly angry.

After a few minutes he pushed himself upright and shook his head to Colette and mouthed, 'No!'

Songbird

'Tom MacParland, don't you dare say "No"! Janey is my friend. We must help her, as best we can.'

'OK, OK. You're right, Colette darling, of course you're right.'

Tom reached over the table and laid the letter in front of Janey, pressing his hands flat on top of it. It was as if it had to be held down, that it was something frightening, dangerous, hurtful, something that must be contained. His terse words came slowly, carefully chosen. It was as if he was afraid to speak, afraid to reveal himself.

'We will do our best to help, if that is what you need of us. But first you must hear something Miss Wren, something rather personal. As you have trusted us we will now trust you. After you've heard it maybe you will decide you don't want or need our help.'

He closed his eyes. She thought he might be praying. She had heard that he was some sort of voluntary counsellor helping people through bereavement and the like. His eyes opened and he spoke slowly and quietly.

'Miss Wren, your brother-in-law Trevor Gilmour was one of the brightest and most devious minds I have ever known. At one time we were close friends. We were at the High School together and then at Strathclyde. He won every prize there was to win. We both started out in Law but after his first degree he switched to International Accountancy. He was a chameleon of a man. He could make you like him, if you gave him a chance. As he prospered he was generous, giving thousands to charities and, on the surface, he appeared to be a pillar of the community. I had heard that he was soon to be knighted and maybe heading for the Lords.

Most people would swear by him. He did not drink to excess, did not smoke, or gamble that I am aware of. I read that he died of an overdose. Perhaps he was a drug taker but if so, it never showed. He seemed perfect.

But Trevor Gilmour did have one lethal defect. He had a God complex. But Collette and I know that he was **not** the benign God that he presented. Trevor Gilmour was an evil God who liked to **control** people, get inside their minds. I suspect that he did this with your sister Brenda, bent her to his will. He probably manipulated her, helped her gain her position and then used her high office to gain leverage to get whatever he chose to pursue. Trevor was certainly successful when it came to accumulating the wealth that this type of power demands and deploys.

There is one person who not named on this list, someone who is a very special to us. It was through her experience I came to know of the dark side of Trevor

Songbird

Gilmour. She was never a strong person but is not a bad person either. Trevor Gilmour broke off their engagement in order to marry your sister Brenda. She seemed to put him behind her. She went on with her life to marry and have children. At one time she was a brilliant cardiac surgeon. All seemed normal.

Later, much later, when it was too late, we discovered that that he had wormed his way back into her life, in secret, to carry out a long term affair with her, behind her husband's back, deceiving him and their children. Slowly she became a different person, doing things against her own nature.

It transpires, as revealed later during therapy, that he had dominated her life for years, behind the scenes, subjecting her to inhuman levels of close control making her perform.... No, sorry, sorry. Too painful. Not necessary. No, no, no.'

He closed his eyes, took stock, then after a few deep breaths, continued. 'To escape him she retreated into herself. Then she cracked. She is now a long-term psychiatric patient in Gartnavel Royal. I know her well, very well. She is my sister, Dorothy. Her husband Robert became an alcoholic and drank himself to death. Both children emigrated, Emily to Australia, Oliver to New Zealand. The mother they once knew is gone, never to return.'

There followed a long pause while Tom sat with his eyes closed. Tears wet his cheeks. Colette reached out and stroked his hands.

'Mr MacParland, my other sisters, especially Annette, thought Trevor was amazing, special. As you say he could always find the right words. I was lucky, I suppose, I never liked Trevor. Mr MacParland, have you shared this pain with me because you think there is a way that I can help? Is it money Dorothy or her children need?'

'No, no, no, Miss Wren. No. Sadly Dorothy is already beyond help. And her children are fine. No, Robert had family money which they inherited. No, I told you of Dorothy because, knowing what happened to her I fear for the others on this list. The few that I know personally are good people, very good people. I cannot prove it but I suspect that they too have been under the control of Trevor Gilmour, as Dorothy was. What was Trevor up to? Did he even have a plan? Or was it merely his way of controlling them by the constant threat of ruin? Was it about a knighthood or more? Perhaps we will never know. I suspect, as this letter from Brad alludes to, that since his death these people have been living in a state of increasing trepidation, dreading what might happen to them when they are forced, eventually, to face their ruin and the publicity that it would attract. One thing I have learned over the years about wealth, great wealth, is that those who have it fear most is

Songbird

the prospect of losing it, of becoming poor. And where did Trevor get this money from? That's what I have been wondering? '

Janey saw them exchange glances. She read the same fear in their eyes that she had experienced herself a few hours earlier. She had almost confirmed the decision that she had arrived at, after her discussions at Bingham's Pond.

'What do you advise I should do?'

'I am unable to offer advice in this matter, I'm sorry. This is completely out of our experience.'

'May I see the letter again, please, Mr MacParland?'

She re-read Clause 20. Perhaps now she knew what Annette was saying, almost in code.

Janey finalised her decision.

'I would like to free these people from their torment. Do you think that this can be done without harming them further?'

'You would freely give up your right to this money?'

'Yes. I had thought immediately that it must be tainted, drugs came to mind, among other things. However it happened to them I doubt these people deserve to suffer any further. I don't want or need their money. To be truthful, it frightens me.'

'Janey, are you sure about this?'

'Yes, Colette. Nor do I wish to accept the money from Brenda's estate, the first part, in Schedule A. The only part I will accept is what is due to me, the Knightswood flat, Uncle Thomas's old place in Rothesay, the Bearsden house and Annette's investments. Over the last few months Annette told me many times that she intended to leave everything to me, and that Connie in Australia has more than enough already. But I don't want a penny from Brenda or Trevor. I ask that everything they owned be sold up and that the net amount should go to Marie Curie. Can you please make contact with Mr MacMillan and let him know?'

'Of course, Miss Wren, I'll write to him first thing on Monday. That will give you a chance to mull things over during the weekend.'

Songbird

'No, Mr MacParland, my mind is set on this. Please try to contact Mr MacMillan at once and ask that he act immediately, tonight, and make contact with Wheelers, so that their Clients may be advised.'

'Janey, please dear, are you sure about this? This is an awful lot of money you are giving up.'

'Yes, Colette, and it has only ever caused unhappiness to my sister. I don't remember seeing Brenda truly happy in all the years she was married. Hearing about Dorothy I can't help wondering why Brenda stayed with him, and how she suffered. I don't wish to even think about. I want this dilemma resolved at once, as soon as can be achieved. Immediately, please.'

'Miss Wren, you are the most remarkable person I have ever met! Apart from Colette, of course. Right! Yes, of course! I'll do it *now*.'

He opened the door and shouted down the hall. 'Allison, ring Brad MacMillan please, I need to speak to him most urgently. Tell him it's not about golf. Tell him it's something even more important. Tell him it's about Miss Wren. That should get his attention. I'll take in my office. I just hope he doesn't have a heart attack!'

Collette rose and closed the door. She sat beside Janey, to her left, as in the choir.

'Colette, there is just one other thing. It's more of a personal matter really.'

'What is it Janey?'

'Do you know if Brad MacMillan has a brother called Declan?'

'Yes, there was a brother. Brad talked about him one time, in his cups. Very tearful he was. The brother emigrated to Canada years and years ago. Apparently they did not get along, fought like cat and dog. I can't imagine that, really, Brad is so sweet, like a big friendly Labrador, really. But no, I'm sorry I don't know this brother's name. Do you want me to try to find out?'

'No, that's fine. Just leave it at that.'

'Is this Declan a friend of yours?'

'No, not really. More a friend of Annette's husband, Carson.'

'Ah, I see.'

'Thanks Colette. Do I have to sign anything?'

Songbird

'Not yet, we'll make Bradley and his lot work for their pennies, shall we?'

'How much do I owe you?'

'Nothing Janey, nothing.'

'I'll be off then. Bye-bye and thanks again, Colette. That's a great load off my mind.'

'Bye-bye Janey, take care.'

Swansong

That evening she exchanged texts with Helen and arranged to meet next morning at Rose & Grants coffee place.

On Saturday morning Janey walked to M&S at Bearsden Cross, bought a meal for two deal, and put it into her rucksack.

At Rose & Grants, she ordered her usual black coffee and waited. Helen breezed in fifteen minutes late as she always did, never wishing to be the first to arrive.

ooOoo

Standards had slipped, badly, Helen confided in a low voice, while downing her second large pre-lunch Sauvignon Blanc and perusing the lunch menu seeking the most calorific option. She needed to be able to last through to a late M&S meal for two with James, she explained. James was her long term friend who offered good hands to help her aching neck and shoulders brought on by RSI working at the cramped Reception area. He was an avid Partick Thistle fan and they were Away to Airdrie, whom Jags fans hated, James had informed Helen, many times. Janey in turn had also been made aware of this, many times, by Helen. Helen's circle of friends was only slightly wider than Janey's.

She went on to tell Janey that:

Several patients had sent in lawyer's letters, complaining about last minute cancelations and unsatisfactory work, residual pain, and infections. That Iain was having anxiety attacks, and being snappy with too much responsibility having being dumped on him. That the other partners were grouchy, complaining, and overworked.

Helen went on to say that she had smelled alcohol on Henry's breath on more than one occasion. That the Agency had sent a succession of locum dental nurses to work under Henry but none had lasted.

Helen, who had no inkling of Janey's fantasy marriage to Henry, expanded as the wine took effect. 'The last one, a Rosalind Pelling, very snooty English, who blocked the car park with her giant Toyota Landcruiser - her husband is a Wine Merchant somewhere - quit after three days. As she left she said: "That man is a 'boah'." I asked if she had said, 'bore'? "No", she said, "B-O-O-R, boah. And the man stinks, does he never showah?" '

Songbird

'And do you know, Janey, he does smell and he mutters under his breath and swears a lot. He's completely changed from his old cheery self. And Patients have been cancelling on him right, left and centre. Some have asked me if they can transfer to one of the other dentists, but most are just leaving. To crown it all, Denplan have been on to Iain, requesting a date for an Inspection.'

There was more but Janey had tuned out.

ooOoo

On Sunday Janey left Bearsden early. The good spell was set for at least another week. She walked first to Milngavie, then to Mugdock, then down through the woods onto the West Highland Way, heading towards Dumgoyne. She stopped to sit above Craigallian Loch and saw a tubby man fishing, singing to himself. She recognised him from the Fauré Requiem concert.

It came, as she had hoped. The osprey hovered and then moved to hover again. He then bird swooped and caught a large fish which he carried up to the dead tree on the far side of the loch. She watched as he ripped at with his strong beak. The man stopped fishing to watch. He turned and waved to her calling, 'That's how to fish, eh?'

Then she went on, past the Hutters at Carbeth, looping along the road, down to pass across the moor towards the wooded mound of Duntreath, and on parallel to Glengoyne Distillery. She kept going past the Beech Tree to the Wishing Well, her favourite place for lunch.

She had read that Hippocrates had advised that "Walking is man's best medicine". It worked for women too. By the time she had walked back to Bearsden she was ready for bed.

Facing the future

On Monday morning, Janey rose early, showered, and washed her hair. She dressed in the new outfit she had bought from M&S. She did not enjoy shopping but she was fortunate, being a perfect size ten petite online shopping almost always worked for her.

She still thought of Bearsden as Annette's place. Everything about it and in it was to Annette's taste, nice enough but a bit on the old fashioned side. Not what she would have chosen. Over these last months, with Annette losing interest, Janey had slowly made the garden after her own liking and more bird friendly. The birds were hers too.

It was another perfect June morning, continuing the spell of summer weather that had started the day after Annette's funeral two weeks earlier. The sun was bright, the sky blue. The lavender, covered with happy bees, was already scenting the air.

Her blackie was singing from next door's tree and the tits and finches were looping in and out to the bird feeders. On the ground, around the base of the bird table, her wood pigeons were asserting themselves, bullying the other ground feeders. From the chimney pots opposite a gang of jackdaws was conducting a heated argument about who could Kee-aak the loudest. Her two robins were singing against each other and her flurry of wrens were flitting from one low bush to another, playing tig, as she always thought.

Declan was in Portugal. He was drifting away from her. She took a deep breath and tried again to banish him to history. To cheer herself she started to sing *The Seal Lullaby*, which she loved.

She forced her feet to start out, heading to the Practice. It would be her first day back and she was filled with a sense of foreboding. The early morning rush hour traffic was building. She chose the quieter side streets, listening to the competing blackbirds and robins.

ooOoo

She arrived at the Practice first, donning again the mantel of her old regime: first in, last out.

Songbird

As the back door swung open, the old smells struck her. It felt as if she had never been away. She unset the alarm: 07.32. She went to the kitchen, filled the urn, switched it on then went about the remainder of her first tasks, operating on auto-pilot, thinking only of her coming encounter with the new unwashed, boorish Henry that Helen had so graphically described.

She lifted the bottom window sash by two inches and lowered the top sash by ten inches, setting them to the marks that Henry had made with the red marker pen. As she had expected her surgery was in disarray and dirty. Supplies were low, and many items missing. It would take hours to get things back to normal. Turnin g on the computer she fired up the system and checked.

Today: Ann Hemsworth, 2.00 pm, two hour slot. No other patients.

Tuesday: blank.

Wednesday: blank.

Thursday: John McEwan, 3.30pm, thirty minute slot. No other patients.

Friday: James P. McFarlane, 10.00 am, one hour slot. No other patients.

She made a quick check of the other surgeries and was very pleased to find that her training had paid off. In spite of Henry's behaviour and Helen's other reported issues, there was a residual air of efficiency and competence beyond Henry's immediate domain.

Janey set to, and within an hour everything was sterile and in its proper place. As she worked she heard the others arriving and the Practice coming to life. Only Miriam the Lead Hygienist had stuck her head round to door to wish a cheery "Good Morning", no doubt checking to see that Janey had actually returned. Anita brought a strong coffee at ten minutes to nine, as usual. Iain was attending his GP for a check-up but would be in by ten-thirty, Anita had advised. Janey went online and ordered supplies, marking them, "Urgent - three hour delivery". Everything began to feel normal and she relaxed.

Suddenly there was a grinding "**Crump**" from the rear car park. She scuttled to the window to see that Henry's Audi TT had rammed into the back of Helen's new mini. The damage to both cars was extensive.

She heard Helen screeching along the corridor and watched as she hurtled across the car park to confront Henry as he levered himself up and out of his car. She had never heard Helen swear in the fifteen years she had been with the Practice.

Songbird

'You're a bloody disaster Mr Henry. And you're drunk, I can smell it! I have a bloody mind to call the police. You'll buy me a new car, so you will. What the fuck are you playing at, eh? There is no bloody way you should be here, the state you're in.'

Janey ran down to the car park where Henry stood like a naughty school boy, his face sad, lost, tears brimming. He pulled a dirty hankie from his pocket and blew noisily.

'Are you not even going to bloody say, "Sorry, Helen"?''

'Helen, could I have a word, please, inside?' said Janey, taking her friend's arm and steering her to the back door.

'Eh, yes, of course, you're right Janey. Sorry, I just lost it. That car's only four months old and it's wrecked. I still owe on it too, another three years. It'll never be the same, never.'

'Helen, I'm sure Mr Henry will sort things out. Could you phone Mrs Hemsworth, please, and re-arrange another date, perhaps for next week? And call Eric at Courtesy Cars, please, and ask if he can come at once. And send Anita out with a strong sweet coffee, please, the way Mr Henry likes it. Thanks.'

Helen moved off down the corridor. Janey went back out, took Henry's arm and led him over to the staff patio where they sat down. She kept her hand on his arm, patting it, and making soothing noises. She had no idea where this behaviour was coming from. There were two Janey's now, the one behaving like Florence Nightingale and the other looking at the shattered remains of the man she had 'married'. For better or for worse, flashed and dimmed.

'Janey, oh God, Janey, what am I going to do? My whole life is over. You have no idea what it's like. Mummy was the one who caused it. She said I was not to worry, just to leave it to her. But Papa Henrik made it all bad. He was always so clever but he made it all bad. It'll never be right now. Oh Mummsy, Mummsy, why did you have to die? Henry needs you to come and help him.'

At this point Anita arrived with the coffee. Almost instantly, he changed to a semblance of his old self.

'Ah, Anita the glamorous goddess brings the elixir of life to the droothy dentist. Thank you Anita. Just what I need. Foot slipped off the brake pedal, car muddy, needs a valet. Mmm, this's excellent. Thanks. Oh, tell Helen I'm sorry, I'll get it sorted, new

Songbird

car, just as she wants. No problem. No problem. OK? Off you go and give her the good news.'

'Oh, Anita, would you bring my jacket and handbag please, and hang up this smock. I'll take Mr Henry home. I'll phone Iain later, bring him up to speed. Thanks again.'

Life must go on

The taxi crunched to a halt on the granite chips at the foot of the steps that leading to the main door of Treetops. The house seemed even bigger than from her binoculars. On arrival Henry stumbled out of the car to retch the remains of whatever was left in his stomach. Now sitting on the top step, head in hands, Henry mumbled that someone called Johan was still waiting on parts coming from China.

Janey gave the driver a twenty pound note and refused the change.

'Thanks Janey, very good o' ye. Noo look, ur ye shoor ye'll be ah right, hen?'

'Yes Eric, fine thanks.'

'Look, take this cairt with ma mobile number oan it. Ah don't gee tha oot tae just onybuddy ye know. If he gies ye ony bother, I'll be back in a jiffy. Did Ah ever tell ye Ah wiz a light-heavy silver medallist? Ah'll tell ye this Janey, if it hudna been fur yoo heeda nevvur huv been in ma motar. Is he one o they toffs that doesna believe in waashin, eh? Ah've read about them. Mad as butarrflies they ur.'

'Eric, there is one thing. Do you know anyone reliable who could do a bit of house cleaning for Mr Henry? I suspect this place is in a bit of a mess inside, judging by the mess outside.'

'Aye, noo, funnily enough, Ah'm the very man tha kin help ye. Ye see ma old boss, in the Marines, well he's goat this business, gees ex-sodgers and the like a joab. He's yer man. An' look, heer's his cairt.'

Janey took the card.

'Mind an' tell him it wiz me that sent ye, OK?'

ooOoo

Major Colin MacCorkindale, Royal Marines (Rtd.) answered at the second ring, and listened to what she had to say.

'Miss Wren, I will come at once to do a personal recce. ETA fifteen minutes. I'm with one of my platoons working just along from you, tree-felling at Hilton Park Golf Course. It is non-urgent work and, if appropriate, I will redeploy them. How does that sound, Ma'am?'

Songbird

Korky MacCorkindale was a man of action. Despite his slight limp he moved around swiftly, stopping from time to time to write on a yellow pad before returning to her with an estimate. She agreed it and asked him to send the invoice to Bearsden.

When she gave the address he blurted, 'I live just round the corner from you, nearly back to back! Oh, so you're Janey, Annette's sister. Never met her myself but Lorraine my wife knew her. Sorry to hear of your troubles. I thought at first this gentleman was your husband. Look, Miss Wren, if you ever need anything, just ask, OK? You can get me on my iPhone, anytime. I never switch it off. A communications addiction, Lorraine says.'

Janey thought it strange that Annette had never mentioned him or Lorraine. But she supposed there were lots of things like that in life, as she already knew. And there was an air about this man, a complete openness, a patent goodness and she knew instinctively that she could trust him. Turning her face away from Henry, in a low voice she gave Korky a synoptic version of Henry's situation. Korky looked over her shoulder at Henry as she spoke. Henry was stroking Korky's black lab Trudy who had immediately raced over to make friends with him.

'Leave your gentleman to me, Miss Wren. I'll get him ship-shape for you. And, if you don't object, I'll give him a dressing down. Look at this place. Your Mr Henry Thom needs to get a grip. Everyone loses their parents eventually. Some of us have seen much worse at first hand. Life must go on.'

Korky talked quietly to Henry. She moved out of earshot. Henry accepted his hand and Korky hauled him to his feet. The two men headed indoors. The dog made to follow and was told sternly: "Stay". Trudy immediately transferred her affections to Janey and together they wandered around the garden. The dog brought a stick and Janey threw it for her.

The Land Rover arrived and the seven men disgorged in a hail of banter that filled the garden with their laughter. Korky spoke to them, gave a man called Tubby a flimsy from the pad. He was a tall thin man with laughing eyes and seemed to be in charge of the group of ex-soldiers. He was hard to look at until you got used to his disfigured face with its weird permanent grin.

About an hour later Henry reappeared, showered, shaved and dressed in dark wine cords and a dark pink short-sleeved shirt, a mug of coffee clutched in his hand. Trudy transferred her affections back to Henry who now took over stick-throwing duties.

Songbird

'Right, Miss Wren, I'll be off to check on the other platoons. But I'll be back again soon. If you need anything, ring my iPhone, please. Come on Trudes, leave that man alone.' But Trudy was not for leaving. She was having too much fun. And so was Henry.

'This is the sort of garden she should have, Miss Wren. If only I could find the right person to take her on. She's my brother's dog but he's been transferred to Hong Kong and, well, he dumped her on us. Lorraine isn't keen. Trudy has chewed her way through most of our furniture. That's why I have to take her with me everywhere. We can't trust her alone in the house. Strange as it may seem, not everyone appreciates her loving and enthusiastic nature.'

'Why don't you leave her here and we'll look after her for the rest of the day.'

'Done! Thanks, I'll get her dishes and food from the vehicle.'

ooOoo

Henry and Trudy were a long way off, she leading, he following. Janey had heard all the stories, dozens of times. He was quite a good mimic and did Gertrude's imperious Germanic voice well:

'I am not a dog person, Henry.'

'Dogs are unpredictable and smelly.'

'Dogs bring disease and vermin into the house, Henry, I know what I'm talking about, you know.'

'We are horse people Henry, not dog people.'

Perhaps now Henry could have a dog, Janey thought. It might do him good, force him into walking more, and encourage him to take some of Hippocrates' medicine. She wandered after him. The grass had not been cut for months, but Korky's Kommandos had that on their list too.

ooOoo

It was nearly seven o'clock when the hit squad left, driving off in their long-wheel-based Defender with its logo, "Korky's Kommandos 'C' Platoon", and towing their high-sided trailer stuffed with various coloured bags of pre-sorted rubbish. They would drop these off at the recycling centre prior to their planned return tomorrow, at 08.30 hours.

The end of the day

Janey and Henry were alone at last. Janey suggested that they eat outdoors, on the patio, overlooking the waterfall and the pond, something she had always dreamed of doing. Henry brought a tray with plates and cutlery and a bottle of wine with two crystal glasses. There was also a citronella candle which he lit to ward off the midges.

She phoned Eric.

'Would you like a glass of Sancerre, Janey?'

Janey rarely drank alcohol.

'No thanks Mr Henry, a fresh orange or any soft drink, if you have one, please.'

He stood still, the bottle hovering over his glass, for what seemed like a long time. 'No, Major MacCorkindale is right. No more booze for the next while.'

He re-corked the bottle then went off to return with a large bottle of diet Coke.

Eric delivered two haddock and chips from 'The Wee Fry'. She had suggested one portion between them but Henry had insisted on two. Trudy was more than happy to oblige, helping Janey finish hers. She wondered if it was good for the dog but she had gobbled it down without immediate ill effect. Whether she enjoyed it was debateable. Trudy could hardly have tasted it, given the speed at which the leftovers had disappeared.

During the day, as they had wandered in the grounds, Henry had told her, many times over, what had happened when he had returned home to find his mother. She gained the impression that he had not had anyone to share his trauma with, other than someone called Philip, a nurse who had been called in to help him.

He rambled through his tale of woe to the now familiar tearful, sobbing end. Never once did Henry ask her about her own troubles. Eventually he fell silent.

The sun accelerated downwards, throwing the distant mountains into black relief.

ooOoo

Songbird

He was dozing in the rocker. Trudy lay snoring at his feet. Janey looked at him closely. Relaxed as he was now he looked younger, reminding her of her Graduation Henry.

There was a slight breeze. It was cooler, becoming chilly. Janey watched the white-red crescent of the sun drop behind the Cobbler, near Crianlarich, closing her eyes against its ferocity.

She had decided. Now she must find the words.

'Henry, how are you feeling?'

'Oops, sorry, drifted off then, it's been a long day.'

He beamed at her. His smile changed him. He was nearly like his old self. 'So, Janey, you've actually called me Henry, at last, just like Mummy. After nearly twenty-five years.'

He looked younger, almost boyish, more like that man she had 'married'.

'Look Janey, thanks. Really, thanks for everything. I lost control completely when Mummy, well...'

He closed his eyes and swallowed a sob before changing again to become the pathetic complaining Henry of his earlier tellings.

'The police say it was an inside job. They think it was someone called Zofia Zloviniz or something like that, from Russia or the Baltics, they're not really sure. They said she worked here under an assumed name, Mitzi something. The policeman showed me a grainy photograph but I had never seen her before. He said she dyes her hair and wears wigs, and uses contact lens in different colours.' He stopped for a short weep and to blow his nose.

'He said the chances of getting the stuff back are low. It's a nightmare come true. I've lost everything. It was all poured into the artworks. Mummy had insisted they were a great investment, bullet proof, inflation proof, a great way to make money. All gone, all gone. And... well.' There were tears now.

'Henry, you will be covered by insurance, surely.'

'No, no! Don't you get it?' he snapped at her angrily, shaking his head and taking many deep breaths. 'Sorry, lost it again.'

He blew noisily into his handkerchief then wiped away his tears. It came in a rush and again she felt that he had bottled it up. This was probably the first time he

Songbird

had said the words aloud, making them real. As they came he changed from pathetic to aggressive.

'It's because the alarm system was defeated by someone who knew the codes. Self-inflicted they said, and hinted at fraud. Except the vehicles, they were insured but I needed that money for living expenses. I had **no idea** that we were so low on cash. The bank people are being a bit jumpy. If only they knew. And Alistair from the Stables needed money for vet bills. **Mummy** did all that stuff...'

Mummy and Papa Henrik had let him down badly. Mummy had never let him have anything to do with the books. Mummy had spoiled his life. It went on, going into detail Janey did not want to hear.

Trudy began to yowl, diverting him. He started to speak to her.

'Trudy, you are so beautiful. Now there is no Mummy you can come to be with Henry. Yes Trudes, I'm your new Daddy now. You are a very lucky girl. Yes you are. And we can do what we want. Yes we can. Yes we can. What a clever girl you are. Yes you are....'

It went on in this way for a long time.

'And look, this is Janey, she's your new Mummy. Yes she is. Clever Janey. Nice Janey. Janey with the naughty, naughty hands,....'

She sensed where he was heading. She had been waiting for the right moment to head him off, prevent him any unnecessary embarrassment, but he had moved on, now telling the dog what Trudy/Trudes and he would do together. Would Trudy like a new brother or a new sister to play with?

Janey had been relegated, forgotten.

The light had almost gone. The breeze dropped.

Suddenly he stopped, looked up at Janey, startled, remembering that she was there.

'Bloody midges, they love me, they do. 'Come on Trudes, let's go inside girl, eh?'

And then he was off, loping along at speed, leaving the dishes and glasses for her to carry in after him. She ignored them. The midges were indeed ferocious; probably the long grass didn't help.

Songbird

As she closed the French doors, the heat in the room struck her like a hammer blow. It must be over thirty degrees, how could anyone find this comfortable, she thought. And then she remembered: "Mummy hates to be cold".

He had thrown himself into a huge leather recliner and using the controls, brought up the leg support. She chose an upright chair, on the other side of the drawing room. The bottom three buttons on his shirt had popped: rolls of fat had spilled out. He seemed oblivious. He had huge breasts. She saw now how like a beached whale he had become. She surmised that he must be more than twenty stones.

Trudy had taken up position beside him, now on her back. His right hand dangled to tickle her tummy. In his hand he had a large brandy balloon, his previous resolve forgotten. His face was sad again, tears filling his eyes.

'But that's only half of it, not even the small half,' he sniffed, continuing his tale of woe.

Fishing out a hankie he blew his nose. Trudy, no longer being stroked sat up and dropped her head onto his heavy thighs. His hand reached out and tickled behind her ears. She turned her head and softly mouthed his hand. The dog's unconditional love seemed to give him strength.

'Janey, so far nobody else in the world knows this...'

A long gap followed during which he kept his eyes closed and shook his head. His voice came in a low whisper.

'I've lost everything. Everything. Every single thing I have has been taken from me.'

There was a long pause.

'You are the only one that knows this. And Wheelers the solicitors, in London, they know, of course.'

Janey realised that for whatever reason Wheelers had not yet been in touch. They would be concentrating on the more important people first, the London people, she thought. No doubt they would get around to Henry in due course. She had no intention of revealing her part in his sudden reprieve.

There was another longer pause. The dog sighed and closed her eyes. The Sun slipped below the horizon. The room grew dim.

'Janey, I had hoped, one day, when Mummy had, well...'

Songbird

Another sob and then he went on. 'I had hoped that one day that you would come to stay here with me, look after me, like at the Practice. If you wanted we could even get married but, but now...' A smile came to his face. Then it changed to a leer. Never before had Henry looked at her in this way. It made her feel unclean.

'Henry, please stop now. Please don't say anymore.'

Her phone sang out the Robin call: she had a text. She saw him look angrily at her handbag as he slurped the glass empty and re-filled it to the brim from the bottle on the small table beside him.

Probably Graham, she thought, to tell her that he was finished at Knightswood. She must wait. Reply later. Henry was her priority.

He swallowed the entire glass in one long swallow, as if he was drinking water.

'You see, Janey, I know that you've wanted me too for all these years. Didn't you? but Mummy would've said no. It wasn't her fault! She said it was Papa who was really to blame. He made this mess, at Lloyds.'

His tears were gone. He was angry again. And he was re-filling the balloon again. It was a big bottle. Now it was almost empty. Who could drink that amount of alcohol in less than ten minutes?, she thought

'You see Janey, Papa was a Name at Lloyds. Mummy said that at one time he was one of the richest men in Scotland. Mummy said more than a hundred million. His Syndicate did well for years and years. Then Trevor came along.'

The anger had turned back to self-pity. More tears fell, with big gulping sobs.

'Everybody liked Trevor. He was a horse person, like his wife, Brenda. She looked a bit like you. Mummy said he was very clever and soon they let him be the Lead Name.' His anger returned and he spat the words at her. 'But then Trevor took on a big risk, some Nigerian thing, and it failed. Everyone was wiped out. But Trevor still seemed to have money, money he could lend us, saying he would help us get everything back, make us rich again, using our other money. Not just us, all of the Syndicate, Mummy said.'

The last of the brandy disappeared down his throat. The glass dangled, then it slipped from his hand onto the thick carpet. His anger subsided to tears and sobs.

'Everyone had lost everything. But it was alright because Trevor was helping us. Then he died. Wheelers wrote to Mummy. Brenda was trying her best but she wasn't a

Songbird

Name. Mummy went crazy for a while after that. She started to beat me again, like before and ...

'Henry, please stop. I don't want to hear anymore. This is your own personal business. Least said, soonest mended, please.'

'**No Janey, you're all I've got.** You have to listen to me. And now Brenda has died! Who else can I tell if I can't tell **you**? Janey, Janey. Don't you get it? I have nothing. Don't you understand that? Not this house, not Racetops and not even my own Practice. And now I don't even have a car. Nothing at all! Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing... Do you get it now? Only you and Trudy.'

At her name Trudy leapt back from him and started barking. He rolled out of the recliner onto the floor, onto his hands and knees and started to coo at her and she immediately calmed down and licked his face.

Janey's phone started to warble its Wren song; a voice call this time. Again it had to wait. Graham said he might be able to go to Rothesay tomorrow. He would want to confirm, get keys. She would get a voice message and respond as soon as she was clear of this.

Henry's sat back on his heels, with his big sad face looked up her, pleading.

'So, Janey, will you have me, even though I'm poor now, like you?'

He started to crawl towards her. The phone rang again and she reached over, opened her bag, lifted it to look at who it was. Declan's name was on the screen.

Janey, don't you **dare** answer that phone when I'm talking to you. Look at me. **Now!** Say yes or I'll explode. Please, please, Janey, say yes. Please say yes, please.'

'Declan, hello. It's difficult to speak just now. I'll have to ring...'

The blow almost struck her right cheek, but his bellow of rage had alerted her. She rocked back, almost causing the chair to tip backwards. He reared to his feet, and raised his left arm for another swing at her.

'Bitch of hell. You bloody, bloody tease...' He lurched forward and bowled her over, throwing her out of the chair, crushing her to the ground, trapping her below him.

Trudy was growling, barking and snarling. And then, sensing what had happened, the dog lay beside them and began to whine.

Janey found that she could move her hand just enough to get her phone to her ear.

Songbird

'Declan,'

'Janey, what's happened? Where are you? I've been all over the place trying to find you.'

'But you're in Portugal!'

'No, no. I decided not to go. It was well, never mind, just leave it. I'm sitting in your driveway at Bearsden, where are you?'

'Declan, there's been a terrible accident. I think Henry, Mr Henry might be dead.'

'I heard him shouting at you. Did he hit you? He bloody better be dead if he did.'

'I'm all right but I need help. Can you come please? I'm out at Mugdock, the big house called Treetops, the one on the hill with its own waterfall. Can you come as quickly as you can?'

'I'll come, Janey, but I've only a vague idea where that is. But are **you** hurt? Will I call an ambulance?'

'No, not hurt really, just a little, but I'm trapped under him. I think he's had a stroke or a heart attack. Wait a minute. I'll try something.'

She put the phone on the carpet then used every ounce of strength in her body to push and wriggle out from under him.

Picking the phone up, she continued, 'Declan, I managed to get free. He still has a pulse. I'm ringing off now to call an ambulance and ...'

'But Janey are **you** all right? **Did** he hit you?'

'Yes I'm all right. He was drunk, he fell on me. Look I'll switch all the lights on, in every room. Here's the postcode for your Tom-Tom, are you ready...'

Swansong

The ambulance arrived quickly enough to bring Henry back from the brink. Dr Neil Hughes had been with the ambulance, on a training exercise for the paramedics.

'Miss Wren, does Mr Thom have any near relatives?'

'No, not that I know of, sorry. He did mention a firm of solicitors, Wheelers, in London. I've known Mr Henry for nearly twenty-five years and so far as I know it was just him and his mother, Gertrude. She died some months ago. He has no other family that I know of, sorry.'

'I understand from his GP, Dr Mathieson, that he recently named you as his next-of-kin. Did you know that?'

'No.'

'Were you aware, Miss Wren, that Mr Thom was terminally ill? I have just downloaded his medical records to my iPad. Modern technology, *Medicine on the Move*, the project is called. That's what our training was about tonight. It seems that Mr Thom has been suffering from a brain tumour for many months. His record shows that three weeks ago he was told that it was inoperable, that he must make the necessary arrangements. I also phoned his Consultant, Mr Paul Armstrong, a personal friend, to confirm what I have read. It seems that Henrik Thom's last rational act was to sign the necessary 'Do Not Resuscitate' form and also to donate his remains to Glasgow University Medical School, as his mother had wished him to do. Apparently, Paul said, she had wished this for herself also. Having signed these forms, Mr Thom immediately placed himself beyond our further help by refusing further treatment, declaring himself well, discharging himself from Paul's care. Vehement denial of this sort is, sadly, not unusual.'

'Oh dear, I had no idea. Oh dear, poor, poor Henry. Poor Henrik, what a torture for him, on top of everything else.'

'I'm sorry to have been the bearer of such bad news. Sadly I have to ask you if you will sign this form please, as his next of kin. An autopsy will be required.'

'Yes, of course. Oh, and yes, Mr Henry always said he wished to donate his body to Medical Science. His grandfather, was a GP.'

Songbird

'Yes, it's so helpful of him to offer his remains, we're always short of donors. In the shock of a loss, relatives tend to balk at this, even when the deceased expressly wished it. By his bravery and foresight, Mr Thom has saved the NHS a great deal of money and will help further medical science.'

Dr Hughes fished out the DNR label, filled it out, signed and dated it. Janey countersigned it. He tied it to Henry's left wrist. He nodded to the paramedics who wheeled away what used to be Henrik Alberto Helf Thom. The hospital would leave a message on the Treetops answering system a few days later, advising the Henry had slipped away quietly and peacefully, without coming round.

ooOoo

As the ambulance left the white police car arrived.

'Declan, I don't want us to say anything about Mr Henry's outburst.'

Declan nodded.

WPC Gemma Brownlee took statements from Janey and Declan, interviewing them separately.

Janey said that Mr Henry had stumbled over the dog and fallen on top of her. Mr Henry had been depressed lately, as her colleagues at Elite Cosmetic Dentistry would confirm. It seemed that he had been living alone, since his mother had gone on ahead. Today he had seemed to be getting better. She explained briefly about Korky's Kommandos and gave Colin MacCorkindale's contact details. Today was her first visit to Treetops. Mrs Thom and her son Henry were very private people. She had been speaking to Declan on the phone when the accident happened.

Declan said that he had just started to speak to Janey, to ask if she needed a lift home, and then there was crash, the sound of someone falling. She had explained that she had been trapped but got free. He had taken a note of the postcode and had come to help. No, he had never met Henry Thom before nor had he been in this house at any time before tonight.

ooOoo

The digital clock on the oven at Treetops displayed 04.43. They had found a few coffee capsules but no means of making coffee. Instead they settled for a caffeine-free tea called Red Bush, which Janey decided she liked very much. It had a calming effect, it claimed on the packet.

Songbird

It was already bright and sunny. The dog snored at their feet, under the table. They sat side by side with their mugs, in companionable silence, as she thought it, a phrase she had read in a book once, a notion she had always liked. The tea was not working as it should. This may have been because of his nearness, she thought. Her heart was thumping. Surely he must hear it.

Declan had not asked why Henry had been shouting at her. If he did, she would say he was mistaken, that it was the dog that Henry had been shouting at, and that he had been emotional at the loss of his mother.

Declan did not volunteer any explanation about the cancelled trip to Portugal. Janey did not ask.

Her fantasy marriage to Henry was over. Her old life was behind her. She had no plans to go back to the practice. She would phone Iain later. She was unsure how the inheritance of the Hellf/Thom Estate would work now. Even without it she would probably have enough in her pension pot to retire. The start of the West Highland Way was just a few miles away. The weather was perfect.

The Bearsden, Knightswood and Rothesay houses could wait until Brad McMillan and his many advisors had sorted things out.

If she was to live at Treetops she might need to learn to drive, or depend on Eric. Or perhaps...

In any case she would prefer not to drive herself unless it was necessary.

But if she did need to try again, Annette had once told her that the girl Angela from Jennifer Jayne's Hair had said that the local driving instructor Alex Kerr was very good. Emily from The Property Bureau next door who was having her hair done next to Annette had also said Alex Kerr was very good. Both girls had passed first time under his tutelage.

It would all depend on what might or might not happen. But whatever happened she must move on, put all the pain behind her and be learn to trust people more, as Annette had told her too.

ooOoo

'What do you want to do now Janey? Go to Bearsden or Partickhill or Rothesay?'

'Trudy likes it here.'

'She's a big dog. Very slobbery. What will we do with her?'

Songbird

'Declan, do you know anyone who might welcome the gift of a very loving if rather boisterous dog?'

'No, sorry, Janey. I'm not a dog person.'

'No, neither am I. Lorraine will be very disappointed.'

She explained about the itinerant Trudy.

She kept her head down, looking at her hands. She saw that they were jerking. She tried to fold them together but almost at once they started to flutter again, taking on a life of their own, like baby birds learning to fly. Her throat was dry. She heard herself speak but she was not in control. Her voice was squeaky, unmelodic, drifting above her comfortable range, cracking into a descant.

'Do you like horses at all, Declan?'

'No. Why?'

'Just a thought.'

'Do **you** like horses, Janey?'

'No, not really. I like to look at them, but they seem, well, a bit fierce, unpredictable. And they need a lot of looking after. No, I'm much more interested in birds. Wild birds, I mean. They are amazing, so self-sufficient. You know, what do they do in winter, the residents, when it's so cold and wet? Where do they sleep at night, with the wind? It's a real... '

He waited until she had talked herself out.

'What's your favourite bird Janey, the wren, I suppose.'

'Yes, I do like wrens. And robins too. But no, my favourite bird is the swan.'

'They mate for life, don't they?'

Her heart was about to explode. Her reply came as a tiny, squeaky whisper.

'Yes, Declan they mate for life.'

'They move effortlessly, don't they, gliding, quietly, never making a fuss about anything.'

Almost inaudible: 'Yes, Declan they do.'

'Just like you, Janey.'

Songbird

His hand wandered across and covered hers, grounding them. His hand was warm. Her hands twitched. He squeezed. Her hands settled, came to rest. And safe now, they no longer wanted to fly away. She closed her eyes. She could feel his breath on her ear.

'Maybe we should take Trudy for a widdle walk? It's quite light. And there's a pair of swans along at Mugdock Country Park.'

'Yes, I know.' Her voice was normal again.

'Do you know their names?'

'Birds don't have names, Declan, they're wild creatures.'

'Yes they do. A little wren told me.'

'So, what did the little wren tell you?'

'They're called Janey and Declan.'

The letter

Christopher the weather man had predicted that the good spell was set for another two weeks or more. They had phoned Travel Lite and the bookings were made.

Declan would be back soon. He was along at Milngavie with their big rucksacks, to leave them with Gilbert at the Travel Lite van, at the official starting point in the Precinct.

Janey was waiting in the garden at Bearsden, beside her bird friends. Declan would leave his car in the garage. Then they would have a final coffee, lock up then and make their way to the start of the West Highland Way. They wanted to do it properly, all the way from door to door on foot. They would detour to Kilmardinny Loch and speak to the birds. Declan had started bagging birds and she had bought him a pocket guide and a good pair of binoculars. She looked down at the letter.

She smiled when she thought how surprised Heather Armstrong and her team would be when the cheques arrived from the Helf/Thom Estate, made out to The Gambia Horse and Donkey Trust and Stella's School. It would put her own annual contribution of £50 a bit in the shade. She started to sing, quietly.

Declan has a barrow in the market place

Janey is a singer in the Choir

Declan says to Janey girl, I like your face

And Janey says this as she takes his hand

Ob la di, Ob la da, Life goes on ,man

La la how our lives go on....

She lit the gas barbecue, put the thick brown envelope inside and closed the lid.

It was a lot of paper but it only took a few minutes to burn.

Songbird

She had emphasised most strongly to D. Brad MacMillan in an email that her name must never be discussed. He had replied with a two page epistle repeatedly emphasising his fealty to the principal and practice of client confidentiality.

Collette and Tom had promised also that her secret was safe. Janey was still singing when his car horn peeped. Declan would never know of what had happened. Their new king-sized double bed from John Lewis would arrive in four weeks. It was an extravagance. They had managed very nicely with Annette's queen-sized bed, but it was a bit old fashioned and like Gertrude before her, she did not like sleeping on old lumpy mattresses.

oo00oo

From time to time over the years to come, when she closed her eyes, the letter would suddenly come into focus.

Not once would she regret what she had done.

Dear Ms Wren,

The Estates of Mrs Brenda Gilmour, Mrs Annette Fallon and inter-alia Mrs Jean Wren

Firstly, I wish you to offer my sincere condolences on your recent bereavements. I knew your late sister Brenda her late husband Trevor over many years, both of whom I came to consider as friends.

Your late sister Annette I met only recently but over those last few weeks I would like to think that we too, became friends. Like Brenda, Annette was also a very determined and kind-hearted woman. I regret that I did not have the opportunity to meet your late mother, Mrs Jean Wren.

Part A:

1. I wish to assure you immediately, that your surviving sister Connie has no claim whatsoever on the property portfolio or any other parts of the heritable wealth deriving from Estates of the deceased to which this letter refers. Connie is aware of this fact - please see Clause 20 - as Annette may have told you.

2. I had proposed to Annette that I explain to you the matters detailed below in a face to face consultation. She was very much against that advice. She said you would need time to adjust, to consider the situation and, if necessary, take independent advice before we meet - if we are to meet at all.

3. Firstly, the **normal** part of what you might expect in a letter like this. Forgive me if I deal with the easier issues first.

Knightswood, Rothesay, Bearsden.

4. Your mother, Mrs Jean Wren, in exchange for an injection of capital for the Rothesay project, signed an "Agreement" prepared and "notarised" by someone named Abdul Qbesit, a professed Doctor of Jurisprudence and an alleged graduate of several Universities which do not in fact exist. This person is, apparently, untraceable. This Agreement entailed, (in fact, in legal terms, if they were to apply, "gifted"), both of Mrs Jean Wren's properties, in Knightswood and Rothesay, to Brenda. However, Annette also found a sealed letter amongst your mother's papers, addressed to you, and signed by your father Alexander Wren, in which he states that the Knightswood property is to be inherited solely by you. This pre-dates the above Agreement and likewise is not notarised. It has no legal standing other than to express your father's wishes, which would in the normal course of events be superseded by your mother's wishes. Annette has explained that for many years your mother has suffered from progressive Alzheimer's disease, thereby adding another uncertainty.

5. Annette showed me a further letter which Brenda had provided to her, stating that on the demise of Mrs Jean Wren, these properties would be sold by Brenda, and the proceeds divided 70% Brenda, 30% Annette.

6. Annette explained that she and Brenda had a verbal agreement that you were to be provided with a lump sum of £15,000 in recognition of the monies that you loaned or gifted to your parents down through the years. Annette explained to me that Brenda had been very difficult on the actual amount of this gratuity but that, at the time of the Agreement she, Annette, had intended to share her 30% in equal shares with you. She also asked me to tell you in this letter that she was ashamed of what she did and that she had tried without success to find the words to tell you this directly.

7. Insofar as I can deduce, this informal letter to Annette appears to have been devised by Brenda alone and certainly without my input or previous knowledge. It was not notarised and has no legal standing. If the Agreement itself had been sound, and had Brenda changed her view of the proposed split, your sister Annette would have found it hard to pursue any monies from Brenda or her Estate.

8. *The above situation could have proved extremely messy.* I simplify here, this is not a legal terminology. However I think it conveys the predicament well to the lay mind. In the event, since the wealth under consideration will in effect fall to you, I am confident, after a Consultation with my friend and colleague Sir Crispin Burke-Wellton QC, that it will be in order to ignore these complications.

Songbird

9. The above matters, as you will understand, will need to be ratified in the proper manner, by due process of law, over the weeks and months ahead. Thankfully the transfer of ownership of Annette's Bearsden property should be straightforward.

Our friends at HMRC will need their portion, of course, but there is more than enough in Annette's Investment and Savings Portfolio to cover the necessary outgoings. I do not expect there to be any difficulty in this regard.

The Estate of Mrs Brenda Gilmour:

10. For simplicity I will summarise in lay terms:-

In essence what has occurred is that Brenda left everything to Annette who, in turn, left everything to you.

To confirm, this means that you are the sole Inheritor of a considerable portfolio of properties deriving from Trevor and Brenda which, Annette has advised me, you will already have some knowledge. I have listed these properties in Schedule A, attached.

11. As a result of the first part of these Inheritances, (**excluding** the Bearsden, Knightswood and Rothesay properties), **the normal part of your Inheritance**, if I may be so allowed to call it, will accrue to you a net amount, subject to taxes, as a first estimate, at bottom of the market prices, should you choose to entirely liquidate the entire Property Portfolio at Schedule A, my Advisors estimate to be circa:

£13.2 M.

13. There is also a net valuation of moveable and heritable items which may yield, further, circa:

£1.4 M.

14. For the interim, until legal issues can be concluded, including satisfying our friends at HMRC, I had proposed to appoint one of the larger firms to manage this property portfolio at Schedule A. The successful firm, to be selected by competitive tender had already been drawn by lot from our standard list of firms with international reach, to include; Messrs Rydens, Messrs Jones Lang Lasalle and Messrs Rettie, one to be selected by competitive tender. (If you wish to revert to this process, please inform me in writing.)

15. However, Annette, against my strongest advice, insisted that I appoint The Property Bureau (Bearsden Office). She explained that she knew that these are good people. To my surprise, on their performance so far, they do indeed seem very competent. And I must add, in fairness, their fees are very reasonable. The point here is

Songbird

that you need not worry about the day to day management of the properties in Schedule A.

16. Annette advised that, since you are a very competent DIY-er, you are well able to care for the Bearsden, Knightswood and Rothesay properties. However, if you need my assistance do not hesitate to ask.

17. I suspect that you would welcome an immediate injection of cash to assist you in these matters. If you would kindly complete Schedule B, attached, and have your signature notarised, I will immediately transfer an amount of £250,000, to your personal bank account, as an interim release of cash from the liquid assets I now control on your behalf.

18. Should you personally have already incurred expenses which you feel may be chargeable to the above Estates, thereby mitigating taxes which will be payable, please forward a note of these to me, with receipts, and I will recompense you by return.

19. Annette was very surprised by how wealthy Brenda had become. I suspect that you are too. I am aware that this good news will be coloured by the concomitant sadness and the unusual and unfortunate circumstances, which bring this wealth under your stewardship.

20. Annette asked me to emphasise that she very much hoped that this wealth will bring you happiness, and that you will live long to enjoy it. I also wish to add my own reinforcement of these sentiments. At our last meeting, (the one that Connie attended, briefly), Annette asked me to include her words to you as follows:

“Poor Brenda, even with all that money she was never happy. Connie too, she has so much already and yet wants even more. I hope Janey, that you do not let this money rule your life.”

Part B:

This part, in my experience, is without precedent.

21. Without my advice or knowledge Trevor and Brenda Gilmour employed the services of another firm of solicitors, Messrs Wheelers of London, to devise and implement The Gilmour Trust Document and its various Annexes.

22. I confess immediately that The Gilmour Trust Document caused me some considerable concern when I first read it, concern which has increased rather than diminished with time.

23. I have subsequently engaged in several rounds of correspondence with Wheelers and, acting on Annette’s Instruction, have met with them in their Offices in London, in

Songbird

company with Sir Crispin Burke-Wellton QC, acting as my Adviser and Witness of Record.

24. I also hold a personal letter devised and written longhand then signed by Sir Beltam Wheeler, Senior Partner, confirming this situation, fully notarised by the Speaker of the House of Commons.

25. *In a nutshell, The Gilmour Trust Document, which I hold for you in my vault, is "watertight" and the wealth which would accrue to you from it, is legally secure.*

26. In round numbers, at bottom of the market valuations, should you choose to move to liquidate these assets over the next few months, assuming market conditions pertaining at today's prices, the total value accruing, net of transaction costs, fees and any HMRC tax payable is, according to Wheelers, circa:

£1,853 M.

27. At Schedule C, attached, I have listed an abstract of the Named Individuals (hereinafter referred to as Other Clients, a terminology preferred by Wheelers), with their addresses together with estimates of the values of their properties and businesses to which you hold legal title. As you will see many of these Other Clients are people who with an extremely high public profile and it appears that they owed Trevor exceedingly large sums of money.

28. At our meeting in London, and, rather unnecessarily I might add, Sir Crispin and I were subjected to what in all honesty I can describe only as a harangue, by Sir Beltam about the sensitivity attaching to these names, the need for "discretion", nay "secrecy", and so on and so on... regarding the disclosure of any of the Other Clients and the amounts owing.

In short:-

a) Each one of the Other Clients, as were Trevor and Brenda, was and remains a long term Private Client of Wheelers.

b) Many of the Other Clients or their immediate families hold or have held high public profile and are vulnerable to adverse publicity.

c) Most of the Other Clients are or were until recently Members of one or more Syndicates of Lloyds of London. This may explain the need for such clandestine and unusual loans from Trevor and Brenda.

d) Several are denizens of one or other of the Houses at the Palace of Westminster.

c) As you may recognise from her honorary title and repeated exposure by OK magazine, one of the Other Clients was until recently a member of the Royal family.

Songbird

29. Sir Beltam has asked me to express to you, on behalf of his Other Clients, his most urgent desire, to engage with you/us/your representatives inter-alia, in dialogue and negotiation designed to achieve an amicable and equitable solution “set for the longer term”, rather than the “numerous personal catastrophes”, (his words, not mine), which might ensue should you press for immediate repayment or reveal any of these names.

30. I have, as is my duty to you, refused to reveal **you** as the sole beneficiary of this Trust. This displeased Sir Beltam greatly.

31. Annette said that she was overawed by this list and the substantial, nay staggering, amount of money involved; as I confess I am myself. She said her mind was frozen and that, given her illness, she could not face the prospect of deciding what to do about the situation. She asked me to apologise that she must leave this problem for you to resolve.

32. I must add immediately on behalf of my Firm and Sir Crispin that we know of no precedent in case law which offers guidance.

33. I am obliged to say that I am advised that we can expect a maximum of six months before HMRC will start to press us for definitive action on Schedule A, your normal Inheritance.

34 How HMRC will react to the discharge of The Gilmour Trust is unknown. But I am sure they will try to find a way to relieve you of as much of it as they can.

35. As authorised by Annette I am currently consulting with Messrs KPMG, Chartered Accountants and Tax Advisers, regarding the HMRC Tax implications of this second abnormal part of your Inheritance. They have promised to deliver their Best Advices before the end of July.

36. Wheelers have stated “that they know of no payments of interest” having been made by their Other Clients to Trevor and Brenda and have asserted such payments were discussed but expressly excluded by Trevor and Brenda. A most unusual arrangement, I am sure you will agree.

37. Since Brenda’s death I have directed my Firm’s in-house forensic accountant, Dr Neil Mitchell CA, to trawl through the various bank accounts which were operated by Trevor and Brenda. I can and I can confirm that these reveal no record of any such interest payments having been received.

38. It would appear that these loans were made on an interest free basis and Sir Beltam has confirmed that this is true. Sir Bertram has asked me to emphasise that each one of his Other Clients entailed by The Gilmour Trust Document has always fully intended to reimburse Trevor and Brenda, albeit at some future date, when the

Songbird

economic climate improves and so on and so on. He also avers that these intents have been fully transferred with undiminished vigour to the Trust Inheritor (viz. your good-self). Sir Beltam further avers that his Other Clients wish to make retribution to you as soon as ever it is propitious from them so to do. Sadly he can offer no indicative timescale, each case would vary, circumstances change, and so on and so on.

39. The above provides a summary of the current position. Over these past months there has been almost daily pressure on me personally from Wheelers on behalf of their Other Clients who are said to be “at their wits end, fearing ruin with every telephone call, every letter delivery, and with every television news broadcast”. In a nutshell, while Trevor and Brenda were alive the named individuals felt “secure in their friendship”: now they feel “fearful, tearful and suicidal”, Sir Beltam reports.

40. Fielding these distressing calls and the many, many letters on this matter, I find myself cast in the role of a gatekeeper of the souls, which is most stressful. But be assured, Miss Wren, I will soldier on, until you are ready to instruct me, or relieve me of my burden by appointing someone else in my place.

41. Annette insisted, most strongly, that I must not in turn, pressurise you and that having provided the information detailed above I must leave you to decide for yourself what to do. To this effect she signed off the costs to date (see Schedule D) and in addition authorised a further advance payment to my Firm in the amount of £50,000 in order that you and I both would be free of an immediate pressure to meet.

42. I must in all honesty report, as Annette had understood, that the input of effort and resources by my Firm has, necessarily been considerable, with collateral costs that are not inconsiderable. Schedule D seeks to detail these for your information. It will be necessary to renew the mandate that I hold from Annette, as you will understand. I project that this will become necessary in a further six to eight weeks.

43. Should you wish to meet or contact me for clarification regarding the above please do not hesitate to ring me at any time, day or night, including weekends.

44. I have listed my various contact details in Schedule E, attached.

Yours sincerely,

D. Brad MacMillan

Desmond Bradley MacMillan, Senior Partner,

Moncur and MacMillan LLP, Solicitors and Notaries Public.