

Dead of Night

Storm Bound

North Uist, cossetted by the year-round warmth of the Gulf Stream, is one of fifteen inhabited islands in the Outer Hebrides. This chain includes a further fifty or so unpeopled islands and rocky outcrops scattered across one hundred and thirty miles from the Butt of Lewis in the north to Barra Head in the south, an archipelago which bulwarks Scotland's mainland against the wild storms crashing in from the North Atlantic Ocean.

Mrs Janine Macleod was huddled close to Granny MacInnes's old wireless. The signal was whining, coming and going. She was listening intently to the inshore shipping forecast, with the sound turned down to prevent waking her two infants sound asleep in the family bed a few feet away. The veteran hand-built device was powered by an 'exchange' lead-acid accumulator, its charge almost spent. Rhys had promised to bring a replacement battery but she had not seen him for three weeks.

Her remote croft was set amidst fertile machair land below an untidy peat hag, bounded to the west by a white sand beach. Three thousand miles away, across the wild and unpredictable North Atlantic Ocean, the rugged coast of Newfoundland was already ice-bound. Now the War was over, the freighters plying these stormy waters to and from America and Canada were no longer sailing in convoys.

The foetus stirred bringing a sharp twinge of pain and a throatful of acid reflux. She had not slept properly for days. The incessant downpour and high winds had prevented her nearest neighbours from visiting. The MacPhails had only been to see her twice since the start of the month. The track down to her croft from the coast road was impassable, Uncle Henry had declared. The last time they came, his Austin had got stuck on the muddy track and, despite her condition, Janine had been obliged to help Aunt Martha push the vehicle up the slope to the coast road. Janine had always called Henry and Martha 'aunt' and 'uncle' but these were courtesy titles; the MacPhails were not blood relatives.

Recently, Janine had seen Aunt Martha watching her intently and hoped her secret was still safe, her affair with Rhys undetected.

Trapped alone with her girls, she had been thinking constantly about Commander Rhys Dewy-Davies RNVR, obsessing, spiralling into another episode of depression, desperate

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to be held, kissed, to snuggle into his sweet-smelling hairy chest, to be reassured by his warm baritone lilt, to have him sing to her one of his songs in Welsh.

The familiar questions of her uncertainty tumbled in her mind:

Why, oh why, is he closeting himself up there in the radio station? It's six months on from VE Day and three months from VJ Day with Demobilisation in full flood and everyone coming home. He knows we must act now before I'm discovered, shamed. Why can't he see everything will turn out well, despite our affair and our new baby. It is so unlike him to stay away. Could there be a new naval threat looming, one he must not reveal for security reasons? How could he have forgotten my birthday, two days ago? Is Petra still alive? Has she written to say she wants him back? She must be very brave and strong-minded and, to become a top Norwegian scientist, she must be very clever. What is she like as a wife? Is she pretty, sophisticated, debonair? Has Rhys tired of me because I'm forced to live here in squalor, like a peasant? Is he about to abandon me to go back to Petra or someone else in Bath or Oxford? If only he had met my father, they would probably have liked each other, given time. He gets on well with Uncle Henry and Aunt Martha. Why, oh why, does he not come to me?

Such doubts and variations of them had been nagging at her, keeping her on edge. Even though she knew such negative thoughts were fruitless, self-destructive and might lead her again into depression, she had allowed herself to wallow in them. In the past, before Rhys, she might have prayed her doubts and fears away but now, having turned again to 'unbelief' or 'defiance', as Uncle Henry would call it, she had only her memories of their times together. Calling up the image of Rhys's smiling face to her mind, she scolded herself and tried for a positive line of thinking:

Rhys is a gentleman; a man of honour, everyone agrees. And, to be fair, he warned me he could be posted away to Bath or London at any moment. But if that was the case, surely he would have sent a note? If he had skipped away unannounced, the MacPhails would have heard and told me at once. Which means he must still be here, up there, hiding from me. He knows I can't leave the croft, not in this weather and not with the girls to care for. Without him to rescue me, I'll become an outcast, branded a harlot for a second time. Why, oh why, does he not come?

Like the rising storm, her thoughts were moving to a crescendo. The croft shook and the corrugated metal roof heaved but held, as it had for decades.

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Origins

Janine Robinson was from a medical family. Her father, John Robinson was a GP and her mother, Moira (MacInnes) had been a nurse. Decades earlier Moira and her friend Martha MacPhail from the neighbouring croft had 'escaped' from North Uist. Martha aged seventeen and Moira fifteen, had travelled together to Glasgow to enrol as student nurses. The two North Uist girls had stuck together. Martha always being the dominant of the two, guiding and watching out for her more feckless friend Moira, whose head was full of romance and highfalutin ideas.

Martha had met and married Henry MacPhail, a policeman a decade older than herself. Henry was originally from Dingwall near Inverness and had only a smattering of Gaelic. The Dingwall man was a stern disciplinarian and not well liked by his Glasgow born colleagues. Despite this, by dint of hard work and thoroughness in all he did, he eventually rose through the ranks to become an Inspector in the City of Glasgow Police. To their disappointment, the MacPhails had remained childless.

Moira MacInnes had been less circumspect. Within a few months of starting with Martha at Glasgow Royal Infirmary, she was madly in love with a trainee doctor called John Robinson, a beanpole almost six feet tall who towered above his much shorter consort. John was from Dumbarton, his father a draughtsman in John Brown Shipbuilders. Aged sixteen and three months pregnant with her daughter Helena, the couple married in disgrace, shunned by John's family who were staunch members of the Salvation Army.

During the early years of their marriage, John and Moira Robinson had struggled but when John eventually qualified, they settled to a sober and God-fearing lifestyle, joining the Free Church of Scotland in Partick. The following year he became a junior partner in a GP surgery in Yoker. By a stroke of good fortune or, as John would claim, by God's Providence, the family had moved upmarket to rent a more comfortable home in Dudley Drive, one of the most sought-after streets in Hyndland, in Glasgow's well-to-do West End. When they were settled they tried for a second child but Janine did not arrive until late November 1924 when Helena was ten.

Helena resented being displaced by Janine and the girls were never close.

In the summer of 1939, with the War looming, Helena now a fully qualified nurse working in Emergency Receiving, was still living at home. She took her chance to escape from the stern discipline of her parents by enrolling in the QARNNC (Queen Alexandra Nurses). After training in Newcastle, she was sent to Portsmouth to help tend the victims of the

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Dunkirk fiasco. During the months which followed, Helena was moved many times and contact with Glasgow became sporadic.

At this stage Janine, aged fifteen, had been enrolled at *Skelly's College* in Glasgow for shorthand typing, hoping to become a Medical Secretary.

In the spring of 1940, when the threat of air raids on the Clydeside shipyards was rumoured, Janine was sent to North Uist to help Granny MacInnes with the croft. The sixteen-year-old had argued against this move but her tearful pleas were overridden, her tantrums punished by evening and weekend confinement, preventing her from visiting the cinema and the chance to meet boys.

On previous visits to Granny MacInnes's croft with her mother, Janine had felt isolated. Because she did not have the Gaelic, other children she met excluded her, mimicking her posh voice and making fun of her fancy clothes. The only person who had been kind to her had been her mother's friend 'Granny' MacPhail, Aunt Martha's mother. Granny MacPhail (nee Morag Ferguson) had been educated on the Mainland and could speak both the English and the Gaelic. Before she married Malcolm MacPhail, she had worked as a teacher in the nearby village of Sollas where she had been born.

From Janine's point of view, the only positive aspect of her forced evacuation was that Aunt Martha and Uncle Henry would be living less than a mile away on the MacPhail croft which they had taken Martha's mother (Granny MacPhail) died.

During the first months of the War, at the Maternity Ward at Glasgow's Rottenrow Hospital, Matron Martha MacPhail had suffered from lack of nurses as other girls like Helena volunteered to serve alongside the armed forces. Set in her ways, Martha had balked at a situation where she was expected to cut corners and accept lower standards.

Henry too was faced with new restrictions on manpower, overloaded with extra responsibilities. The men under his command saw their opportunity to oppose him, forming a cadre who became known as 'MacPhail's awkward squad'.

After a long debate, Martha persuaded Henry to apply for his pension and move back to salvage the MacPhail croft: it had been lying idle for two years since the death of her parents and needed rescuing if it was not to become a ruin.

In April 1940, as soon as the head-strong Janine graduated from *Skelly's* with a Diploma in 'shorthand typing with bookkeeping', she was immediately sent off to North Uist to care for Granny MacInnes. In compensation, she was treated to a whole new wardrobe of the latest clothes for her sojourn on North Uist which, it was to be hoped would be only for a year or so, once the Americans could be persuaded to join the War.

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The Evacuee

The day Janine arrived in North Uist she was met at the pier by her Aunt Martha and Uncle Henry who took her for a special high tea treat at the nearby *Lochmaddy Hotel*. Describing the adventure of her journey and bringing them up to date with the latest news from Glasgow, the girl had rattled at them non-stop for two hours.

During this lang and detailed exposition, Janine had attracted an audience of locals all keen for news from the Mainland. While pretending to be disinterested, this mixed group of customers and staff earwigged most attentively. To them the scene was incongruous. Why was she regaling the dowdy old MacPhails with tales of films, cafes, restaurants and fancy shops, a couple well known for their narrow religious beliefs, parsimonious thrift and sanctimonious remarks.

Aware of this interest, Janine had raised her voice to make sure they could hear. However, the truth of it was they could not fully understand the Glasgow girl's quick, posh English. What they saw was a beautiful girl sitting amongst them like a visiting celebrity, wearing smart, stylish clothes in the latest fashion, obviously new, her long dark brown hair shining, her make-up perfect, ogled by the men and despised by the women.

Within a few days, various tales of the arrival of Janine Robinson, dubbed the 'film star from Glasgow', had spread to every home on North Uist.

When the exuberant teenager had talked herself dry and following a secret nod from Martha, Henry excused himself and went outside to smoke his pipe, find male company, and catch up on how the War was progressing. He had another migraine coming and was pleased to escape the incessant shrill of his new responsibility, a girl he had known since childbirth who had blossomed into a young woman with definite views on everything, most of them directly contrary to his own. It was up to Martha to break the news. They had prayed and talked the matter over back and forth for weeks and, given the uncomfortable personal details to be imparted and since the girl was so young and flighty, it had been agreed that Martha would tell the girl alone, .

Before they left Lochmaddy, sitting in the car together, with Henry standing a distance away engaged in conversation with a member of his small prayer group, Martha tried to break the bad news gently as she could:

"Janine, your Granny Mhairi has been in decline for a long time. She took your Grampa Gordon's death badly. She was never an outdoors person, always near to her wireless and

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singing along with the songs as best she could though she never had the English and had never learned to read and write. It was my mother who read your mother's letters to her and wrote her replies which Mhairi signed with a long string of 'X's."

"Oh, Mummy never said! I thought Granny Mhairi was sending us kisses. I thought she was a neat writer too. Just like you."

"I expect Moira was ashamed, what with your father being a Doctor and so clever. Anyway, when we got here, my mother had been dead and buried and your Granny Mhairi had been living alone with supplies delivered by that old scoundrel Don-Angi Ross. She was in a terrible, terrible state, living in squalor but no, I will not dwell on that. Suffice to say she had not washed for months, maybe years. She was smoking like a chimney, running down the pile of money Gordon left her. Of course, when we arrived I wrote to your mother to tell her a version of what we had found but I left out the worst of it. Your Uncle Henry and I are doing our best for her but she is almost a mile away across some rough ground and well, we are not as young as we were. But do not fret yourself, we will do our best to help you. I confess, you are an answer to our prayers, a sweet breath of fresh air. You have grown up into a fine-looking young woman, fit and strong, just what we need."

"Poor Granny Mhairi. I only met her three times, when I was a wee girl. Mummy seemed reluctant to make the journey and Daddy was never any kind of cook or bottlewasher so she did not like to leave him. Helena point blank refused to come after she was about twelve, I think."

"Janine, I find I have to tell you something, something very sad. Your Granny Mhairi has been going soft in the head these last months, as secretive as a squirrel and wandering out of the croft down to the shore looking for Gordon and for my mother. Twice now we have found her standing in the waves up to her waist, near catching her death of cold. It is why we have taken to locking her into her house, for her own good. Now you are here, you must lock yourself in with her to make sure she does not go off like that. If she gets out again, it could be the death of her."

"Mummy and Daddy, they don't know?"

"No. Your Uncle Henry and I decided they have enough on their plates with this War. But do not worry Janine. As your Uncle Henry says, we must each and every one of us learn to trust in the Lord in every detail of our lives. As I said, we will be here for you, to help you through it all. With her chest the way it is, I cannot see your granny lasting very much longer although, as Henry says, you should never say such things as such matters are in the hands of the Lord."

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"Oh, Aunt Martha, why have I been condemned to this? No, no! I'm not cut out to be a nurse. I hate smelly old people. I can't do this. I'll write to Mummy and Daddy at once. They must do something. I want to go home, back to Glasgow. On the next ferry."

"Calm yourself, Janine my dearie. Here, take this hankie. Dear me, Henry will be angry for I have probably said more than I should. No, no, my dearie, it is *not* so bad as I have made out. Anyway, we promised Moira and John we would make sure to keep you safe here, away from the bombs in Glasgow. So, blow up your nose and sniff back those tears and do not spoil your nice make-up. Come now, let's go home. And remember, Janine, whenever Mhairi becomes too much for your, leave her be and come along the shore to us. It is a longer way but safer for you. But make sure you always lock her in, now, do you hear me?"

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When Janine arrived at the family croft, Mhairi MacInnes had been a widow of nearly twenty years during which time she had slowly deteriorated, becoming almost feral, a recluse, losing all interest in herself and surroundings, spending most of her time listening to the radio, searching the airwaves for Scottish dance music. She had always been a smoker; now she was chain-smoking sixty to eighty a day, rolling her own from shag tobacco, saving her dog end's which she smoked in an old pipe of her husband's. Mhairi's chest had never been good and over the previous winter she had suffered increasingly from serial bouts of bronchitis and emphysema. Despite Dr MacDonald's contrary advice, Mhairi held strongly to her addiction.

Janine, whose parents were tee-total and non-smoking, hated the smell of cigarette smoke and especially the stench of stale tobacco juice from Granny MacInnes's pipe cleaners, items her grandmother insisted in rinsing for reuse. These greasy, dark brown worm-like sticks were left on the hearth to dry before the peat fire, their acrid stench filling the croft, pervading every nook and cranny.

One of the worst aspects of Janine's new life was her sleeping accommodation. At Dudley Drive, she had had her own bedroom with a large double window. This bright and airy second floor room was her private space, a place of retreat where she could read and listen to an elderly gramophone incorporating a radio and a wind-up record player. At Granny MacInnes's croft she had the box bedroom which had been her mother's before she left for Glasgow. It was a tiny, windowless cupboard large enough for only a single bed, a space created from the main living area when Janine's mother Moira was a toddler. At five-foot-ten compared to her mother's five-foot-four, the bed was too short and the horsehair mattress was old and lumpy and long overdue for replacement.

From the first night onwards, when Mhairi was asleep, Janine crept out to doze the night away in her grandmother's leatherette armchair by the fire. The chair had once been her

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grandfather's pride and joy, an expensive item ordered by catalogue from London. Keeping the volume low, she would re-tune the wireless to try to find something to keep her company while she read a novel, wrapped in a travel rug which Martha had gifted her.

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During that first summer of 1940, at every opportunity the teenager took to walking the moors with her grandmother's collie, Balach (short for Balachan, 'little boy' in Gaelic). When summer moved to autumn and the long, dark winter nights set in, she spent most of her evenings with the MacPhails nearly a mile away, both crofts lying on the edge of the white-sand beach below the hill with tip of the new military radio transmitter just visible in the distance.

One area of conflict between Janine and the MacPhails was church attendance. The services at the Free Church were conducted entirely in the Gaelic. After two months of enduring long, incomprehensible services and dirgeful songs sung without accompaniment of an organ or piano, Janine rebelled and refused to attend, claiming she would instead listen to the Sunday Service in English on the wireless. To salve her conscience she did this faithfully for a few weeks but soon she was skipping to other channels to catch Sunday morning repeats of popular evening shows, particularly swing and jazz music, whirling around the small kitchen in the arms of an imaginary partner, to the bemusement of Balach the old collie and the enthusiastic laughter and clapping from her grandmother.

Janine's first year on North Uist drifted past slowly. Tutored by Henry and Martha, she learned to take her share of milking Bella, a cow owned by the MacPhails but housed in the MacInnes outbuilding when the weather turned wet and windy, a common occurrence. This outbuilding, a rickety structure formed of corrugated iron sheeting, was also the hen coop for nights. Granny MacInnes had around two dozen hens and a cockerel. With the collie's help, Janine soon became adept at finding hidden eggs before the seagulls got them. One of Balach's jobs was to watch over the hens who were prone to predation by hen harriers, day-flying barn owls, low-flying eagles and the two local families of huge black ravens.

Granny MacInnes also owned a remnant of around sixty sheep mixed with the hundred or so owned by the MacPhails on shared grazing along the shore. In high winds, the flock would move to the higher ground on hillside beyond the road to try to find shelter among the rocks. Another of Janine's frequent tasks was checking to make sure none were snagged in a fence or trapped in a boggy ditch.

By the late autumn of 1940, the girl from Glasgow had settled to a daily round of milking Bella, hunting eggs and shepherding her sheep. For the teenager, used to the hustle and bustle of Glasgow with its clanging trams, cinemas, theatres and fancy shops, the life on North Uist was slow and boring. The highlight of her week was a trip to Lochmaddy where

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she made a beeline for the free lending library to renew her stock of books and magazines. This service was funded and organised by Miss Veronica MacDonald MA, the spinster daughter of Dr Angus MacDonald whose wife had died in childbirth. The newborn, a boy christened Angus, damaged during the long, difficult delivery, had died six weeks later.

Despite their very different natures and literary tastes, Janine and Veronica soon made friends, sharing a common interest in classical music and Trad (traditional) Jazz. The sort used to dance to. Veronica had studied English and Gaelic at Glasgow University and was writing an anthology of Gaelic Poems and Songs in cooperation with Miss Eilidh Ferguson, the local postmistress.

The other longed-for event was the arrival of her mother's letters, written in a large, quick, extravagant scrawl. These effusive epistles were never regular; it might be three or up to five weeks between them, their intermittency compensated by their volume, covering both sides of many pages, full of snippets of news from the church and local gossip and a scattering of clippings from newspapers and overseas mission pamphlets.

A repeating topic, an obsession it seemed to Janine and Martha, was the increasing strain of feuds brought about by rationing, queuing and the undesirable effects of black marketeers. According to Mrs Moira Robinson, these men were in league with dockers and farmers to steal and divert goods to sell at inflated prices, thereby reducing the quantities which should be rightly made available to the general public through the rationing system.

Janine typed her replies on her *Royal Speed King* suitcase typewriter, a surprise gift from her father on the day she was sent off to Lochmaddy. In these weekly outpourings, always checked and frequently censored by Martha, Janine learned to avoid any hint at her Granny Mhairi's true condition. Although she always included a special section dedicated to her father, Dr John Robinson did not ever respond. Perhaps this was because her letters always included a neatly written note from Martha giving her version of the news which, Janine suspected, included a 'report card' on her behaviour and performance, and in particular her continuing refusal to go with them to the Free Church services on Sundays and the prayer circle meetings on Wednesday evenings. Another 'fault' was her 'overindulgence' in listening to the radio and her 'inappropriate liking' for American music, particularly jazz.

Over that first year, one thing became clear from the radio broadcasts and long harangues from Uncle Henry - the War would not be the quick affair which had been predicted by John Robinson back in Glasgow when he had sent Janine off to North Uist and safety. On the contrary, the conflict in Europe and around the World was growing as other nations took sides for or against the British while the Americans steadfastly refused to help.

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Devastation

In late March 1941, when the first stunning details of the true extent of the Clydebank Blitz reached North Uist, Janine was forced to admit her parents had been right to evacuate her.

Several weeks elapsed before the further news filtered through. This came in the form of a foolscap-size brown envelope addressed to Mrs Mhairi MacInnes. It had been sent by Mrs Shona Davidson (nee Macnab), a friend of John and Moira Robinson from the Free Church Mission to Africa. Shona Macnab was from Benbecula and had used her contacts to establish Janine was safe with her grandmother. In the initial aftermath, before the bodies had been identified, there had been a fear Janine had also died in the Dudley Drive bombings.

Shona's graphic epistle made grim reading. Included were newspaper clippings with photographs of the 'Devastation at Dudley Drive' in which dozens had been killed outright by a stick of stray bombs jettisoned as German bombers made their escape after raiding the Clydeside shipyards. In one photograph the poignant image of an old dolly of Janine's lay in the rubble beside a stethoscope which had been her father's.

Stricken by the loss of her only child, Mhairi MacInnes closeted herself in the box bedroom. Inside, she sat upright in the short, narrow bed with her wireless turned to full volume and fixed on a German channel broadcasting day and night in English, providing a mixture of music and song interspersed with propaganda. In the early days of her self-imposed isolation, Mhairi refused to eat or drink, smoking continuously until her supply of tobacco was exhausted. At random times of the day or night she would emerge with her potty which she then emptied on the peat fire, a disgusting practice causing a vapour haze of bitter ammoniacal fumes which mixed with the cloud of stale tobacco smoke which escaped from the box room in her wake.

The bonus for Janine was she could now sleep in the kitchen, climbing up into the larger family bed, which had been raised on blocks to provide extra space for storage below. With freshly washed linen it proved a comfortable arrangement apart for the din leaking from the wireless in the box room.

Within a week of her self-imposed isolation, the sixty-two-year-old was hit by a vicious chest infection which soon became pneumonia, the silent killer. Bedridden, she was also now suffering from double incontinence, ruining the ancient horsehair mattress which had to be removed and burned. Delirious and failing, she was moved back to her own bed.

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To protect the mattress Martha devised adult nappies from old towels fixed fastened with large-sized safety pins.

Dr Angus MacDonald from Lochmaddy was summoned to check on her condition. Janine was asked to wait outside for this inspection. Double pneumonia was diagnosed with a fading, irregular heartbeat detected. Janine was not party to the quiet discussion between Martha and Angus during which it was agreed he should allow the patient to slip away thereby conserving his meagre supply of precious antibiotics for others more likely to benefit.

Smoking by the patient was banned.

Martha and Janine nursed Mhairi day and night during her last few weeks, sleeping in chairs, Martha praying quietly in Gaelic and English. In retreat from her reality, Janine re-read her way through a stack of boring novels collected by Henry from Veronica's library in Lochmaddy.

Mhairi lingered to early May 1941, then turned her face to the wall and slipped away peacefully. Just over a year since leaving Glasgow, Janine Robinson, now seventeen, was an orphan, with no money and no way of making a future for herself. Over her time in North Uist, Janine had tried writing to Helena through the QARNNC off in Portsmouth but her letters went unanswered. She knew that somewhere in Dumbarton she might have uncles, aunts and cousins from the Robinson side of her family but she had no addresses.

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Apart from the MacPhails and the mad old Iain Sinclair who lived three miles beyond the MacPhails on the most north westerly point of the island, she had no near neighbours who spoke English. Sinclair was an oddity, a small thin man in his early fifties who always wore a kilt and plaid regardless of the weather.

Taken by all to be 'soft in the head', the man was prone to standing alone on the hillside high above her croft on what came to be called 'Sinclair's pulpit rock', keening dirgeful psalms in a high tenor voice and reading aloud from the King James Bible, usually from the Old Testament, swapping from Gaelic to English and back again as the mood took him. At the end of these sessions he would conclude with a fire and brimstone prayer cum sermon in which Janine heard her name repeated many times. She learned from the MacPhails that Sinclair wandered all over the island delivering similar sermons to other crofts where women were on their own and that he never approached a croft where there was a man.

Apart from a few educated people in Lochmaddy like the Dr Angus and Miss Veronica MacDonald and to a lesser extent Miss Eilidh Ferguson, Iain Sinclair was the only other fluent English speaker she knew of and not a man she wanted to converse with.

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The distressing demise of Granny MacInnes was Janine's first experience of death at first hand. In her mind she had yet to accept that her parents were gone, never to return. As the early summer weeks rolled by, the orphan read and re-read Shona Davidson's letter and studied the clippings and photographs. As denial moved to anger then grief and loneliness, she fell into a deep depression and lethargy, spending hours indoors lying on her new larger bed in the kitchen, sobbing and at times conversing with the ghosts of her parents. When these phantoms at last faded, it was time for Helena to appear, in her QA uniform, smiling smugly, never speaking as if mocking her younger sister.

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In late September 1941, as the nights began to grow longer and the autumnal storms set in, defying her husband, Martha took direct action. Using her friends and family contacts, Martha managed to get Janine a position at the *Lochmaddy Hotel*. Henry reacted badly to Martha's subterfuge but, after a period of sulking, he reluctantly agreed to Martha's plan and together they encouraged their adopted niece to accept the move, at least on a trial basis. When Janine saw a chance for change, she rallied and over a few days became enthusiastic.

On Friday 3 October 1941, Janine Robinson moved out of the MacInnes croft, leaving her collie Balach, Bella the milker and her hens and sheep to the care of the MacPhails. Delivered by Henry and Martha, she travelled eighteen miles to the *Lochmaddy Hotel* where she started her first ever proper job. Aware she was on trial only and well warned to be on her best behaviour, she was consigned to Mrs Margo McAuley the manageress who was deputising for her husband who was away to the War flying as a bomb-aimer.

Martha had arranged for Janine to rent a bedroom from Miss Eilidh Ferguson, the Lochmaddy post-mistress, Martha's second cousin. The road from the MacInnes croft to Lochmaddy was difficult to cycle in windy weather and there was no public transport. Petrol was rationed for civilians, the fuel reserved for military personnel and legitimate businesses. In any case, Henry's Austin was unreliable.

Eilidh, a confirmed spinster in her mid-fifties, taciturn, set in her ways, rose at six o'clock every morning to pray, then bathed, breakfasted, prayed again, then move to the front of her house to open the Post Office from nine o'clock. She closed at noon for lunch, her main meal of the day, always to include eggs and potatoes, causing her to give off a distinctive whiff when she passed wind, which she did frequently. She re-opened the Post Office from two o'clock to five o'clock then ate lightly, read her Bible, prayed again, wrote poetry or checked Veronica's manuscript. This routine was adhered to six days a week. By seven o'clock on weekdays, she was in bed, reading and by eight o'clock, fast asleep.

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Although eligible for a telephone, Eilidh had refused to have it installed. Sundays were devoted entirely to God and His Worship. She was very deaf, even with her hearing aids. While she had agreed to accept Janine, it was on 'room only' basis, no food or laundry. Her rent was set at one shilling per week, to be donated to 'the poor in Africa'. At least Eilidh could speak English, when she was in the mood.

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As a new start, Janine was at the bottom of the pecking order, assigned at first as general dogsbody under the tall, portly Mrs Catherine Fraser, slaving as her kitchen skivvy, washing pots and pans and peeling mounds of potatoes, chopping carrots and cabbages and lighting and tending the downstairs coal fires in the public rooms.

Janine would soon learn that most of the hotel's guests were almost entirely military and associated personnel with a rare sprinkling of travelling salesmen and other businessmen.

Janine was unaware at this stage that she had been sponsored for her job by Mrs Donald MacLennan who was Martha's second cousin, also from Sollas. Donna was the wife of Sergeant Murdo MacLennan, North Uist's policeman. Donna was in charge of housekeeping at the hotel.

While Donna and Murdo were always pleasant to the girl from Glasgow, Murdo's twin sister Catherine was a difficult woman to please.

As a teenager Catherine MacLennan had moved to Oban where she had worked in the kitchen of a large hotel before returning to North Uist in her late twenties, now with passable English to add to her native Gaelic. Catherine's nickname was 'Beaky', used openly except in her presence. This came from her large hooked nose set in a round, flat, dish-like face. Aged thirty-seven, Beaky had been briefly married to Robert Fraser an alcoholic chef from the Mainland who had pitched up at the *Lochmaddy Hotel* for a brief spell. During the second winter of their marriage, Robert had made a lone trip to visit his family in Edinburgh, never to return.

Abandoned and frustrated, Beaky had become a twisted, unpleasant woman, with a vicious tongue she used as a whip to control her kitchen fiefdom. Jealous of the Glasgow girl's prettiness and good English, Beaky harried her new charge mercilessly, reducing the teenager to silent tears of frustration. However, the kindly Donna had a plan but was biding her time, to make sure that Janine was 'proved', seen to be a hard worker, amenable.

After a month of long hard days starting at six o'clock in the morning and ending around midnight, Janine was rescued from Beaky's tyranny.

On a day to day basis, the general running of the hotel and Reception were under the control of Mrs Margo McAuley, a bustling, sharp-tongued abrasive woman who had two

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wayward early teenage sons and a husband away at the War as a bomb-aimer. Everyone knew the main problem issue was helping guests settle their bills, a key part of Margo McAuley's duty.

Margo was originally from Kilsyth fifteen miles north east from Glasgow and had met her Glasgow husband Fergus when he was working in a factory which made cast iron goods. The couple had returned to Lochmaddy when his mother died, leaving them a small house in the outskirts of the village. During her twenty years on North Uist, Margo had acquired a passable working knowledge of local Gaelic. However, when speaking English, the Kilsyth woman still held to her lowland twang which most of her guests found impossible to understand. Many of the incomers spoke in overblown BBC RP English or other regional English draws which baffled Margo and the Gaelic-speaking locals.

Acting covertly, Donna MacLennan bypassed Margo and persuaded the Factor for the North Uist Estate who owned the hotel, to re-assign Janine. Lawrie McKinlay was from Harris and had a fine tenor voice. He was Precentor at the Free Church in Carinish where Donna was the Mission Secretary and often sang psalms in duet with him. Donna persuaded Lawrie that Janine's skills would be put to better use working with her in housekeeping part-time and part-time at reception.

Within a few weeks, because of her ability to communicate with the guests, Janine was additionally allocated to the key role of taking orders and serving at table in the Residents' Dining Room and, later, to serve drinks in the Residents' Lounge Bar, a room which in the evenings took on the atmosphere of an informal mess for officers and senior ratings.

This meant the posh girl from Glasgow was not entirely free of Beaky's venomous attacks but gradually the teenager learned to cope and, refusing to be cowed, began to snipe back. This proved to be only a stand-off: in her usual fashion Beaky Fraser began spreading viscous rumours of the girl she envied and detested.

By mid-December 1941, Janine Robinson, newly eighteen and in full bloom, was starting to get traction on her new life as a valued member of the *Lochmaddy Hotel* staff and as a familiar face in the village.

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Defiled

Janine Robinson met Roddy Macleod at a Friday ceilidh in the Lochmaddy Hall. Because of the War, there was a shortage of eligible men and many of the girls were relegated to dancing together.

As the new girl, wearing her smartest frock of draped crepe in a vibrant Kelly green which matched her eyes, she made a striking addition to what was a motely assembly of locals dressed in drab wartime clothes. Janine had taken extra care with her long hair, styling it in a 'peek-a-boo' effect after her idol, the American film star Veronica Lake. Her face was doll-like peaches and cream, set off perfectly by a beauty spot high on her right cheek.

In her own eyes if Janine had a flaw it was that her teeth were a dull, light oatmeal colour, inherited from her mother and not the shining white of film stars she longed for. To compensate she had tried teeth whitening gels of various kinds, all of which irritated her gums and had eventually given up using them. To compensate, in the hope that over time her teeth might somehow whiten and brighten, she used the American brand toothpaste called *Pepsodent*, brushing her teeth many times a day. This product was difficult to find and expensive. On North Uist, it was only available by mail-order, if you could locate a supplier with the product in stock.

As she glided into the smoky hall from the cloakroom, she took in the room with a haughty sweep and confirmed to herself she was the tallest and prettiest girl in the room.

She spotted Roddy at once; to her he seemed like a Viking God. At six-foot-four, half-a-head taller than her father, with a ruddy complexion, clean-shaven with red-gold blond hair worn longish, he was wide-shouldered with narrow hips. Even before he loped boldly across the room offering his outstretched hand, Janine was smitten. Roddy had good English with a pleasant island lilt, not unlike Uncle Henry's, she thought.

"Ach, well, so it is true that they are making a film of the War out here in the Hebrides! You are surely not that actress, what is her name again? Or are you her younger, prettier cousin, the one I have been spying around the place? It is that you are indeed Miss Janine Robinson from Glasgow? Come, my wee princess, and let me hold you tight and we will show these locals how it should be done."

That night and every subsequent Friday night they danced every dance together and sat apart from the others whispering and holding hands during the tea interval.

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For Janine, it was like acting out a role in a fairy-tale film. For Roddy, it was unusual to be courting a pretty girl who could hold her own with him in conversation. Most of his previous encounters had been with simpler, less well educated and more worldly-wise women who were not easy to bed. Since arriving in Lochmaddy, he had already tried a few of the better-looking younger ones but had found them dull in conversation and highly resistant to his wandering hands.

During their chats Janine learned his father's boat normally sailed out of Stornoway but had been requisitioned by the War Department to run military supplies and personnel from Uig in Skye. Other ports of call included the railway terminals at Kyle of Lochalsh, and Oban on the Mainland and occasionally from Greenock on the Clyde. *The Stormy Petrel* had been chosen because it was the largest of the Hebridean fleet, a fact Roddy emphasised many times.

The vessel was owned by a family syndicate led by their skipper, Donald John Macleod, Roddy's father. Roddy's two older brothers who had worked the boat with them when it was at the fishing, were now on an uncle's boat, replacements for younger men like Roddy who had been conscripted or had left fishing to join the Merchant Marine. Roddy had been spared, he claimed, because of his English learned from his mother, who was from Inverness.

Janine also learned there was still an active Hebridean fleet of boats based mainly at Kyle of Lochalsh and Oban or occasionally at Troon and Girvan, depending on the herring shoals. The trick was to land their catches at a good price to be sent by train to Glasgow or further south English cities. Operating in The Minches between Stornoway and Barra, Roddy pronounced, was a highly dangerous activity, emphasising many local fishing vessels had been lost, shot up and holed by German U-Boats who were bold enough to surface. According to Roddy, these U-boats were constantly hunting The Minches and lurking just to the West of the Hebrides waiting to attack for British convoys carrying supplies from Canada for Glasgow or reverse convoys heading up past Norway to take supplies to Russian allies in Murmansk.

Again, according to Roddy, his boat and a few others bold enough to sail these waters were doing a great job spotting and reporting submarines on their new marine radios supplied by the Admiralty and the main reason the new radio station had been built on North Uist.

Roddy was Janine's first real boyfriend and, as he was berthed less than five minutes' walk from her room at Miss Ferguson's, they were able to meet most nights after she finished at the hotel. Within days of their first kiss, he had stated his intention to marry her as soon as the War was over, a proposal she accepted by transferring Granny MacInnes's wedding band from her purse to the third finger of her left hand whenever they were alone together. He promised to save for an engagement ring but meantime,

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she must keep their secret as marriage. Single men seconded to the RNVR were not encouraged to become engaged or married, just like being in the Royal Navy. Questioned further on this point, he advised:

"Ach, well, my wee princess, if we were married and I was to be lost at sea, the Admiralty would be forced to give you the War Widow's Pension and they are very stingy about that sort of thing, so it is said."

After their third Friday dance, Janine sneaked him into her bedroom while Eilidh Ferguson slept upstairs, her hearing aid switched off, placed on her bedside shelf beside her false teeth.

Janine had not understood the handsome twenty-five-year-old from Stornoway had no intention of marrying her and had targeted her as an easy conquest. A few of the other girls tried to warn her Roddy Macleod was a predator. However, as the girl from Glasgow had almost no Gaelic and they had little English, she misread their jealous muttered warnings in there various formats such as:

"Keep yer hauns aff oor Roddy!", while what they had said was, *"Dinnae let yon Roddy get his hauns oan ye!"*

Roddy Macleod soon learned his naive consort responded well to flattery and, half tongue-in-cheek plied her with lines whispered huskily into her ears, such as:

"Miss Janine Robinson, you are to me like a Royal Princess, descending upon us away out here in Lochmaddy from the Mainland. It is said you are related to the King's sisters, is that the way of it? Ach, but you are perfect in every way and without doubt the finest dancer I have ever partnered. You are like one of those dancing angels, the ones with the winged feet. It is you and no other I will have as my bride."

What her 'betrothed' failed to reveal, a secret known only to his father who had been a similar lothario in his younger days, was that Roddy was already betrothed to a clutch of Mainland 'wives' in Oban and another on the Isle of Barra at Castlebay, all needy women in their thirties with small children whose husbands were at sea in the Merchant Navy and who welcomed his attentions and held his visits secret from their neighbours by various subterfuges.

Like his father and brothers, Roddy Macleod was an accomplished seducer with many conquests to his record although Janine was his first ever virgin.

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In Roddy's defence, Janine Robinson was not entirely an innocent regarding sex. When Roddy had first come to her bed, entering by her window in the early hours of the

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morning, she had thought of asking him to use a 'protective' but held back because she knew most men thought rubbers spoiled their enjoyment of the experience.

Janine felt she knew quite a lot about condoms.

Despite objections from others at Partick Free Church, her father had been a staunch advocate of family planning in order to space out children and give the mother's body time to recover between pregnancies. Because of her daily experience working in Rottenrow Maternity Hospital, Martha MacPhail was also an advocate and the topic of contraception had been regularly aired when the two couples got together at Dudley Drive. Although these discussions had been a regular topic over the years they had not held Janine's attention until puberty had altered her body and taken hold of her emotions.

Eavesdropping outside the parlour door from the lobby, she discovered her parents were both very much in favour of men using protectives and less in favour of the diaphragm' for women, a method said to be 'much less secure'.

By age fourteen, Janine was already well developed physically and thought of herself as a woman. With fully rounded breasts she was wearing a cast-off bra which had belonged to Helena who had always been smaller for her age with a flatter chest, even as an adult. Generating a noticeable and pleasing cleavage, the secondary effect of the garment's tightness was mildly arousing, causing a pleasant rubbing as she moved around. Walking home after school she developed the habit of removing her tie and undoing the three top buttons of her blouse, drawing hot lots from older boys while pretending she did not notice.

On occasions when she had the house to herself, mainly late afternoons on Wednesdays, she would disrobe to wander around naked or nearly naked, displaying herself in her mother's dressing mirror to an imaginary suiter and wantonly combing her fingers through her thick matt of dark pubic hair, enjoying the sensation. Just ahead of her monthly periods, her breasts would ache pleasantly, demanding to be fondled and kneaded, causing the release a sticky transparent fluid which tasted very slightly salty. At these times her vagina flushed with a slippery pungent creamy mucous creating an irresistible desire to finger herself to achieve the head-spinning 'release' she had heard older girls talking about in the girls' toilets.

Desperate to learn everything about her new self, she made several trips to *The Mitchell Library*, Glasgow's principal reference library free to the general public. Provided visitors spoke at a whisper and were discreet, all enjoyed unsupervised access to thousands of books selected directly from shelves or located through the card index system.

During her research on sex and contraception Janine was led into the strange world of 'safe sex through self-love masturbation'. Numerous articles gave descriptions with

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diagrams of penis-shaped dildos and self-stimulating feathered gloves. The most intriguing was an electrically powered massager designed to be strapped to the user's hand and guaranteed to vibrate at the correct resonant frequency to create clitoral ecstasy.

Another learned article in a health journal outlined the automated manufacture and testing of 'new generation' thinner but stronger American condoms. Another article reported on the veracity of these *Durex* condoms explaining they been trialled extensively by issuing them free to US Forces to reduce unwanted pregnancies while countering venereal diseases arising from casual sexual relations.

With the house to herself one afternoon, she began her methodical search for her parents' supply of condoms. Ten minutes later, in her father's bedside bookcase behind a pile of medical journals and reports, she found a large box of rubber protectives. Surprised and slightly disappointed she saw they were not the American *Durex* brand but the old-fashioned British kind produced by The London Rubber Company. Unable to resist the temptation, she had taken one, locked herself in her bedroom, smoothing it out, studying it then lifting it to her lips, blowing into it, to inflate it like a balloon. On impulse, she eased it over an appropriately shaped carrot before slipping under the covers of her bed to use her invention as a female comforter.

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Within six weeks of her first intercourse with Roddy Macleod, Janine had 'missed' twice and knew she was pregnant. Roddy reacted badly to the news. In ordinary circumstances as a fisherman free to roam, the young Macleod might have arranged to sail off on *The Stormy Petrel* to fish from another port but, being under contract the War Office he was constrained, trapped.

"Well, my pretty little princess, with you coming from *Glasgow* and from a father who was a Doctor, I expect you will know fine well what to do. My advice to you is that you do it quickly. Do you hear me? Stop snivelling and get rid of it or it is the both of us who will be for the high jump."

Ashamed, contrite and frightened, the teenager turned first to Donna MacLennan. This was a mistake. Secrets of any kind were hard to keep in *Lochmaddy* and soon rumours about Roddy and Janine were rife. Beaky Fraser was in her element, inventing spicy stories of their indiscretions.

In desperation, Janine then turned to her Aunt Martha, throwing herself on her mercy, asking for help. Filled with guilt at her own sinful thoughts, Janine was half hoping the former midwife might offer to abort the baby but held back from asking her directly. Had the girl voiced her thoughts, she would have been harshly chastised but it did not come to this.

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Taking the role of her 'uncle', Henry MacPhail stepped forward on her behalf. He laid the ground well by discussing the matter with Lieutenant-Commander Dewy-Davies RNVR, the man in charge of Royal Navy matters at Lochmaddy pierhead. As the person in strategic command of *The Stormy Petrel*, the Welshman was, in military terms, Roddy's commanding officer. Henry MacPhail was also on good terms with Sergeant Murdo MacLennan and brought him into the plot, calling on family affiliation and police service loyalty.

During a fractious discussion with the naval officer and policeman present, Henry MacPhail confronted Roddy and demanded he make good his promise to marry his 'niece'. In the background stood Martha, who kept her eyes closed, praying. Donald John, Roddy's father, whose English was limited was also present, shaking his head and muttering angrily in Gaelic.

Janine Robinson was quarantined in the office along the hallway with PO Alec Macrae, the older of the two naval ratings who worked for Dewy-Davies. With her head bowed, pretending not to hear the angry voices discussing her future, she focussed on her ornate China cup and saucer, sipping sweet tea and nibbling biscuits.

Behind her, in the corner of the room, Alec Macrae was pecking with one finger at a typewriter with what to Janine felt was infuriating slowness. CPO Jimmy Corbett was absent, on duty alone at the radio station. Between episodes of typing, Macrae complained of his arthritic fingers and pulled open a desk drawer. Glancing up briefly when his typing stopped, she saw he was reading a newspaper, folded inside a ledger, mumbling in a whisper to himself reports of football matches from the previous weekend.

She already knew from Uncle Henry that, like himself, Corbett and Macrae were ardent supporters of Glasgow Rangers FC.

After an hour of bitter wrangling, an agreement was imposed on Roddy Macleod. Under the circumstances it could not be a church wedding. The couple would be wed on the following day by Miss Veronica MacDonald who was also the Registrar for North Uist.

Later, in the bar of the *Lochmaddy Hotel*, Donald John expounded his views in Gaelic (for he had almost no English). A rough translation of this edict was later to Henry MacPhail by Alec Macrae:

"Ach, it will be for the fine croft Roddy has said she owns. But so far he has not set an eye upon it, so it could be one of those tall tales Glasgow people are fond of spouting. Some say she has a milking cow of her own and over a hundred sheep to her name. Tell me now, how could it be possible she has such a fortune to her name, and her still but a child?"

Repeating himself as he was prone to do, he added:

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"Ach, it is a mystery to me how this thin, childlike thing could own more than most of the men in this bar and her not yet a full woman. No, it surely cannot be true! More like it is a witch's spell she put upon Roddy with her high, sing-song voice and those green eyes on her and a face painted up like a doll and the red lipstick of a hoor on her. Never trust a woman with green eyes, I always say. They are always trouble, one way or another. And look at her, will you? There is not even much of a bulge to prove there is a child in her at all. The only thing I would say for her favour is she is a good dancer. Yes, I would give her that, with fine strong legs on her. But the lip on her? No, it will not do, not for a son of mine. Ach, but I dare say my boy will knock her into obedience once he has moved in on her place."

Later still, mellowed by a few more drams he added, philosophically:

"Or maybe it is true that at last our Roddy is growing a head on his shoulders and has decided to give over on his shagging around as he has promised in private to the Welshman. Ach, no. I cannot see the boy changing his spots now and why should he? He will be just be going through the motions because of the big ex-policeman MacPhail from Glasgow and young Murdo MacLennan over there saying if my boy did not marry the girl they would lock him up and send him down to Glasgow for six months in the one of those jails with the shirt-lifters and conscientious objectors. Whenever was it the case that a man could go to jail for having a good shag on a willing girl, tell me that? Ach, if that were true we would all be in the jails, would we not? What they are saying, so Roddy tells me, is that it is all written down under the War Powers Act as 'dereliction of duty' whatever the hell that means! And they are saying we have both signed up to it, lock stock and barrel. I tell you true, that was the biggest mistake ever I made in my whole life until now, signing up for this job when I could have been away up there in the Faroes coining it in now the Frenchies and Spaniards have left it wide open to me."

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On Thursday 4th November 1941, only months after losing first her parents then her grandmother, Janine Robinson of Glasgow and North Uist married Roddy Macleod of Stornoway, currently a temporary resident of Lochmaddy.

Thanks to Beaky Fraser's gossip, none of the local ministers on North Uist would bless their union. The wedding group was small, comprising only Henry MacPhail who gave Janine away and Martha as her Maid of Honour with Dewy-Davies as a reluctant Groomsman to Roddy and Miss Eilidh Ferguson in her capacity as a Justice of the Peace and in support Miss Veronica MacDonald as the Registrar.

The service was conducted in English. With a slightly inebriated Donald John leaning on the wall in near the door, still unsure why his son was marrying into these Sassenachs.

There was no false celebration to follow.

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What Donald John had said in the bar had been widely circulated and blown up greatly by Beaky in the re-telling. Immediately after the ceremony, the couple were parted. Within the hour, *The Stormy Petrel* was ordered to Greenock to collect supplies and Janine was removed by the MacPhails back to their croft.

As a pregnant, married woman in 'disgrace', Janine lost her job at the hotel.

Over the remaining months of her pregnancy until the birth of her child, she was permitted to see Roddy only once a month, chaperoned by Martha MacPhail. On these visits he would always cadge a lift out with Corbett and Macrae as the Royal Navy truck headed out to the radio station, sitting on the tailgate with his rusty old bicycle from the boat. Although he always hoped to thumb a lift for the return journey, this seldom happened. As a bragging bully, Roddy was not popular and vehicles which passed him did not toot or stop to offer a lift. Never once did Henry offer to transport him in his Austin.

MacPhail was still brooding on Donald John's loose words on the eve of the wedding and the enmity between the Glaswegian and the two Stornoway men grew steadily deeper as the months went by and Janine grew bigger. Before Henry had forced the issue, Martha had tried to put her husband off his set plan to have Janine marry Roddy. Now, as Henry heard continuing tales of the bragging assertions being made by the Stornoway men in the bar of the *Lochmaddy Hotel*, he began to realise perhaps Janine might have been better off without him.

Although his pride would not allow him to discuss his thoughts with his wife but he did, however, confide his misgivings in his prayers:

"Heavenly Father, for you all things are possible. Only You can alter a man's heart and make him good. Please send your Holy Spirit to move in His mysterious ways, His miracles to perform. And Lord Jesus, our Christ, please keep our Janine safe from Roddy Macleod and other men like him. As you know well, dear Lord, that girl has a wayward flirtatiousness in her, just like her mother had, and the same stubborn cleverness of her father."

During the months of waiting, Henry MacPhail devoted every free hour he could spare to renovating the MacInnes croft, repairing the corrugated roof, applying cement mortar to the cracks in the stonework. In this work he was helped by Jimmy Corbett and Andy Macrae who supplied materials and paint and occasionally some direct help. The aim was to make the dwelling as windproof as possible to retain the heat from the peat fire inside and prevent it being whipped up and away by strong winds.

As every crofter knew: *tha taigh teann na thaigh blàtha* (a tight house is a warm house).

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Motherhood

Janine's baby arrive in June 1942, born in the MacPhail croft, a fine long girl child, perfect, healthy, and, in the first few days, a good strong feeder, mostly docile and a sound sleeper.

They named her Moira after Janine's mother. In time, the MacPhails hoped to find a man of the cloth who would be willing to Christen her properly and in public. Meantime, to keep her soul safe, Henry chose a form of words which he hoped did not contravene his vows as an elder of the Free Church of Scotland:

"Loving Heavenly Father, please accept this infant into the Elect of our Lord Jesus. By the Almighty Power of your Holy Spirit guard her day and night. As we name her Moira Robinson MacInnes Macleod after her grandparents, strengthen us to bring her up as a true and faithful servant of the Lord. Amen."

The first true contractions had started at three o'clock and the baby arrived without difficulty within two hours, delivered by Martha assisted by Henry. During his three decades as a policeman in Glasgow's slums, Henry had been present at eight emergency live births. With great sadness he had also witnessed several dozen miscarriages or abortions which had gone wrong, either self-administered or induced by well-meaning neighbours trying to help a desperate friend to escape the perils of another unwanted pregnancy.

With the birth, the summer settled to a long, hot and dry spell with just enough of a breeze to hold off the biting midges, forcing the sheep to climb over to the hill for fresh water at the lochan which served the radio station.

During the early weeks of her recuperation, Janine was confined to bed after which she was assigned light duties only as Martha and Henry doted over their 'perfect grandniece'.

Early in her second month Wee Moira changed, becoming a fractious, colicky child, crying and girning hour after hour, refusing to feed. Despite the many 'cures' Martha devised, the infant threw up every ounce of milk she sucked from Janine's swollen breasts, or so it seemed. At their wit's end, Henry paid for Dr Angus MacDonald to come from Lochmaddy to examine the babe but after a quick check, the Doctor declared:

"No, Martha, your grandniece is fit, strong and thriving. She's a bright wee thing just set on exercising the fine pair of lungs on her, no doubt a Mod singer in the making like her grandmother would have been if she had not run away to Glasgow with yourself, chasing men. At least you came back to us, if not poor Moira MacInnes".

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In August, after long weeks of unremitting strife, Henry and Martha moved Janine and her child back to the MacInnes croft to make the best of it alone, supported by daily visits and a signalling system, a Union Jack raise on a mast high enough to be seen from the MacPhail croft just out of sight over the rise of the rough peat beds. Henry explained how to fly it upside down as a call for 'Help!' or right way up to confirm 'All is Well!'.

From that point on Henry and Martha began to reclaim their quieter, ordered life which had been disrupted since the demanding and argumentative Janine had moved in with them on the day of her marriage.

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The news that Janine was now back living alone reached Lochmaddy. During her confinement, Roddy had visited his wife only three times and only once since the birth of his daughter, each stay lasting only long enough to drink a pot of tea and gobble down a plateful of Martha's scones.

Now Janine was back in her own place and unchaperoned, the frequency of his visits increased. From the first night when he was welcomed into her bed, Roddy was overnighing at the MacInnes croft at every opportunity. When this was discovered by the MacPhails, it seemed to them that Janine and Roddy were now settled to live together as man and wife, after a fashion.

Over these first months together, Janine discovered a new Roddy, one who did not need to woo her, the true Roddy Macleod, a rough lover, a demanding bully, forcing himself on her within minutes of arriving, sometimes with the smell of whisky on his breath and a half bottle in his pocket. Thankfully, he did not smoke but neither did he keep himself clean nor brush his teeth. She diverted his forceful kisses to her neck as often as she could and would not allow his tongue into her mouth, another new habit he seemed to have acquired.

Likewise, Roddy discovered a different Janine, one who was inquisitive and persistent to the point of nagging. Janine wanted to learn everything about Roddy and about the Macleods of Stornoway, her new family. Roddy, normally expansive, clammed up, closing his eyes to her, stretching his legs and whistling off key to himself as if trying to drive her mad. No matter how many times she asked, trying different approaches, the information she sought was not forthcoming. Apart from Roddy's father and earlier stories of his two older brothers she knew almost nothing about him and began to suspect a dark secret lay behind his silence. Although she had met his father and shaken hands with him on her wedding day, because of her lack of Gaelic and his lack of English, she had been unable to hold a conversation with him.

To Martha, Henry MacPhail had described Donald John Macleod as:

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"He is one of those men trapped in his own ego, blind to his faults, with nothing of value to say when sober, spending his time whistling and muttering to himself. By contrast, when enough drink has been taken, he is impossible to shut up, blethering, broadcasting his ignorance for all to hear before eventually descending into belligerence. A blowhard, a man best avoided. Roddy, however, has a mannerly streak in him which we should encourage."

Martha in turn, shared Henry's view with Janine adding other tittle tattle. As a local girl, Martha was aware that in Lochmaddy and throughout the North Uist community there was a strongly held prejudice against the people of Lewis:

"The men of Stornoway make poor husbands. They are all vain, every one of them and prone to lifting their hands to get their own way. Worst of all, they are mean and devious, hoarding every penny. How do you think they managed to buy a fancy steel boat when everyone else has to make do with wood?"

The typical epithet, never used in their hearing was:

"Ach, never trust a Lewis man. Misers and scroungers, the every one of them."

To Janine this blanket judgement seemed intrinsically unfair and led her to wonder how they described her when she was not present to defend herself. However, although she did not reveal her inner feelings to her Aunt and Uncle, she had already begun suspect what they said might well be true of her Roddy.

According to Uncle Henry who got most of his inside information from Corbett and Macrae, both Macleods spent their evenings in the Resident's Lounge Bar of the *Lochmaddy Hotel*, a sort of double act, buttering up the transient guests, accepting drams in return for Roddy's fanciful and entertaining tales of fishing up near The Faroes and Iceland where other Hebridean skippers were afraid to venture because their boats were too small and unable to withstand the buffeting of the heavy seas in these more northly waters.

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Within a few weeks of her new way of living independently in Granny MacInnes croft, Janine began to dread Roddy's visits. On arrival, fired with desire, his first impulse was the wrestle her to bed and mount her crudely, ignoring her pleas for tenderness. Only later, when he had been fed and was relaxed could she enjoy their second and third couplings.

For her, the best times were early in the morning when she would rouse him by stroking him to fullness, pleased at the power her bold actions exerted over him, living out fantasies from her early teenage years, basing her actions on scenes from Helena's explicit novels. When he was fully ready but still drowsy, it was her turn to be in charge,

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rising to sit astride him pressing her nipples to his lips to be sucked, nipped and stretched lazily by his teeth. In this relaxed mode, he matched more nearly the fantasy lovers from her early teenage years, afternoons locked in her bedroom with curtains drawn and the house to herself, free to use her female comforter.

The MacPhail's were rightly wary of the unpredictable and volatile Roddy Macleod. They had seen the bruises and the occasional black eye or bloodied nose, suspecting that Janine had been disciplined because of her 'nebbing tongue'. If they suspected he was at Granny MacInnes' croft, they stayed away until they saw Roddy riding his bike back to Lochmaddy. After his departure, Martha would give it an hour and then call on her niece and grandchild with a freshly baked loaf or a pile of scones and jars of home-made jam from her raspberry and gooseberry bushes, tart from the sugar shortage but sweetened with a dollop of odd-tasting honey from Henry's bees.

As the intermittent cohabitation continued through the late autumn into early winter, Janine, Martha and Henry carried on as before, never discussing Roddy. It was as if by ignoring him, he did not exist in their separate life as crofters, remote from Lochmaddy and the War. Partly this was because the MacPhails were afraid if they criticised Janine or Roddy in any way, it might lead to a rift and they would lose the chance to enjoy their surrogate grandchild.

By the end of October, Moira had grown out of her tummy problems and, except when teething, was now a happy smiling infant, beginning to crawl and respond to tickles and smiles and play with the home-made dollies and toys made by her Grannie and Grampie MacPhail.

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Nest-Egg

It was clear to Janine her husband was no crofter of any kind and while he happy to eat greedily from her meagre larder, he never brought anything to add to it, refused to give any money to his wife's purse and took no interest in helping with chores. To him, Wee Moira was an irksome and inconvenient nuisance, drawing his oft repeated phrase or a version of it:

"No, wife, I will not tend to her whining, dribbling face. It is your job as her mother and you are making a poor show of it. Look you at her now, a long thin thing with the dark hair and green eyes of yourself and not a trace of the Macleod in her. Is it as my father says? Have you duped me into this marriage to legitimise some other man's bastard? Was it one of those 'fine officers and gentlemen' in the Lochmaddy Hotel who was prodding away at you? Is this why you landed yourself on me? Is it as my father says and you had them lined up at a pound a shag to pay for your hoors's dresses and fancy shoes?"

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Janine's nineteenth birthday in November 1942 was marked by a week-long bout of heartburn and nausea. By her reckoning, she was about three months pregnant. Mistakenly, she had believed she would be 'safe' while still suckling Moira.

Because of Roddy's reaction to her first pregnancy, she was determined to keep her condition from him for as long as possible. She also held it back from the MacPhails as she did not want the information to get back to him indirectly. After Donna, Janine had learned her lesson: *the best kept secret is one shared with no one but God.*

During the months she had been back living alone at Granny MacInnes's croft, Roddy's proprietorial assumption that the croft was now *his* began to emerge in his manner and speech. His attitude built a steady resentment in Janine but she held it back, knowing her own position as owner of the freehold croft was not entirely secure.

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By asking around, the Macleods had discovered in the past Gordon MacInnes had run over two hundred ewes and a small beef herd of up to twenty 'growing-on beasts' brought in as heifers from other 'milkers' like Bella, cows served by the MacInnes bull bought from the market in Perth, always replaced every four years. In those days the MacInnes croft had been one of the wealthiest in the north-west of the island. This had ended when Gordon had been in his prime. The exact circumstances of the accident were unknown but it was surmised his creel boat had been overturned by a sudden squall. The shattered

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hull had been washed up on the west of the Isle of Vallay but his body had never been found.

No one other than the MacPhails and Janine knew was this accident had happened a few weeks after the letter reached North Uist telling him Moira had married John Robinson, a man studying to become a Doctor. To mark the event, Gordon had added a simple statement in Gaelic into the front of his family Bible, an item which had belonged to his grandfather, Hamish Gordon MacInnes. In translation, it read:

In recognition of my daughter's marriage and her confession she is with child, I wish it to be known that upon my death this croft and its animals will pass to my eldest grandson.

God and my wife Mhairi MacInnes who makes her mark below are my witnesses.

Under his widow, the MacInnes' herd had declined to about sixty ewes scattered in several hefts along the shoreline machair. There was also a small, wary, rogue flock of un-culled rams which had moved up into the nooks and crannies of hillside below the radio station, joined only by the ewes in the wildest weather.

After more than two decades of neglect under Mhairi, the MacInnes croft house, its land and its sheep were in poor condition, providing a mere subsistence living despite the strong demand for lamb and mutton to support the War Effort. With the occasional ewe or lamb and the steady harvest of meat from her chickens and their eggs, the free milk from Bella and the generous gifts of freshly grown vegetables, Janine was not likely to starve. However, what she lacked was cash to buy shop-bought goods. For these items she was entirely dependent on gifts from her aunt and uncle. The money which Granny MacInnes had once hoarded and used to afford her cigarettes and other essentials had also diminished.

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In the first weeks after Granny Mhairi's death, Janine had searched the house thoroughly with Martha's help, hoping to find her grandmother's cache of money. They found only her old leather purse with a single five-pound note, three half crowns and eleven pence in copper coins.

However, when Janine had moved back to the croft with Wee Moira she eventually found Mhairi's secret hoard, comprising £55 in Bank of Scotland £5 notes, each note interleaved inside a book entitled *The Metrical Psalms and Paraphrases*, compiled by a man called Thomas Young. This heavy tome had tumbled from the high shelf above the kitchen bed when she had been re-arranging her library books.

Granny MacInnes's money now became Janine's nest-egg, money which she resolved to keep for dire emergencies, such as medical treatments or medicines for her children. Each time she wound up the clock, she imagined her money again, in her mind's eye

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spreading it out, dreaming. This secret wealth fuelled her fantasies of escaping one day from North Uist, moving back to *Glasgow* after the War. In her memory her birthplace had become a magical land where everything was cleaner, brighter, full of laughter and song, inhabited by friendly people who would happily speak to you on a tram, in shops or even in the street.

Janine's idea of hiding this money in the mantle clock had come from her father's habit of saving up week by week to buy birthday and Christmas presents, depositing a few shillings each time he wound up the mechanism until there was a pound's worth of silver which he exchanged for a note.

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Domination

Because of unremitting high winds and driving rain, Roddy had not been to visit her for over a month. Martha had only been once, on foot, struggling along the shore, buffeted by wind and rain. Henry, unable to come with her because of his poor knees, had refused to use the Austin because of the deep mud on the path down to her croft.

Janine resigned herself to keeping close to the croft, staying mainly indoors the her clothes horse placed in front of the fire, festooned with Wee Moira's nappies, baby clothes and underwear.

Restless amid this squalor, she was unable to focus on her latest batch of novels or enjoy singing along to the wireless. Occasionally, but only for a few minutes at a time, she would open her 'carry' Bible, the one that fitted into her handbag, think of her father who had gifted it to her, read an inspiring text, say a prayer asking for forgiveness and deliverance. However, she knew such acts of devotion were futile, doomed to failure because she was unrepentant, resisting the power of The Holy Spirit to change her heart and mind, make her whole. Although in her mind she dreaded Roddy's visits, her body lusted for the ecstasy which flooded through her in the moment of release, a pleasure which, now she had experienced the real thing, she could no longer replicate by her own hand.

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The dispute which had been simmering between the newlyweds came to a head in late February 1943. By her estimate, she was about five months pregnant, not willing yet to tell Roddy and actively concealing her condition from the MacPhails.

Obsessing, she began checking several times a day and each time her bump seemed larger. None of her nicer skirts or dresses fitted and she was reduced to wearing the dowdy dresses Martha had fashioned for her during her first pregnancy. Some days she went about her duties dressed only in her old school coat over a night-dress and cardigan.

The new baby began moving, kicking from time to time. Her heartburn and queasiness were back. Because of her reflux when recumbent she was sleeping badly and dogged by constant tiredness. This, combined with the rollercoaster effect of hormones made her weepy, snappy and needy.

At nearly nine months old, Wee Moira was teething, drooling and girning, inconsolable, spitting out her soother, refusing even a comforting nipple in her unhappiness. At her wit's end, Janine had been flying her Union Jack for nearly a week, hoping to attract a

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visit from the MacPhails. Unfortunately, in the blustery conditions, she had attached it the right way up, indicating 'All is Well'.

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Relentlessly, the wind blew and the rains fell until, as if by magic, Janine wakened to a different world.

During a short morning of transformation, the wind dropped. High above, the black rain clouds scudded north and east to the Mainland. Then, after a few hours of bright sunshine, the weather settled to a dull, warmer spell with soft rain and almost no wind. With the change, Janine began to feel better and dropped the signal flag, hoping the MacPhails would stay away thus delaying what she was sure would be their inevitable disapproval at her condition.

From the south, squabbling gaggles of geese passed overhead, pink-foots and greylags, she thought, a first harbinger of spring after a dull wet, mild and stormy winter. Her resident blackbird males were competing, taking turns to sing lustily from the ridge of the croft while the females followed the sheep to spear the ground after worms. From the peat hags the wrens were trilling argumentatively, to establish their territories. As the seas calmed to a sigh and sigh, the silhouettes of plovers and smaller seabirds could be seen among a sprinkling of crows working the shoreline in the low sunlight.

A few weeks earlier, Henry had become excited when reports circulated of a sighting of a male corncrake to the south at nearby Balranald. Some said it was an early summer visitor from Africa not normally seen until April. On this basis it was taken locally to be a sign of a long, dry summer ahead. According to Corbett and Macrae, The Commander was dubious and wondered if it was perhaps an injured bird which had somehow managed to overwinter on the island due to the mildness of the weather.

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On the third day of the good spell, Roddy arrived late in the afternoon, having cadged a lift on the back of old Donald Angus Ross's tractor with its trailer, this mode of transport providing respite from cycling his old rusty bicycle.

Don-Angi was the man who had supplied Mhairi MacInnes with her cigarettes and supplies of tinned soup and beans and luncheon meat which seemed to have formed her stable diet. The itinerant trader was making his way out to the most westerly point of the island with a load of firesticks and coals to mad Iain Sinclair's tumbledown croft. Sinclair, a man believed to be in his late forties, was one of the few ordinary people on North Uist who could afford coal. It was said Sinclair had inherited at least a million pounds from a rich uncle whose father had once owned the tidal island of Grimsay off Benbecula.

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According to local legend, the Grimsay man had sold up, moved to London where it was said he made a fortune on the London Stock Exchange during the 1914-18 War.

As Roddy wheeled his bike down the track, Janine, even though her nipples had been dry for weeks, was 'comfort' breast-feeding Wee Moira who was teething again, her molars cutting through. She did not hear her husband approach. When he burst into the croft, he was tipsy, smelling of whisky. The sight of her bared breasts sparked lust into his eyes. Snatching his daughter, he dumped her roughly into her cot in the box bedroom, slamming the door shut on her screams.

After their usual rough mating, still in his scruffy and none to clean underpants, he took over Janine's armchair and downed the dregs of his whisky directly from the bottle before taking a longer sip from a second unlabelled bottle. This was a clear spirt, locally distilled whisky which he had been sold by Don-Angi.

"Aye, and that one had been building in me these last weeks. I could tell you were a-gagging for it too, eh? Now, wife, what about a wee feast to seal the deed and build up my strength for round two?"

In silence, with Wee Moira at her breast to keep her from crying, Janine made him a heap of scrambled eggs on toasted scones spread thickly with Martha's butter, one of his favourite meals. Reluctantly, she shared the last of her fresh tealeaves which she mixed with old leaves, saved to eke out her ration. The result was disappointing, a weak wartime brew.

Despite her protests, Roddy had taken to using the large ornate cup which had been one of her grandmother's prize possession. Prior to Roddy entering her life, the cup had been occupied pride of place on the as an ornament on display beside the mantle clock on the high shelf above the fire hearth.

This cup had been a commemorative gift sent to Granny Mhairi by her daughter directly from a stall at the 1938 British Empire Exhibition in Glasgow. Shattered in the post, the accompanying saucer had arrived in several pieces, promptly discarded.

Mhairi's other prized possession had been her mantle clock, an exorbitantly expensive wedding gift from Gordon's older sister Victoria Elizabeth MacInnes, always referred to as Great-Auntie Lizbeth. Lizbeth had been the live-in Governess to Grier Davidson KC, an Edinburgh Advocate whose first wife had died giving birth to the couples' fourth child. The child had survived and, after a short period of mourning, Grier Davidson and Lizbeth had married, going on to add three further children to their brood.

Janine knew Roddy would expect four heaped spoonful of sugar but the dregs left in her sugar jar amounted to a mere half-teaspoonful. She liked two heaped level teaspoonsful but had trained herself down to this reduced amount because of rationing.

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Hiding her actions, she sneaked the white granules into her own cup. In the ornamental cup, she dribbled two tablespoonsful of Henry's thick, dark honey before adding the hot tea and stirring vigorously. To make the colour exactly as Roddy liked it, she added a tiny splash of Bella's creamy milk.

Hoping her offering would pass muster, she reached the cup across the hearth at a stretch, keeping her distance. Roddy snatched it from her and greedily slurped a mouthful but at once spat it out, ceremoniously tipping the rest of the cupful onto the fire peats and then, in one continuous violent motion, flung the offending cup backhand in her direction., causing her to duck. The cup missed her head by inches and hit the wall with a loud crack, exploding to smithereens.

Rising to his feet and lunging forwards aggressively, he spat his words into her face:

"What is this poison you would have me drink? Dishwater! You miserable, stuck-up bitch. Surely you can give your man a proper drink of tea instead of hiding your sugar from me, all the while pretending to be a pauper like the man Sinclair up the road with his millions of pounds buried in a big box on his land so no one could ever be finding it?"

Stepping back, Janine raised her arm to fend off an expected blow. Involuntarily, her eyes flicked to the mantle clock and then towards the back window in the vain hope of seeing the Austin coming down the track, all the time watching Roddy in her peripheral vision. Afraid to meet the challenge in his eye, she pretended to stare into the far distance, trying not to show her fear.

"**Ah yes!** I see it on your face! Playing the innocent one, is it?"

He slurped again from the whisky bottle.

She stooped to pick up Wee Moira.

"Well, well, well, this is what you are about while I am away slaving for the War. Hooring yourself on the mad Sinclair, are you? Or did you set your price too high for him and so there is no money for new fancy dresses now? Or is he is **not** coming to prod you because he is a shirt-lifter after the wee boys, is it? Or are you after waiting me out, is that it? Maybe you are a-thinking I will bring you something 'appropriate' in return for opening your legs to me, as is my right by marriage? Ah yes, there it is again, as plain as day on your sweet doll face. You are holding to the notion I should be beholding to you and should have bought you something costing me a fortune from the Mainland. In that you are missing the mark by a mile. No, no, Mistress Macleod. I suggest you get that notion right out of your head for it will never happen. **Never!** And for God's sake will you shut the face on your brat or I will put it out with the cow. The whining off her is giving me a sore head."

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Shaking with fear, Janine retreated to the windowless box bedroom where she sat in the near dark, with the door closed, the only light spilling under the large gaps above and below the door. Here she sat for a long time, pressing the child to her breast until she dropped off to sleep. Listening intently, she heard Roddy talking quietly and drunkenly to himself as he finished off his bottle of illicit whisky spirit.

As time passed her fear morphed into anger. She thought of how she might protect herself. The only idea which came to her was to somehow raise the signal flag to try to summon help from the MacPhails. However, as it was a near windless day and there was no obvious other danger, this might not work, she thought. In his drunken state, if he detected her actions, Roddy might strike her. And there was Wee Moira to consider. Her best hope, she concluded, was that he would give up and leave before it was too dark to ride back to Lochmaddy. Alternatively, if he stayed overnight, perhaps he might waken in a better mood next morning.

When she heard his snoring, she peeked out and saw he was asleep, slumped in her armchair. The room was stinking of urine. He was slumped back in her chair, his breeks and underpants around his ankles. On the hearth she saw the potty, filled to the brim with his urine.

Safe in her cot, her daughter slept on.

Closing the door on the box room, Janine moved quietly to remove the potty which she carried out to empty on Bella's dung heap, conserved for Henry's vegetable plot. His shrunken, flaccid penis was exposed. Rueing the day she met the brute Roddy Macleod, she placed a blanket across his legs, covering his nakedness.

She turned up the paraffin lamp and knelt with the brush and shovel from her companion set brush and shovel and began the task of sweeping up the shards of pottery. Sensing her presence, the man came around, smiled lazily, nodding his head, his previous outburst apparently forgotten.

It was then she decided to take a chance and make her pitch:

"Roddy, please believe me when I say I have no hidden millions. All I have is two shillings and a handful of coppers. Look, check my purse. Since we got married I've been dependent entirely on the kindness of Aunt Martha and Uncle Henry. They have my ration book and coupons and try to give me as much as they can but they're not rich either and everything is costing more. I'm out of sugar and flour, lentils and broth mixture. And now, after months of hoarding them, I have no tinned foods at all, not even a tin of that horrible Spam stuff. The accumulator is dead so I've no wireless and I am down to the dregs of my paraffin. I've never had a single penny from you, have I? It's not as if you're short, is it? I hear you are in the Lochmaddy Hotel every night you're tied up at the pier, drinking and telling your stories. Uncle Henry says I have rights as your wife and if you don't give

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me money I should write to The Commander and tell him. Now, you don't want me to be forced to do that, do you? Please Roddy, give me a weekly purse allowance, like a proper husband should. *Please.*"

Lolling, smiling and shaking his head, he had not interrupted her, which made her bolder.

"No, no, Roddy Macleod, it is your *wife* who is a pauper while you are the rich man. With your good wages from the Admiralty, Uncle Henry says you could easily afford to give me a pound a week or more. You know it's only my due as your wife. Please, Roddy, I'm desperate."

At this, Roddy roused himself and reached for the whisky bottle, angry to discover it was empty. He rose to his feet, swaying slightly. The blanket fell to his feet but he did not notice it as he hissed:

"So, now it is you are to try acting like the innocent wee lamb, bleating at me as my mother did to my father before they sent her to the mental hospital in Inverness, weak in the head. No, wife, you have the MacInnes money stashed away here in this very house and I will find it, I promise you that! If needs be I will beat it out of you, as my father has said I should."

Janine countered, paraphrasing Uncle Henry's oft repeated mantras:

"No, Roddy Macleod, surely even you must know money does not grow on trees. Nor does it lie scattered around the machair like manna from Heaven. God does not work like that. He gave us dominion over this Earth so that we might make it productive. The land needs to be fertilised to make it give back to us. That means seaweed needs to be gathered, spread and washed by the rain and dried by the sun before it is dug into the ground to feed the soil below and make the grass to feed the sheep and to grow vegetables. Everyone knows this croft needs a man, a young strong man with energy, not Uncle Henry with his bad knees and bunions? Are you blind? Surely if I had the money you say I have, I would not be living like this, would I? So, Roddy Macleod, it seems to me, for better or for worse I am stuck with you as that very man. Is it to be you, Roddy? Are you big and strong enough for the job? Or are you a lazy scrounger as everyone says?"

At this, Roddy, sat back down again, closing his eyes, remaining silent, passive, causing her to press home her verbal assault:

"Look, Roddy Macleod, if you can come as you please and eat me out of house and home, surely at the very least you can fix that outhouse before it blows away altogether?"

He sat up, his arms resting on his knees, still unaware he was naked from the waist down.

"Wheesht now, girl. Look you, this is no place for the likes of us. We both have the English and it is Canada or Australia we should be heading for after this War. *That* is where the

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future is, not stuck here in this wee wind-blown scrap of beach. Just leave it all to me, will you not. As soon as this War is over, I will sell us up here and you can bring your grandfather's money with you. I will claim my share of *The Stormy Petrel* and we'll away as quick as you like."

She spat back:

"No, we will not! This place is mine Roddy, not yours. Ask Henry MacPhail if you don't believe me. And I have Aunt Lizbeth's sons in Edinburgh who are lawyers. They'll make sure you do not get a penny from this place."

From her cot in the box room, Moira began to whine. Janine rose and moved towards the child but as she did so Roddy rose and smacked her hard on the back of her head with the flat of his huge hand, as he had seen his father hit his mother in the past, a blow designed to leave no visible sign of injury. This thump sent her spinning across the small kitchen onto the side of the high bed, stunned and dazed from the force of the impact. Up in Stornoway, Roddy's older brothers were notorious wife-beaters, following the example of their father, assaults usually administered as precursor to violent sex, behaviour witnessed many times over by the teenage Roddy.

As she was coming around, still groggy, he stumbled forwards and slapped her again twice on the left side of her head, open-handed as he had seen his father do to his mother. When Janine fought back, he struck her forehead a vicious blow with the heel of his hand, sending her back onto the bed.

With Janine lying before him, semi-conscious and at his mercy, clad only in her dressing gown and school raincoat, Roddy was re-running the scenes from his early years in Stornoway, a boy standing behind his older brothers, watching and learning how Donald John Macleod dealt with his mother when she had dared to answer her husband back.

Aroused by what he had achieved, Roddy stepped out of his trousers and underpants, spinning her face down then hefting her up onto the side of the bed, hauling off her school coat to cast it aside before pushing up her nightdress to cover the back of her head. He tugged at her knickers but when they snagged, he ripped them off and threw them on the fire. With her buttocks exposed, her legs hanging down and copying what he had seen in Stornoway, he spat on her anus to lubricate it. Excited, he massaged himself to a full erection before reaching forward to assault her as his father had urged him to do in order to degrade and dominate her.

The searing pain brought Janine back to consciousness but she was frozen with fear, powerless to act, filled with terror at what else might be in store. Like most rape victims, she remained docile, accepting her fate, enduring, intent on surviving the minutes ahead.

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With his knees forcing her legs apart, his chest pressing heavily on her back, his hands underneath her and hauling on back onto her shoulders, he thudded into her until he grunted, spent.

Standing back, she heard him mutter, mimicking his father's words of years earlier:

"Well now wife, is it not a good old-fashioned arse-shagging you were needing to teach you who is the man in this arrangement? Ach, look at you a-lying there now like a wee lamb and not a bleat from you. It is not just as it was with my mother, the very reason you continue to provoke me, so as to get yourself a good seeing to?"

Roddy moved back to her armchair where he sat snoozing, still naked from the waist down except for his heavy woollen socks. Moving slowly, Janine crawled up onto the bed and curled into a foetal position. Gradually the pain eased and she began to focus on her situation, considering her options. There was no sound from Wee Moira asleep in the box room.

After an age, the brute dropped off again into a drunken sleep, snoring loudly, regularly.

Moving quietly, she retrieved her coat and then Moira from her cot and escaped with the child wrapped into her with a fresh sheet, covered with the blanket Roddy had discarded. At the outer door she slipped her bare feet into her old leaky Wellingtons, tugged hard to get the door open enough to slip out, then pulled it shut behind her and crept away. The thought of stumbling over the fields in the darkness to take refuge at the MacPhails was rejected.

Instead, shaking with fear, she moved into the outbuilding and snuggled down behind Bella to hide under the hay trough, turning her back to the door, praying for deliverance.

Curious, the old cow bent over to sniff at them while Balach, grateful for her company, coorried up to his mistress providing a screen of sorts to hide her. Eventually, Bella gave up and returned to the half-gate, peering out towards the croft, as if standing guard.

The tension in her body lessened. She dozed, losing track of time. It was still dark when she heard Roddy shout from inside the croft, his voice strident, angry, threatening:

"Mistress Janine Macleod! Come you in here at once and make your husband a meal and get this fire alight. I shall count you to ten and if you are not here by then, I shall beat the skin off your arse with my very own belt."

Once more Janine's heart was thudding, her breath coming in short gasps, her frame quivering with an overload of adrenalin. Moira, sensing the fear, began to cry. To silence her, Janine moved the child's head until her mouth found a nipple. This suckling calmed them both. Roddy reiterated his demands several times then seemed to give up. Perhaps he had fallen asleep again, she hoped.

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As time crept slowly, the wind got up, moaning softly. Her heart rate and breathing returned to normal. Once more she slipped in and out of a shallow, uneasy sleep, twitching awake as she attempted to avoid imaginary blows before subsiding, comforted by Moira at her breast and the dog nuzzled into her back.

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Much later, in the full dark of a cloudy, moonless night, she heard him leave, whistling his way up the track wheeling his squeaky old bike. She waited a long time to be sure this was not a rouse, that he was indeed gone.

As the first rays of the new day filled the sky, she peeked out from beside Bella, checking warily through the gloom before moving back to stare through the wide-open door into the grey-black of the croft, Wee Moira asleep and huddled to her breasts, wrapped inside the blanket. After several minutes of listening, ready to flee, she called his name, almost a whisper. There was no reply. She braced herself and called again, louder, ready to escape by running first to the shore then along the half mile or so to the track which led up across the fields to the MacPhails' croft.

After another short wait, she called again, even louder.

Silence.

Reassured he was gone and with her eyes adjusted to the dimness, she moved inside, leaving the door open behind her, as a precaution. She lit her paraffin lamp but it immediately guttered out for lack of fuel. She found her emergency supply of candles and lit one to discover her home had been ransacked.

The fire was out, the peats burned to grey ash, considered a sin for any crofter who kept a fire going constantly every hour of the year to heat water and to cook on. Both of her handbags had been shredded and her purse was empty. The mantle clock lay smashed, shattered beyond repair. It seemed to her he had deliberately crushed it with the heel of his boots as an act of spite. Her nest egg was gone, the remnant of her grandfather's wealth which she had used to fuel her dreams of escape after the War.

Much later, she realised this discovery had probably saved her from a further beating.

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Two weeks passed before Macleod came again. This time she was ready, watching for him. Using a *tosg* (a peat cutting spade) she had fashioned a makeshift internal locking strut to bar the door against him and the to her relief, it held against his violent shoulder thumps and vicious kicks. After a lengthy blasphemous rant, he left.

As Janine watched through the back window she saw him stop beside the coastal road and turn, raise his arm and point his hand towards her, shouting, hurling words she could

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not hear, carried away on the stiff breeze. Balach, who had followed him barking and growling from a safe distance was the only living soul who heard his threat:

"Mistress Janine Macleod do not think you this matter is settled. When I come back I will bring an axe for that door and my father's razor strop for the back of your legs and your arse and then we will find the rest of the money you are hiding from me."

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Disclosure

By mid-April 1943, suffering from nausea, heartburn and stomach cramps, Janine could no longer conceal her pregnancy from Martha. Her searing memory of Roddy's assault had been bottled up for weeks and once she started to speak, the teenager's ordeal came tumbling out in a flood of tears. Desperate to share her fears and anxieties, she gave a graphic account of her argument with Roddy and the assault cum rape, going over and over the events, including the loss of her previously secret nest egg.

Her words of disclosure ended in a long spell of heartfelt sobbing. Martha held her adopted niece tightly to her chest as Janine bubbled tears and blew her nose into her aunt's pinny. For Martha, it was a version of a common story heard many times over during her years in maternity back in Glasgow; the familiar dismay and disbelief of a young wife learning the man she had married in good faith and who had once seemed charming was, at his core, a selfish brute. Janine, like countless others before her also questioned her own part in the attack, blaming herself for provoking her husband. At the time of her marriage she had thought she had won first prize. Roddy Macleod, with his good looks, charming words and fine prospects as the co-owner of one of the best fishing boats in the Hebridean fleet had seemed to her to be a good catch. Now she wanted free of him. Most of all she wanted a divorce, to protect her right to the MacInnes croft.

Martha counselled:

"Janine, divorce if for rich folks, not for poor crofters like us. I do not think there has ever been an ordinary person on this island who has been divorced, not one. No, you must not look to your rich cousins in Edinburgh for help for I am sure they will not be easily persuaded to act on behalf of a girl they have never met. No, that connection died with your Aunt Lizbeth. Anyway, above all else, Roddy Macleod is as lazy as he is grasping, far too lazy to seek a legal right to this place. I will ask your Uncle Henry to have a quiet word with The Commander and Murdo MacLellan, get them to put a shot across his bows, so to speak. Like all bullies, Roddy will not be so brave if Henry threatens to take his police truncheon to an elbow and a knee to reduce him to a cripple."

"Will they be able to make him give me money?"

"No, Janine, getting money from the Macleods would be like getting blood from a stone. If you listen to Beaky Fraser's gossip, the Macleods are denying Wee Moira is Roddy's bairn and are putting it about you were giving sex for money to the officers in their bedrooms at the hotel. Donna is backing them up on that, the besom. No Janine, there will be no money from the Macleods but we will manage, somehow. You are well rid of him."

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I told Henry from the start I did not like the look of him. The best of it is at least you are married and Wee Moira is not a bastard, not officially at any rate."

"What if he comes back with an axe as he said he would?"

"No, Janine, he is too lazy. Anyways, I will suggest to Henry he installs strong metal slip bolts top and bottom to make this door of yours secure from the inside and put bars across the inside of the new window shutters he put on to make you cosy."

"But Aunt Martha, what if Roddy does come? He is a very strong man and in one of his rages, I'm sure he could get through the door with an axe. At one point I was sure he was going to kill me and, as I told you, he was very rough with Wee Moira. He seems to hate her. Do you think he might kill her too? He doesn't know I'm pregnant but it is much more obvious now I'm bursting out of all my clothes. I don't have a single dress or skirt that fits me. Maybe I should move back in with you and Uncle Henry?"

"**No!** No Janine, no. Do not even think of moving back here. You know what happened before. Your Uncle Henry will not have it. No, girl, you'll have to make the best of it alone, in your own place. You know well enough we do not have room for you and Wee Moira both although I could take her for a while if you want? No? Well, anyways, Roddy MacLeod is not as bad as you make out. It was just that he was drunk. I am sure what he did was not premeditated. If you had held your tongue all this would not have happened. Listen, I will tell you what I will do. I will ask Henry to give you his dummy pistol, the one he had when he was in the Police, the one that fires blanks., the one he uses to scare away the eagles and ravens from the lambs. If you fire it up the chimney, the chances are we would hear it and Henry will drive round at once to chase him away with his proper gun."

"When did Uncle Henry get a gun?"

"Shush now, it is a Top Secret. Henry was trained in firearms by the Police back at the time of the General Strike and was a qualified marksman until he retired. It made him a bit extra and he never had to shoot at anyone in earnest, only targets. Jimmy Corbett gave him a pistol and a rifle in case we have invaders landing on our shore, German saboteurs from a submarine trying to disable the radio station. Now, I will tell you a secret, never to be shared with a soul. Your Uncle Henry has been signed up by The Commander as a Naval Civilian Assistant, a bit like the Home Guard. It was your Uncle Henry's idea to ask; he has always wanted to do a bit more for the War Effort."

Martha did not reveal to her niece the other rumours from Corbett and Macrae, Roddy's boasting of his string of other conquests on the Mainland, lonely women whose husbands were away at the War or already widowed.

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Sadly, it was all turning out the way Martha MacPhail had dreaded from the start, sensing at once Roddy Macleod was a nasty piece of work. As anyone in Stornoway could have told her, Roddy was following the same path as his father and older brothers.

Before the shotgun wedding, Martha had tried to make her case against Roddy, citing 'female intuition'. Henry had overruled her, adamant the girl must be wed to the Lewis man to legitimise the coming infant, to make the best of it. As a local girl born and bred, she had agreed with him at the time, knowing in a small community like North Uist, Janine's child, brought up without a father, would be stigmatised as a bastard and looked down upon forever. But she also feared the current situation was little better; Beaky Fraser's scurrilous rumours about 'the Glasgow hoor' would be brought up every time Janine and her family were mentioned.

It was for this reason when they had seen Roddy creep back to her at the MacInnes croft, they had resolved to hope and pray for the best, leading Henry to add Roddy to their daily prayer list alongside Janine and Wee Moira, praying earnestly for their marriage to grow, become successful. As a dutiful wife, Martha had joined his 'amens', albeit less than sincerely.

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After several hours of reworking the matter, Janine had been calmed with two aspirins and a drink of hot milk then put into her own bed at the MacInnes croft. Martha said she would take Wee Moira away for a day or two to give her niece peace to think things over. As she stood in the doorway with the baby wrapped into her shawl, Martha sermonised after the fashion of her husband. The words which came were, for her, edged with uncharacteristic candour and harshness:

"Janine, listen to me and hear me well my girl. I told Henry the man Roddy Macleod was never the right one for you but we had to give him a chance. At least you are married, which means you are respectable. And do not think you are the only wife around here who has is 'disciplined' by her husband. If we could see behind closed doors, we might find even some of the teetotallers and Rechabites in our churches are not beyond lifting their fists to get their way when they are in heat or are provoked by a nagging wife. Now, this is my advice to you, Janine. Put this episode behind you and we shall see what comes to pass in God's good time. Henry and I will continue to pray for you as we always do. You too should pray about it and reflect on your own part in all this. First and foremost, you really must learn to curb your attitude. That strident, self-assured tongue comes from your father. The showy flirting and shamelessness you get from your mother and is the very reason you find yourself in this mess. We made a mistake letting you go to the *Lochmaddy Hotel*. I suppose I have to take my share of the blame for that as Henry was dead against it. But we must all learn to live with the consequences. You, my girl, must learn to grow up and face your responsibilities. Henry and I will not live forever and we

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cannot be expected to pluck you from the burning flames of perdition at every turn. In the unlikely event your husband comes again, give him a chance to speak and make his peace with you. Keep your tongue under control and do **not** rile him, whatever you do. Remember, the Holy Spirit is our Constant Companion and through Him we are in God's Good Hands. Now that your earthly father is in Heaven you must look to The Holy Spirit minute by minute, hour by hour. He knows what we need and what is best for us. Take this opportunity to return to His throne and confess your hidden sins and ask for His forgiveness and blessing. And remember to pray for your husband too, as a good Christian wife must. The Bible is very clear on this: Woman was made for Man and it is her duty to obey, as you promised to do when you wed him. Surely Roddy Macleod cannot be all bad. Give it time, who knows what this War has in store for all of us."

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Admonition

Janine's few days of seclusion extended to a week and then another, with Martha and Henry visiting with the baby for only an hour or so every other day. There was not enough petrol for the Austin and when the wind was up, the trek along the beach was often too much for them. During these short visits, most of their time together was devoted to Bible readings and prayers. Perhaps because of her condition, Janine was tetchy, complaining and morose, reacting to their pious approach with sulks and exasperated sighs.

Now when she left her alone, she was closeted like a nun behind a strengthened door and windows, rising every few minutes to look towards the coast road with the dummy pistol on the kitchen table loaded and ready to use.

During the first two weeks she had asked at every visit for a replacement accumulator to which Henry had replied:

"No, Janine. No wireless for you until you make your peace with The Lord. It is evident from your demeanour you remain an unbeliever, unrepentant, still holding fast to disbelief, one of the worst sins of all for a person like you who knows and understands God's Salvation through Jesus our Christ. In Heaven, your parents are weeping at your stubbornness."

One day when they were leaving, Janine exploded:

"Why can't I have an accumulator for the wireless. I've asked you dozens of times and all you can say is 'No, Janine, read your Bible and confess your sins. Dedicate yourself to prayer.' I've tried but it's not working. It's been weeks since I heard another human voice. Even worse, I have no music to sing along to, not even the morning service. I don't even know what's going on with the War. I'm miserable, stuck here alone with only Balach and Bella. So, I've decided. I want Moira back, please. She's my daughter, not yours. Why don't you just leave us alone? Look, I'll be straight with you both. I know you mean well but I just don't want either of you poking your noses into my life anymore."

Martha intervened:

"That's quite enough from you girl. How ungrateful can you be, after all we have done for you and your child, all we are still doing. Do you know how hard it is for us, walking alone that beach with your Uncle Henry's knees the way they are. Shame on you, Janine Macleod. How many times do you need to be told to curb your tongue! Read the Book of

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Job and contemplate on Chapter Six. Take to yourself mottos from verses Twenty-Four and Thirty."

"Alright, alright. Oh, Aunt Martha, I'm sorry. I didn't mean any of that. It's just I'm so, so lonely and so, so fed up with everything. Look at me, I'm a mess and nothing I have fits. What will I do? Please don't take Moira away again. You've no idea what it's like to be trapped here day after day wondering if that brute is coming back to hurt me again. Please, Uncle Henry, don't let him come near me, please. Oh why can't I come and stay with her at your place, until the new baby comes? Please."

Henry intervened.

"Martha, off you go with the wee one and I'll sort this out with Janine. No Janine! Let it be, let your aunt take the wee soul, there's a good girl. You know you can't be trusted when you are upset like this."

The door closed and Janine was alone with Henry MacPhail.

"Sit there by the fire my girl and we'll have another cup of tea. Here, I've brought you a bar of Cadbury's chocolate, the real stuff, not that 'ration' muck. Now, Janine, it is time for plain talking. You simply must learn to control yourself and give up on these hysterics and histrionics. We went through all this before, after your parents and grandmother died when you told us you wanted to 'put an end to it all'. Imagine a fine, strong Christian girl like you contemplating suicide, an act which as you well know would send you at once to Eternal Hell. Trust me, I have seen it dozens of times before, back there in Glasgow. Think back on how many times your father had to treat young women like you for depression, overdoses and so on."

'But Uncle Henry, I just want to be *normal*. You know I've never been religious, not really. I have tried praying hard but it doesn't work for me. I don't seem to *feel* it like you and Aunt Martha, like Daddy. It was Daddy and Helena who were religious, not Mummy and me. You know that, don't you?"

"Janine, your father told me when you were about thirteen he caught you in an act of carnal lust, self-pleasuring with a carrot, no less. After the shock, he told us it was the happiest day of his life because that afternoon you confessed your sins and gave yourself to The Lord and became a true adult Christian. A few months later he told me he had discovered you were backsliding, sneaking off to dance halls, chasing after boys. Ah, so Janine, from your face I see what he said was true?"

"But Daddy said he would keep my sins secret from everyone."

"Janine, I am your Godfather, Martha is your Godmother, we have a special responsibility for you. Anyway, it was your behaviour when you were at that typing college which convinced him you would be safer out here on North Uist, away from temptation."

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"But Uncle Henry, I told Daddy it was just kissing, no touching. Gavin Thomson was a very nice boy; he would never had done anything. It was horrible what Daddy did, expelling him from the Youth Fellowship, so unfair."

"But Janine, you kept on meeting him, even after you promised you would give him up."

"But Uncle Henry, I told Daddy again nothing happened, just kissing and pressing against each other; no actual sex, nothing dirty."

"There you go again, Janine, defending yourself as if what happened was not really sinful. Cannot you see that making a false promise to your father and then acting deceptively to meet with this boy was sinful? Shall I assume that these sins and others have remained unconfessed, poisoning your mind and corrupting your soul? Cannot you see where they led you? Cannot you see the link to your lewd behaviour eventually giving birth to an innocent child conceived out of wedlock and another child on the way to a brute like Macleod? What sort of mother are you to become?"

"Alright, so I have sinned and enjoyed impure thoughts which makes me just like nearly every girl of my age. So, Uncle Henry, what am I to do, according to your way of it?"

"Janine, I commend to you the whole of Second Corinthians and most especially verse 14 where you shall read:

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?"

"From a wee girl you have studied the Bible with your head alone. Now as a wife and mother you must study it with your heart also and come before The Lord's Throne of Grace and be washed clean by the sprinkle of His Blood."

"But I've told you, it doesn't work for me!"

"Well Janine, so be it. These are my last words to you on this topic. Martha and I shall pray for you as before but never again will we advise you on how you should behave. Your life and your soul are yours to save or squander as you choose. But I warn you, Janine Macleod, do not put your children in danger or I shall take them from you, so help me God!"

After a long silence Henry MacPhail rose, straightened to his full height and left, slamming the door closed behind him.

As if in a trance, Janine rose, shuffled to the door and slid the bolts top and bottom. Slumped in her grandmother's armchair she spent the rest of the day staring into glowing peats.

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Starting again at the beginning, from the moment of her arrival at Lochmaddy from Glasgow, she picked through her last two years, examining her behaviour, considering her options, her mind rebelling against what she saw as a punishment when she had expected sympathy and encouragement.

Initially she dismissed their views on divorce and concentrated on trying to work out how to escape and get to Edinburgh. Despite what Martha MacPhail had said, Janine clung to the notion Aunt Lizbeth's family would help, if she could find them. Or perhaps her father's people, the Robinsons from the Salvation Army in Dumbarton might take her in, if they were not too fiercely set in their ways.

In the end, Janine realised that for the present at least, she must make the best of her situation. Without a penny to her name she was stranded. Her priority must be Moira and the new child in her, both innocents.

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Later, alone in bed, at an all-time low, curled on her side into herself and staring at the flickering embers of her fire, she was filled with guilt and remorse. The words of her father came to her from that afternoon when she had been caught in shame, with the comforter:

"God so loved you and me, Janine, that He gave His Only Begotten Son to die on Calvary's Tree that our sins might be washed away by His Blood, that we might claim our Salvation. Think of that sacrifice, Janine. Could I ever give you or Helena up for the sins of others? Never. Let us get down on our knees together and confess before Our Heavenly Father our weaknesses and dark passions. If we do so with a contrite heart, He surely will honour His Promises."

On that afternoon, adopting the style of singing at Partick Free Church which did not permit the use of organ or piano accompaniment, father and daughter had sung *a capella* in sweet harmony, embarking on a round of hymns and psalms, beginning with:

"Yield not to Temptation

For yielding is Sin,

Each Vic'try will help you

Some other to win."

With these tunes running in her head and singing to herself *sotto voce* she rose from bed, turned up the lamp, rooted out her personal 'carry' Bible and began to flick through its pages, hoping for inspiration. This tiny Bible was stuffed with Sunday School exhortation place markers.

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In Isaiah 41:16 to 18 she found words which pierced her heart. To many it might seem an unlikely text but for her it was special, a favourite text of her father's, one he had preached on many times when deputising for their minister absent for annual holidays, illness or suchlike.

16 Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the LORD and shall glory in the Holy One of Israel.

17 When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.

18 I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

For the first time since she had turned away from her Saviour at puberty, Janine knelt by the side of her bed and prayed solemnly for help. However, try as she might, she could not bring herself to pray for Roddy Macleod to come back to her and become a good and loving husband. Instead she prayed:

"Father God, please banish Roddy from our lives. Keep him safe but far away and help him to find a better way of life for himself. But not here. Amen."

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The Commander

In May 1943, a few days after Janine's prayer, *The Stormy Petrel* was sent to Glasgow to be readied for special duties. Jimmy Corbett confided to Henry MacPhail the Macleod's vessel had been re-named and was being sent to Norway to land spies and resistance fighters. Janine was told but warned not to spread the story. Thankfully this secret, which was true, held.

After a raft of other speculations had buzzed around Lochmaddy, in the end it was concluded the Macleods had been sent to Liverpool to help escort the Russian convoys to navigate through The Minches to and from Murmansk. Under orders, Jimmy Corbett had started this rumour by telling a version of it to Murdo MacLennan in strictest confidence. As expected, Murdo told Donna who told Beaky Fraser and Margo McAuley. When pressed on the subject by Margo, Andy Macrae admitted the Macleods were no longer under The Commander's jurisdiction and may not return to Lochmaddy until after the War, if they survived. Escorting the convoys to Russia was known to be very dangerous.

During the hiatus after her beating and rape, Roddy had stayed away from the MacInnes croft. By the time of her 'conversion' Janine, had a definite bump but her discomfort had passed and she was radiant, in full bloom. In consultation with Martha, they concluded she was due in late July or early August.

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Around this time Rhys Dewy-Davies was promoted from Lieutenant-Commander, upgrading his two-and-a-half gold rings to become a Commander, a full three-ringer. Even prior to this he had become known on the island as 'The Commander' and his promotion passed without comment. Corbett revealed he had only volunteered for the Royal Naval Reserve from his post as a Don at Oxford University to please his late father. The consensus concluded the Welshman was 'too nice to be ambitious'.

To the inquisitive island community, the tall, slimly built, good-looking Dewy-Davies was a man of mystery. From his academic stoop and bright, intelligent dark brown eyes and softly spoken manner, they knew he was from an upper middle-class background. They saw him as a lonely, solitary man who smiled and nodded but seldom spoke. When he did engage, he did not talk down to them as many of the other incomers did or imply the islanders were stupid just because they did not have an expensive education. They saw in those same eyes a wistfulness, as he looked into the distance and, at the cry of a gull

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or a sighting of a seal in the harbour, was quick to raise his binoculars and detach himself from those around him, immediately re-entering his own world of solitude.

There also seemed to be a wistful sadness in the man which most women found attractive, a lost boy look. From his fresh, ruddy face it was clear he was an outdoors man. Sporting a full beard of dark wiry hair flecked with a few rogue strands of white, he was almost always seen in his uniform, the picture of a senior naval officer, easily imagined on the deck of a ship.

Apart from Corbett and Macrae with who he had a good working relationship, the only other person who came close to a friend was Dr Angus MacDonald with who he played chess from time to time or shared a pipe, talking about the wildlife of the Hebrides.

Everyone agreed Rhys Dewy-Davies was a gentleman, a toff, a conservative man who seldom spoke unless he had something important to say. Mostly he could be seen walking around, humming or singing softly in Welsh or opera songs in Latin, binoculars draped around his neck, prone to stopping unexpectedly to scan the skies or shore or far out to sea, looking for who knows what. Although he looked younger, Andy Macrae said his record showed he was thirty-eight.

Not surprisingly, as an important man in their community, he was the subject of many long-running rumours regarding naval life and his 'hidden' romantic entanglements.

One tale which ran for several weeks suggested he had been promoted as a way of placating him, a sop to encourage him to stay in Lochmaddy. According to this rumour, he was the nephew of a politician in the War cabinet and could call on his uncle to have him transferred to wherever he wished, at the drop of a hat. This rumour suggested Dewy-Davies wanted to be posted to Bath, to be near his wife, it was claimed. Others, the vocal majority citing insights from Corbett and Macrae, said his marriage was long dead. At this new information, the rumour changed and claimed he was keen to get back to Bath where he had a harem of Wrens (WRNS) at his beck and call.

Some darker voices said he had been seen sneaking into the houses of a few of more aspiring local gentlewomen whose husbands were away on War Service. Beaky and Margo compiled a list of spinster women who, the sisters claimed, had confided to various sources, never named, that they 'were out to get him'. Beaky said these women had been 'acting up to him' since his first appearance in the summer of 1941.

Because of Rhys Dewy-Davies' friendship with her father, and, despite her off-putting thick spectacles and tall, gaunt frame, and large horsey teeth, the thirty-seven-year old Miss Veronica MacDonald had topped the list of these spinsters for several months. According to Beaky, a woman who seldom left the hotel, the pair had been seen meeting regularly at his favourite wildlife-spotting locations, sharing a bivouac tent he used as a hide.

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This story seemed to hold some credence because Jimmy Corbett had revealed Dewy-Davies was a well-regarded wildlife author, a regular contributor to various magazines and journals. According to Corbett, The Commander was compiling a 'modern record' of North Uist's birds, otters, seals, whales, dolphins and porpoises. His special interest was Basking Sharks which, despite their common name were in fact whales, as everyone knew. When spotted, these enormous mammals were often mistaken for enemy U-Boats.

In the rumour, Veronica, who ran the Lochmaddy library and used her father's car to deliver books to outlying crofts, was helping him with the necessary research and local information. Yet others said this story about Veronica was a fantasy, pointing out she was deeply religious and had no interest in wildlife. When Miss Eilidh Ferguson, who at first had missed out on most gossip because of her deafness, eventually heard what was being said, she dismissed it with:

"Tosh! Libellous tosh! Veronica is more interested in the African Missions and the Poor of India than the sparrows and blackbirds in her garden. That girl does not have a romantic bone in her body and never has had. Veronica is a born spinster! Trust me, I know what to look for."

On this basis, which everyone knew to be true, Miss Veronica was dropped from the list and the focus switched to the other Lochmaddy women said to be 'fishing for his attention' who had not, so far as was known, 'managed to land their catch'.

Casting their net wider, Beaky and Margo began to consider likely War Widows. The two most obvious were selected, well-to-do women known to be good friends. Both had cars and telephones which, in the rumour, made it easier for them to meet with The Commander at secret locations. The glamorous Mrs Madeleine Denholm (aged forty-three) was the prime candidate. Her departed husband Finlay was a qualified deep-sea captain, a member of the Denholm shipping line. Maddie lived in a grand house on Benbecula. The other woman was the less attractive, rather dumpy Mrs Sally Godwin (thirty-nine). She was a local girl from Berneray whose husband Angus had worked in Glasgow as a younger man gaining marine engineering qualifications before returning to North Uist to set up a marine and motor engine repair workshop on the outskirts of Lochmaddy. With the outbreak of the War, Angus had joined the Merchant Marine, joining his life-long friend Malcolm Denholm. Both men drowned when their vessel was torpedoed near the Isle of Man in the early months of the War. A spicy extension of this rumour was the two women had agreed to share The Commander month about, occasionally meeting as a threesome at the radio station where, rumour asserted, their cars had been seen parked overnight beside his motorbike.

Janine had heard all these stories from her Martha who, after wallowing in each re-telling, had eventually remembered her Christian duty and said:

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"No, Janine these rumours are the work of Satan. Although The Commander is not a church attender, you can tell from the way he behaves he is an upright man. His crime is merely that he is a quiet and kindly man, a thinker. His wife, whoever she is, is a very lucky woman. These rumours are caused by spite and jealousy and it behoves us to make sure they go no further. As your Uncle Henry says - *a good story does not need to have any basis in truth to gain traction in Lochmaddy, a nest of sinners and a place which stirs hot gossip like a coire (cauldron) of porridge in danger of sticking.*"

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The Nicholsons

By early June 1943 the Macleod boat had been replaced by a smaller fishing boat from Ullapool called *Dougal's Lass*. It was operated by Ken (Kenneth) and Iain Nicholson, two brothers in their early fifties. Although they were supposed to be based in Lochmaddy, the men contrived every opportunity to berth at Ullapool to spend time with their wives and families.

The tight-knit community in Lochmaddy and a small band of selected others in the wider community were soon to discover the Nicholsons were an enterprising duo. For a price, they could supply many sought after things from the Mainland, items simply not available locally or in short supply. The brothers were wise enough to make deals with local retailers such as Don-Angi Ross, all parties working to mutual advantage. Since the early days of the War, the Nicholsons had been serving Mainland west coast communities in this capacity and understood how the system worked, including barter and credit arrangements for those who lived from the land or by fishing, people who did not necessarily have cash to hand.

Operating quietly, tactfully, they served the established market through these secondaries with sought after everyday items, such as sugar, tea, flour, rice and tinned foodstuffs. In season, they brought fruits such as apples, raspberries and strawberries; chestnuts to grind to a flour for baking or adding whole to meat dishes to make them go further. They also brought gelatine for jams and chutneys, spices for cakes and, on occasion, sloes and herbs to make a form of local gin.

Highly valued were the hundredweight hessian bags of barley used to make illicit alcohol of various kinds including a highly potent version of raw (unaged) whisky known as *uisge-tiène* (firewater). Some home brewers used the barley to make passable beers and stouts, adding bee honey or treacle to give colour and added taste. This liquor was sold in competition with a local form of Poitín (Potcheen) made from potatoes and sweetened with brandy balls or mint leaf and, when available, plums, the drink which Don-Angi had sold to Roddy on the night of the rape.

The Nicholsons also provided a direct order service for premium and luxury items, such as ladies stockings, a variety of aromatic tobaccos, including 'relaxing herbal mixtures', named brand malt and blended whiskys, London Gin, Brandy, Port and other more exotic spirits and liqueurs which had become scarce since the outbreak of hostilities. They also ran a line in 'speciality items', including lingerie as gifts for wives and sweethearts, racy picture magazines for men and romance stories of the explicit sort much in demand by

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lonely ladies bereft of male company. Indeed, given enough time, the Nicholsons could supply almost anything, at a price.

The secret of their success was they were not greedy; given the shortages and the prices demanded by other black and grey market sources, the Nicholsons' tariffs seemed fair. And, crucially, they were reassuringly discreet, demanding equal secrecy and discretion from their customers, an arrangement which kept them under the surveillance of the law and the snoops from the War Office. Another important advantage of this two-way secrecy was purchasers soon learned their secrets would be held safe from others, however bizarre a request might be.

Another well-kept secret was that by paying contacts in Greenock, the Nicholsons had 'bought' the contract to serve under Commander Dewy-Davies. This had been arranged by the third member of their family syndicate, their older brother Alasdair who worked for the Admiralty as a Senior Clerk. Operating under the auspices of the Royal Navy gave the Nicholsons official protection for their clandestine activities while providing access to the marine diesel they had been finding difficult to source commercially.

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Marital Allowance

When Roddy was posted away, Janine felt free to join the MacPhails on their regular Friday trips to Lochmaddy in the Austin, sitting in the front beside Henry with Martha in the rear, bouncing Wee Moira on her knees.

The routine was established by her need for cash, calling first to the Navy Office at the pier to ask for news of her husband and to receive her 'marital allowance', a Government money order which she could convert to cash with Miss Ferguson at the Post Office. By agreement, Janine kept two shillings for personal spending on cosmetics, fragrant soap, shampoo or chocolate, money she saved until these items were available. The remaining cash from her eighteen shillings weekly allowance went to Martha's purse. By agreement, the MacPhails held the ration books and coupons for both crofts.

As a married woman, the young mother had no need to conceal she was pregnant again but she was embarrassed at her appearance; the only clothes which fitted her swollen body were baggy dresses in black and grey which had once been worn by Granny MacInnes. Janine had washed these garments repeatedly to rid them of the stench of tobacco. To modernise their appearance, Martha had remodelled a few of the best of them using her treadle Singer sewing machine, adding panels of brightly coloured material she had salvaged from a pair of summer curtains brought from her previous rented home in Glasgow. Despite these privations and limitations, when dressed to her best and wearing her highest heels, Janine felt elegant, bright and cheerful.

In the past, in Glasgow, Janine had secretly admired the long flowing curls of the American film star Veronica Lake. Another favourite was the 'Long Pageboy' style but after experimenting with various styles seen in magazines, she settled on the new vogue called 'Victory Rolls'.

For these weekly outings Janine always tried to look her best, taking extra care to brush her long hair to a shine, adding a tiny amount of glycerine if she could get it. Like most good cosmetics, *Dreme Shampoo*, her favourite was permanently 'unavailable' in Lochmaddy. It was said you could get it by post from Glasgow or Edinburgh but no one seemed to have an address for the shops which sold it. For its luxuriant smell, her all-time favourite was *Watkins Coconut Oil 'Mulsification'* but again, this too was 'unavailable'.

Very occasionally Martha would receive a gift of *Amami Shampoo* from a former neighbour in Glasgow, when it became available in Woolworth's. Unfortunately, such obvious gift packages often went 'astray' during their long, staged journey through the chaotic wartime postal system. The *Amami* brand had been her mother's favourite but

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Janine did not care for the odour. However, it was much better than Martha's 'wartime substitute' made by stirring slivers of Sunlight laundry soap into boiling water to create a goo which left Janine's hair 'dry and brittle, hence the need for glycerine. Worst of all was a similar brew made with red carbolic soap used to combat the occasional outbreak of nits, a hazard of wearing her hair long.

As she moved around Lochmaddy on these short Friday visits, with Henry carrying Moira and Martha fussing, insisting Janine rest on her arm, she felt like Royalty, delighted at the envious looks of the Lochmaddy ladies whose hair was generally confined by drab headscarves and, Janine judged, would almost certainly be greasy, probably infested with 'mobile dandruff', Martha's euphemism for head lice.

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A pattern was established. Most Fridays, though not always, Janine would be invited into The Commander's inner office for a brief chat over a cup of tea and a cake or biscuit. These treats had been made by Andy Macrae whose father had once owned a baker's shop near Glasgow's Bridgton Cross where Andy had worked until joining the Royal Navy.

Janine always wore her Sunday best coat to Lochmaddy, even during the warmer weather in May and June when a cardigan would have sufficed. This was a special coat, a pastel green cashmere and lambswool blend. It had been an expensive present from her father bought for Christmas when she was awarded top marks for typing in her half-term exams at *Skelly's*. A high-fashion, figure-hugging high garment reaching mid-thigh revealing a pelmet of her 'best' maternity dress; because of her bulge, she was obliged to leave it unbuttoned.

Martha had point blank refused to shorten any of the modified dresses to the modern 'above the knee' style which meant Janine could not display her fine legs to best advantage. Her only other coat option was her dark blue school gaberdine trench coat with its unfashionable wide lapels and military style epaulettes. Fleecy lined, it had been bought when she was twelve, deliberately chosen by her mother in a size 'comfortably large' to allow room for growth. Apart from looking tired from its years of rough service, it was tight around her midriff and short in the arms even before pregnancy. Janine had never liked the coat and had contemplated 'losing it' on several occasions in her rebellious early teenage years but she knew it had cost 'an absolute fortune', according to her mother.

Unknown to Janine, her Friday visits were a regular topic of cruel gossip among a cadre of local women who took every opportunity to diminish the status of the 'Glasgow hussy'. Even though the Macleods with their big boat were long gone, these women raked over the previous reports from their husbands of the Lewis men's boasting in the *Lochmaddy Hotel*. These men too enjoyed retelling the outbursts from Janine's blowhard husband,

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his pronouncements always made in English, the language Roddy used when drinking, showing off. These assertions had been backed up by Donald John who muttered repeatedly in Gaelic, that he had told Roddy "to make the stuck up bitch pregnant again to make sure he would have rights over the MacInnes croft which his son would sell-up after the War".

Local sentiment was summed up by Margo McAuley. With two sons Colin (15) and Alda (Alasdair) (12) who were slow-witted, lazy and rebellious and a husband waiting out the War in a prisoner-of-war camp in Austria, she hated the notion that an attractive incomer who was a mere teenager, might have such good prospects after the War:

"It'll be bluddy good riddince to the baith o' thum, thet's whit Ah say. Yon MacInnes croft shood be gain' tae a deservin' local faimly, Ah say. When the hussy and her man are gone and the auld MacPhails hae dee'd oot, wu'll hae tae git a guid faamily man oot there tae bring the auld place back to fuull produkshun, Ah say. Merk ma wurd, whit's needdit urr herd-workin' locaals oot there on the best o oor land, no' auld yins an' incomers frae Glesga. Onyways, thet's whit Ah say."

The irony of this was not lost on Donna MacLennan who always added, quietly to herself:

"Now I wonder who she could possibly have in mind, a woman who has never chased sheep, dug peats or milked a cow in her life?"

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The Blessings

On the 7th August 1943 Janine's second daughter arrived, smoothly and easily, delivered by Martha MacPhail and checked over by old Dr Angus from Lochmaddy. Both mother and child were strong, fit and healthy and, in MacDonald's words which quickly circulated around the island:

"Never was there an easier labour, despite the greatness of the child. The Glasgow girl is a natural child-bearer, there is no gainsaying of that."

The Lochmaddy women whispered a different version:

"There is none easier to bed than the Glasgow girl. She is nothing short of a tart and a siùrsach (hoor)."

Because Janine was not a churchgoer, Henry and Martha knew the new baby like her sister Moira would not be Christened in any of the local churches. Instead and in secret, the infant Henry performed a brief informal service of Blessing in his capacity as a church elder, in contravention to his express calling and vows given to the Free Church.

Janine had decided to call her second daughter Martha-Rose Robinson Macleod, chosen after Martha MacPhail and her father's older sister Miss Rose Robinson.

Janine had learned from her mother that Rose was a schoolteacher who lived in Edinburgh where she taught deaf children. Although deeply religious, unlike the rest of her family, she had broken the family embargo on communicating with her brother John in Glasgow, writing once a year on the first day of January, penning a lengthy well-meant if rather sanctimonious epistle peppered with Bible texts, gems of insight designed to encourage him in his studies to become a Doctor and urging him to go to the 'China Missions' when he qualified.

In the back of her mind, Janine had the notion Rose might learn of Martha-Rose and would, somehow, prove to be a beneficial influence in her grandniece's life.

Under pressure from his wife, Henry MacPhail compounded his transgression by also naming and blessing Moira. At Janine's request, she was blessed as Moira-Ann Robinson Macleod, after her father's mother. This too was based on the hope that one day either Janine or her daughters might, in a hazy future, be able to make their peace with the Robinsons from Dumbarton and thereby get help to lift them out of poverty and perhaps back to Glasgow, now in Janine's mind a mythically 'perfect place to live'.

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The whole thinking around this naming had been from a book called *The Inheritors* which Janine had read during the final week of her pregnancy in which a poor family had been rescued from destitution by a gift of cash sent anonymously to the estranged family, a widow called Becca (Rebecca), a hard-working girl who had fallen on hard times to be rescued in the final chapter by the inheritance of the great wealth of a stern and unforgiving patriarch who had inexplicably named her as his sole heir. Miraculously, this unexpected beneficence had enabled Becca and her many children to escape from poverty and the oppression of a greasy landlord who had repeatedly forced himself on her, threatening eviction if he did not yield to his unsolicited advances.

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First Love

When Rhys was six, his sister Bethan had died suddenly, aged thirteen. The event stunned his parents and shattered his mother's already fragile mental health, turning her into an alcoholic. Since the trauma of Rhys's difficult birth, his parents had agreed to sleep separately to ensure there would be no further babies.

With Bethan's tragic death, believed to be a brain tumour, and with his wife barely functioning, there had been a succession of live-in nannie cum housekeepers but all had moved on within a few months or so until Captain Gethin Dewy-Davies settled for a day visiting housekeeper and cook.

This sharp-tongued whisp of a woman was called Mrs Welmand who brought as her helper, her twenty year old daughter Nance, a hulking, overweight Down's Syndrome girl who enjoyed nipping and punching Rhys, if she could catch him. Without Bethan to shield Rhys from Mrs Welmand's rough tongue and help him fend off Nance's intermittent assaults, Rhys was alone. Fortunately, both day servants left promptly at six each weekday evening.

At weekends, when his father was home, a different, more glamorous lady came to stay. Although she cooked fancy meals, she did not do much in the way of housekeeping or cleaning and it was down to Rhys to keep the fires lit and stoked and the ashes removed. This lady, called Gloria, seemed to enjoy playing the family piano and spent most of her time upstairs in his father's room, listening to his radiogram.

In the months after the tragedy, late at night when Rhys was supposed to be asleep, he would hear his parents arguing at a low rumble. Occasionally his father would shout and his mother would caterwaul and then her bedroom door would be slammed and his father's footsteps receded to his own bedroom at the far end of the hall and the distant sound of his radiogram.

No one came to cuddle Rhys, to scare away his bad dreams and sing to him as Bethan had.

The first year passed during which his weekdays were taken up attending the local school, a happy escape from a house immersed in melancholy. At every opportunity he would visit the houses of schoolfriends, ingratiating himself by being polite and obedient. If asked, he would readily stay over, running to a telephone box where he pretended to speak to his mother to obtain permission.

On his seventh birthday Rhys was sent away to boarding school. In the first months he had been bullied. Of necessity he had learned to fight back physically while adopting

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various stratagems to make people like him, deferring to them, trying to please them, avoiding confrontation until he was left with no option but to lash out.

In the years ahead, he would become a valued member of the school's boxing squad. And, by concentrating on bowling and fielding rather than more glamorous batting, he became he the vice-captain of the cricket team. Indeed, for Rhys the boy and Rhys the man, most of his achievements had been won by dogged patience, gaining each victory step by step. Unlike his father, he was not driven by fierce ambition, preferring a slow, easy approach to life.

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When he returned home to Cardiff for holidays after his first year at boarding school, Bethan's room had been remodelled as a guest bedroom. Throughout the huge lonely rambling house all traces of his sister had been erased, no photographs, no books; even her pony had been sold. It was as if her parents did not want to remember their lost daughter. In her place, at the far end of his corridor, was a teenage girl called Roisin Sullivan, from Tralee in the south west of Ireland. Roisin was a large, buxom girl, energetic, outgoing, cheerful and playful.

For Rhys, Roisin was a *Godsend*, a replacement for Bethan but more ebullient, more affectionate, always cuddling him, tickling and chasing him around the house playing *Donkey Tail Tag*, *Find My Treasure*, *Hide and Seek* and *Hunt that Mouse*, a game they invented with the chaser smacking a carpet beater on the floor behind the fleeing 'mouse', a chase which always ended when the mouse was cornered and the hunter was rewarded with a kiss on the lips.

Rhys was banned from visiting his mother in her second-floor rooms. His father had explained she was too unwell to see anyone and sternly warned Rhys he must only visit when accompanied by him. Consequently, Rhys had seen her only a few times over the years, even before Bethan died. However, he hardly missed her, hardly thought of her.

When he returned for holidays, it was Roisin who filled his life with activities such as day trips by train or charabanc rides to the seaside and all-day picnic walks along the cliffs, spotting seabirds, seals, otters and in the distance dolphins, whales and basking sharks. It was from these days his love of wildlife stemmed.

Roisin was a blether and talked to everyone as Rhys stood at her side, listening and watching their reactions to the happy girl who made everyone laugh with her quick and quirky Irish humour. It was from this Rhys learned how to remain in the background while watching and listening, learning to discern what other people were thinking from their body language, noting their words of concealment used to divert the conversation, avoiding questions they did not want to answer, a trait he learned to use when confronted with conflict or awkward situations.

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On weekdays his father drove to Bath where he served as a Captain in the Royal Navy, returning at weekends. Even then Gethin Dewy-Davies absorbed himself in work, writing up his journals and drafting clever letters to far-flung colleagues serving the Royal Navy on the far-flung outposts of the vast British Empire, maintaining his 'profile' as a man on the rise.

As a result, his parents slowly but steadily drifted out of his life. When home from school in Cardiff, it was just Rhys and Roisin.

Aged eight, when Rhys had first met Roisin it had been explained to him by his father she was a live-in nurse cum housekeeper. Only when he was about twelve exploring his newly found interest in girls and masturbation, did he realise she was his father's lover. By this stage, when Roisin crushed him into her ample bosom and smothered him with kisses, he did not resist, enjoying her softness, her sweet floral perfume and the erections which they generated.

Over the years their games had evolved. Now they played draughts and darts, billiards, snooker and ping-pong. She was proficient with a cricket bat and very willing to act as batsman to help him practice bowling. They had tried chess and card games but Roisin was not up to them. Most nights, by unsaid mutual agreement they played at least one round of *Hunt that Mouse*, sometimes several, their reward kisses becoming more intense and longer lasting with each year, fuelling his lustful dreams and 'night manoeuvres', the jokey code for masturbation used at school.

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Rhys had been home in Cardiff for nearly a week of the long summer break. At school he had been ordered to start shaving but free of this discipline, he had a fuzz of dark facial hair, aiming to grow a full naval beard like his father's.

From the first minute of his return he and Rosin had picked up where they had left off, enjoying days out, playing games, cooking and eating together in the kitchen. As in previous years, each day was concluded with several sessions of *Hunt that Mouse*, providing the teenager with an excuse to kiss, cuddle and press against her, fresh fuel for his 'night-time manoeuvres'. In these embraces, Rhys detected a new passion in Roisin and began to fantasise.

On the evening of his birthday they celebrated with a special meal served by Rosin in the Dining Room. His father was in London, for a week long course at the Admiralty. The centrepiece was a birthday fruit cake made with raisins, figs, orange and lemon peel and laced with sweet sherry from his father's drinks cabinet. As they ate, in faux style, dressed in their best outfits, background music came from the parlour radiogram, playing a selection from his father's collection of hits from Broadway Musicals.

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When Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy sang from the show *New Moon*, Roisin and Rhys sang along, hamming it up, swishing around in a close embrace, waltzing awkwardly as neither was proficient.

Their evening was brought to an early close with a shortened, less boisterous round of *Hunt that Mouse* giving them an excuse to kiss and indulge in a lengthy embrace which Roisin broke off with the breathy statement:

"Rhys my big darlin', be off wid ye and let a girl come up ferr air. Now then, look at the clock there. Oy'll need to go up an' see after yer Maamay. The poor old soul's bin soar bad since ye were last up teh visit hur but yer Daaday's at me te keep ye well away 'till she's back to her ownself, whenever that might be. Oy'll be honest wid ye, Rhys, Oy don't think yer Maamay'll make it teh another summer. She's hanginn beh a thread and after she goes, Oy've made up my mind to move on. Oy've over tree hundred British pounds in a bank account so Oy'll be fine."

"Oh, poor Mummy. To be honest with you, Roisin, I feel as if I hardly know her. Even from a child, she did not take any interest in me. Water under the bridge, I fear. Right, it's my turn to wash up and tidy away everything. See you in the morning."

"Ach, yer a good lad, so ye aar."

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An hour later Rhys was sitting up in bed reading when Roisin slipped into his bedroom, dressed her heavy woollen nightgown. On past occasions when he had seen her wearing it, the nightgown had been button to her chin but now it was hanging open, revealing her flimsy nightie below.

His mind raced to a much-used fantasy. As a thirteen-year-old he had kneeled to peer through the keyhole of the first-floor bathroom door to watch her strip, bathe, dry and powder herself with talc. Later, rerunning this memory time after time, he imagined she had been aware of his presence, displaying herself to him. This memory was a 'film' he had used while enjoying the strictly forbidden pleasure of masturbation under the covers of his dormitory bed, relieving himself into a facecloth, this to conceal the tell-tale evidence from Matron who made random snap inspections of bedsheets in pursuit of chastity in her charges.

As he soaked up the sight of her near nakedness, Roisin made a show of turning the key, locking them inside together before throwing herself onto his bedside chair, her legs akimbo. As intended, he saw she was not wearing knickers. He slipped his right hand under the bedclothes to enjoy the surge. Their shy smiles broke into broad grins, both now certain what was in progress. Aged twenty-seven to his seventeen, the young Irishwoman was in her prime:

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"Rhys, deh ye think Oy'm a fallinn woman?"

"No. Why would I think that?"

"Ye must know about yer Daaday and me."

"Ah, well, I suppose you'll just tell me it's none of my business."

"Now put the bedside light out, will ye, to hide my shame."

"No, Roisin, let's leave the light on, please. I'm well, enjoying. . . indeed, I'm very much enjoying the view."

"Yer a naughty, naughty laddie, Rhys Dewy-Davies. There's no mistakinn it. Now, stop handinn yerself under there or ye'll spoil it for us both. Put them both hands out where Oy can see them and let me get this off my chest."

"Fine choice of words. I'm all ears."

"Quiet now and don't ye rush me. Now, where to beginn my kinfesshun."

"Roisin, it's all right, I already know about you and Father. And about Mother and her dinking. And I know they do not co-habit. There's no need to explain."

"No, Rhys, ye only think ye know. Ye see, yer Daaday was not a full man in his mind efter yer sister died. Oh, yes but he made a fine show of the stiff upper lip, workinn himself like a demon. But that was not how it all started with us. No, no. It was all right and proper, at the start. Oy had been here about a month, just working away, glad to have such a good job after the slavery of the Nun's laundry. Ye see, they took my baby Sean and gave him away. My older sister Niamh was there and they had taken her baby away too but she never saw it so we don't know if it was a boy or a wee girl. Like me she had been abused by Father Patrick O'Conner our parish priest. She told me there were eighteen girls in there that all made babies to him, may his soul burn in Hell for evermore, God forgive me. So, Oy stole money from the Mother Superior's office, five pounds, from a drawer, while Oy was cleanin' her office. That drawer, Oy can see it yet, stuffed wid money. Oh how Oy wish now Oy had taken more, all of it, wages for the two years Oy had worked there. That night, Oy, ran away and ended up here in Cardiff. Oy was sixteen."

"Roisin, why did you keep all this from me? All this happened when you were younger than I am now. Did my father take advantage of you?"

"No, no, Rhys, it wasn't like that. Gettinn is a very nice man, a good man. It was not like that at all. No, Oy was sitting in the park, ye know the one, down the hill, near the bus stop? Anyway, Oy heard two women talkinn about 'The Captain' and how he was struggling to cope. They said there had been a sukshessshinn of ladies helpin for cash but none had stayed. Oy heard them say yer Maamay was 'difficult', not well in her head. Then they

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went quiet as he walked past us, carrying a shopping bag, dressed in his uniform. He looked old to me, older than my own Daaday. Oy found out later he was forty-one.

"From the park, Oy watched where he went and followed him. Oy waited a few minutes then walked up to the back door. Bold as brass, Oy was, but only because Oy was desperate poor wid only a few coins to my name. He took me in and we sat in the kitchen. Oy was starving. He made me tea and roasted cheese on toast with brown sauce, you know, the way we used have our secret treats after ye always beat me at draughts?"

"Anyhow, Oy blurted it all out, the whole horrible truth. Oy told him my story and he told me his then he took me upstairs to your Maamay. The room was a wreck, smelling like a cow byre. She was what we called 'a looney', back home. She had painted the walls with her exshcrimint. Gettinn had no words, just stared at her, tears in his eyes. Oy shooshed him away downstairs and got busy, stripping and washing her like a baby. Oy've been here ever since."

"I had no idea Mummy was so bad. Thank you."

"Later she told me she was pooneshinn hurrself for what happened to Bethan. It took me a year oh talkinn to her, makinn hurr see that Bethan was in Heaven, safe and sound, waitinn for hurr. After a while she got a bit better she started to go out a bit but then we found she was still takinn to drink, teh help hurr to get to sleep, she said. Gettinn agreed to 'allow' hurr a half-bottle of sherry a night but it got worse and soon it was two bottles then three bottles a day. That's when we changed hurr to Gin and Tonic only because it was less to carry from the off-licence. Oy was just collectinn and signinn, yer Daaday had an account. The sad way of it was the booze kept hurr calm and happy, glued to the wireless, in hurr own world, locked in hurr room with hurr commode when Oy was out of the house for shopping and the like and when you and Oy went on our days out."

"Father did not tell me any of this but I did see the empty bottles. I'm sorry Roisin, for a while I thought it was you who was drinking it."

'No, no. Oy signed the pledge when Oy was a wee girl because my own Daaday was a drinker, a drunk. No, no. Your father only drank very occasionally, always Rum, and only on special occasions. Now, Rhys, Oy have teh confess the hard part the ye, so, let me do it, no inturrupshuns,. Agreed?"

"Right-o!"

"From about a month into my new job, Oy started to realise the crying Oy was hearing in the darkness was coming from your Daaday's bedroom, not from yer Maamay's. One night Oy coodnaa a stand it any longer and after Oy checked yer Maamay was safe and Oy had hurr locked in, Oy went to him. Oy was not as you see me now. No, no. Oy had put back on my clothes and was fully dressed, Oy promise you. At first it was just cuddling and

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shooshing but, well, you are a full man now yourself so Oy don't have to paint ye a picture, do Oy?"

Rhys shook his head, grinning.

"Gettinn was a perfect gentleman and right from the first time we gave in to it, he used a rubber to make sure Oy diddna get pregnant. He said he would ask me to marry him when yer Maamay died but Oy said no to him right off because Oy knew it would upset you. Anyway, how wid a fine gentleman like him go on wid a simple Irish girl like me for a wife? Anyway, when ye were about twelve, somethinn medical got hold oh him and we had problems makinn him big. Yer a man, ye'll know what Oy mean. So, we settled to just cuddling and makinn me happy, ye know what Oy mean. Anyway, Gettinn seemed to be happy enough wid that and Oy had you, when ye came home to me in your holidays, so that was fine by me too."

There was a long silence during which Rhys stared down at his book, realising what had been happening when he came home each time, how she had held him, not as a sister but more. Swirling in his mind was what would become of her when he left to go to Oxford University after the summer. She had a brother and a sister in Canada and had said many times that she planned to go there some day.

With her confession over, she smiled naughtily, took a packet he recognised from her dressing gown pocket which she tore open, dangling it from her fingers. He had used rubbers once before, at a riotous country house party in the Cotswolds at the home of Jeremy Cunliffe, the Head Boy. His parents were mega-rich and had gone to South Africa on Safari. Condoms had been provided, six for each house guest, both male and female.

Rhys returned her smile, marked the place and closed the book he had been reading. Without taking his eyes from her he fumbled it onto the bedside cabinet and then raised the covers, showing he was ready for action.

She slipped out of her dressing gown and then her nightie and he clicked off the light. They kissed long and hard and then she helped him put on the condom before easing herself up to straddle him.

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During the remainder of the summer break, acting discreetly, they slept together most nights. As a birthday gift, Rhys persuaded his father to buy him a motorbike which the couple used to extend the range of their awayday adventures.

During the Michaelmas term of his first year at Oxford, Rhys was summonsed home by his father to attend the funeral of his mother. He had expected to see Roisin but she had already left for Canada.

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Six months later, Rhys was called back to Cardiff again. His father had died in his sleep, shrivelled by prostate cancer. Over the next year, the estate was settled, providing him with enough funds to purchase a comfortable town house in Oxford's Jericho district, a Bohemian enclave close to the University.

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Missing in Action

In late September 1943, Rhys Dewy-Davies set out from Lochmaddy for the radio station. He was dreading the message he had to convey to the young mother. For a second time since arriving on North Uist, the War was about to deal Janine Robinson Macleod another disappointing hand of cards.

The roads of North Uist had been deserted all day. People were hunkered down, seeing out another spell of atrocious weather. On the plus side, the storm was keeping the German subs deep. In the Minches the up and down convoys were making the most of the bad weather as the coded radio transmissions received at the North Uist radio station recorded.

At the pierhead the powerful motorbike had been difficult to start, the carburettor acting up, a common problem with the BSA-M34. Taking a chance, he had solved the problem by running it fuel-rich knowing it might clog and stall the engine or jamb the gearbox, leaving him stranded. The ride from Lochmaddy had been treacherous with gusting winds from the north-west bringing icy rain with spells of sleet and rain freezing on his goggles. Dewy-Davies had forgotten his gauntlets and his hands were frozen.

On the first stretch to the west the problem had been side winds but turning northwards after Clachan, he had been forced to slow to just above walking pace on the narrow, twisting and undulating coastal strip of hard packed gravel interspersed with patches of poorly laid tarmac full of potholes. Although he had started out in good time, he was running late to make his call before the changeover at the radio station. For days Corbett and Macrae had been talking about the darts final at the hotel and he had promised to be in good time to take over from them.

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While living with the MacPhails during her first pregnancy, Janine had adopted the habit of listening to the evening shipping forecast, wondering how it would affect Roddy on *The Stormy Petrel*. Henry never missed it, jotting down the gist of the information then writing it up into his 'weather book', comparing it with previous days and months. Since moving to North Uist, meteorology and bird spotting had become new hobbies to add to vegetable growing and tinkering with his car, trying to keep it going.

Back at her own croft, since her 're-conversion', Janine had used the time after the wireless transmission to force herself to pray for Roddy's safety, wherever he was. While keeping up appearances before the MacPhails, she knew she was backsliding, falling

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into her previous ways, thinking and dreaming unclean thoughts. By this stage, her prayers were briefer, routine, less fervent than they had been in the weeks after her confrontation with Henry and Martha following Roddy's assault. Although she hoped he was safe, she did not want to see her husband ever again.

Over many weeks she had devised a formula which satisfied both her head and her heart:

"Dear Father God hear my prayer. Please watch over Roddy Macleod and all those involved in his mission to Norway. By the Power of Your Holy Spirit, keep them safe and return them to their families in Your own good time. Keep this household safe from harm and bless all who enter it. This I ask in Jesus's Precious Name. Amen."

As The Commander approached the MacInnes croft, the sleet stopped and the wind eased. In the last glow of the Sun now below the western horizon, the sky cleared to show a sliver of moon. He checked his watch and saw he had just under half an hour to complete his unpleasant task. He wondered how the girl would react. There were rumours that she had split with her husband who, it was said, had beat her senseless in a drunken stupor.

Wearing his greatcoat and waterproof leggings over his high sea-boots, Dewy-Davies came slithering cautiously from the main roadway onto the muddy track towards the croft, arriving just after the evening shipping forecast. Inside, the two infants had gone over to sleep in the box bedroom. Janine had been in her pyjamas shuttering the back window when she caught a flicker of his slitted headlight. Peering intently, she picked out and recognised his black outline as he skidded down the snaking path from the coast road to her door.

In a flap, she sorted herself, cleansed her face and underarms with a damp cloth. There was no time to brush and pin up her hair and do her face but she changed from her nightwear into a clean blouse and her best pair of slacks. She puffed a spray of perfume under each arm and into her nursing bra to counter the milky smell from her leaky breasts. Aware the blouse was tight on her, she shrugged into her Sunday best coat, an action which made no sense since the croft was warm and cosy. In recent weeks, Henry MacPhail had systematically stopped up all the gaps, eliminating the draughts, curing the whoomping of the flue in windy weather, putting an end to the sudden flurry of dangerous peat sparks which gusts had caused. The room was warm and humid from drying nappies. Folding the clothes-horse with the nappies in place, she bundled it into the girls' room and closed the door.

When The Commander entered, dripping wet, he removed his helmet and goggles, came to attention and delivered his portentous news in what she realised later was a rehearsed speech but delivered in an uncharacteristically stilted and shaky voice:

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"Mrs Janine Macleod, it is my unavoidable and sad duty to inform you on behalf of the War Office that your husband's vessel has not made signal contact for three weeks. Local sources in her area of operations say she has been sunk by the Germans. However, I have been advised by my superiors that, for the present, we should not assume all is lost and that those on board, including your husband, are to be listed as 'missing in action'. Of course, this decision has consequences. Most regrettably, I have been advised your 'marital allowance', small though it is, is to be 'suspended forthwith'. This seems inexplicable to me and I shall write to protest this harsh move."

Despite her mixed feelings about Roddy, great sadness welled up compounded by the aching sense of loneliness which had dogged her since the loss of her parents. Mixed with this was survivor's guilt at being spared the Dudley Drive bombs and the return of the nagging doubt about whether she should have done more to try to save her Granny MacInnes from her fate.

The teenager's emotions surged; her mind overloaded and shut down to escape her predicament and the prospect of dire poverty. Fainting, she stumbled forwards. As if caught in a whirlpool, she threw her hands out to clasp at an imagined lifebelt. Rhys stepped forward and caught her, slipping his arms under hers, holding her dead weight, pulling her upright. As she came around, her head rested on his chest. Weeping hot tears into his neck, Janine became a character in a novella she had read a few days earlier:

She was the young, helpless widow being comforted by the strong, older man who would support her in her grief and defend her in her time of need.

Unsure of how to deal with the girl as she pressed hard against him, Rhys sang softly to her in Welsh as if comforting an upset child, reminding him of his six-year-old self when Bethan had died and there had been no one to comfort him.

With this fragrant, beautiful girl leaning into him, hugging him, his mind drifted off to another time, another girl.

Time slowed as their embrace became more intimate.

One song morphed into another and then another.

Rhys returned from his reverie to find Janine nuzzling into his neck, crooning along with him. Only then did it strike him he should have called first at the MacPhails' croft to ask for their support in breaking the bad news. He eased her away but when he saw the lostness and loneliness in her eyes he thought of his mother and saw what he read as signs the Glasgow girl was close to a breakdown.

Gradually, reluctantly, the girl detached herself and lifted the smaller child who was whimpering for attention. She offered to make him a cup of tea, her eyes pleading for him to stay.

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Rhys felt he could not refuse her, despite the fact he was already overdue at the radio station to relieve Corbett and Macrae who would be desperate to get back for the darts final at the *Lochmaddy Hotel*.

Nodding, he shrugged out of his coat and hung it to drip on the back of the kitchen door then rooted in its internal waterproof pockets to retrieve his gifts comprising: four quarter-pound tins of finest Ceylon tea from his personal hoard (purchased from the Nicholsons at a discount); three one-pound bags of white granulated sugar in anonymous thick brown paper bags, their tops secured with blue sealing wax, (filched from a factory in Greenock, where Macrae's brother worked); and, finally, three tins of *Fray Bentos* corned beef from Uruguay.

Over the months ahead, similar welcome gifts of food and sundries filched from his naval stores or obtained from the Nicholsons would be a feature of The Commander's kindness and thoughtfulness towards this struggling young wife who was now most probably a widow.

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Drinking sweet black tea, and smoking his pipe, Rhys stayed for much longer than intended, allowing her to talk about how she had met Roddy, about her previous life in Glasgow, the straightjacket protectiveness of her Christian upbringing, the freedom of her time at Skerry's and finally, the tragic loss of her parents during the Clydebank Blitz. Eventually she had talked herself round in a full circle moving back to Roddy to reveal the fact of their marriage breakdown but stopping short of the graphic details she had revealed to Martha MacPhail.

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By nine-thirty, Janine seemed to have recovered her poise. Rhys gently refused a further cup of tea and rose to leave, reclaiming his coat.

Outside, the wind rose and hail lashed against the walls and roof as another force eight storm built, sending the German submarines below to avoid the risk of an inadvertent collision with a convoy. Later, Rhys would discover the darts match had already been abandoned and a new date had been set.

Up at the radio station, Macrae and Corbet had looked out at the rising storm and had tried to contact Dewy-Davies by radio to warn him against attempting the twenty-two mile road trip. When he could not be raised, they began to fear he might have come off or had sought refuge during his attempt.

As he struggled to fasten the stiff buttons she reached to help, playing mummy, stepping nearer. The milky smell of her mingled with the faint trace of her spicy perfume caught at his throat.

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Leaning into him for a second time, she sobbed deeply, again clinging to him. He felt her fingers moving, now unbuttoning the greatcoat.

Offering only passive resistance, he kept his hands by his sides. Her hands moved inside the greatcoat and an up towards his tie, tugging it gently as her hair snuggled against his face, her chin resting gently on the lapel of his serge jacket. Feeling the urgent press of her pelvis into his groin, he leaned back onto the door and glanced down. From the wetness of his greatcoat, her blouse was soaked through making it semi-transparent, revealing the outline of a front-fastening nursing bra. Glancing up she caught and held his eyes boldly, knowingly, pushed harder with her pelvis, swaying, as if dancing.

"Sing those songs again, please," she whispered.

As he sang, she attempted to mimic his words, instinctively understanding their meaning.

Taking a second glance, he saw her eyes were closed and sensed her slipping into a daydream.

Time slowed to a stop, as if the universe was on hold, allowing him to revisit his past.

Snippets whirled from his nights of passion with Roisin and others who had shared his bed in the Jericho house, happy to be served by an experienced lover who always used a condom.

Playing out a scene from a favourite novella, she was working slowly, stealthily. Moving her fingers inch by inch, she unbuttoned first his uniform jacket and then his shirt before moving up to loosen the knot of his tie before freeing it entirely, pulling it down and letting it fall to the floor.

With each territorial gain, she had expected resistance but Rhys remained static, as if welcoming her lead as he sang on in his warm low baritone, her own sweet soprano voice trilling in near unison, moving through his repertoire of Welsh loves songs as she hummed and crooned along with him, while he attempted to resist her by the simple strategy of standing to attention.

Aware of his erection, Janine was now certain he wanted her as much as she wanted him.

With this milestone achieved, Janine moved on to follow the sequence outlined in another more explicit romantic novel, one she had inherited from Helena's secret hoard at Dudley Drive, hidden behind a false panel high on the top shelf in her bedroom cupboard together with her album of nude well-endowed men and her ornate, ribbed ebony dildo.

Now Janine was reliving the seduction section she had read many times over in recent weeks while pleasuring herself in the bed behind her. As her mind moved ahead to what she was now sure would follow, it seemed to her he too had read the story of the helpless widow seducing the man both able and willing to save her from impending poverty.

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Continuing with greater boldness, her hands slipped inside his jacket then upwards into the warm void between his shirt and his vest, sliding slowly and softly around to his back, moving to the base of his spine to bunch a handful of the cotton vest, easing both the vest and shirt upwards together freeing them from the waistband of his trousers. At last, under the vest, her fingers found bare flesh. Following the script in the novel, she used her fingernails to scour gently from his shoulder blades down and round and across his midriff, moving slowly to the buckle of his belt.

His voice became breathier. He stumbled over the words then became silent.

As her hands moved steadily on their mission, she lifted her head and they kissed, softly at first and then with increasing passion, his hands cupping her head as he spread his legs to stand at the 'at ease' position.

Janie's plan was working exactly as the novella had predicted. She could feel his penis leaping with desire against her pubis as she rippled her hands up his spine, beyond his shoulder blades. Progressing in one steady continuous movement, she hooked them over his clavicles, pulling him back away from her as she arched her back, their enmeshed legs forming the standing leg of a Y-shape as she rotated her pubis against his penis still trapped inside his trousers.

He felt her hand rubbing and searching his crotch for his fly buttons. The voice of duty and propriety displaced his erotic thoughts. The girl was grief-stricken, vulnerable and confused. He knew he should breakaway at once and make his leave. If this encounter were discovered, she would lose her reputation.

A more basic, powerful urge was fighting in him.

Rhys had not enjoyed female company since Bath, over two years earlier. It had happened at the mess party to mark his posting to North Uist, a night of passion with Lesley, the busty redhead from Wolverhampton who had set her sights on him early on that long-ago night, whispering into his ear as they danced a slow foxtrot:

"Well, sir, is it true the women away up there in the wild north are so ugly and frigid their men prefer sheep? Would you like to take away a nice memory, to remind yourself what you are missing? I hear you always carry a few Johnnys in your ticket pocket. Let's slip away to mine after the speeches and put them to good use."

Lesley was married with a husband in submarines somewhere in the Mediterranean. Her children had been evacuated to Wales. With his wife Petra estranged, living in London, his one night of passion had made their adultery double-sided, a simple act of gratification with no strings attached.

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But here and now with his beautiful, vulnerable girl his situation was entirely different. Unlike the one-night stand with Lesley, this fling with Janine would almost certainly get around and ruin them both.

It was already too late. Janine's hand was already inside his underpants. Flesh on flesh.

Perhaps it might end as mutual masturbation, still adultery but less, somehow, a satisfactory and enjoyable compromise he had enjoyed with girls afraid of full sex but willing to give and receive orgasm from a partner's hand.

He sensed her step back, just slightly, and opened his eyes to see her shrug out of her blouse and bra exposing her naked breasts. Her left hand reached up around his head and pulled his mouth down onto her right nipple as she arched her back again.

Her right hand was at work, squeezing his testicles, tugging and stretching his scrotum.

It was too much to bear.

Afraid he would ejaculate and spoil everything, he reacted, his voice reduced to a husky, unconvincing whisper:

"No, Mrs Macleod. No."

"Please, Rhys, it's what you want, isn't it? What we both want. Don't ask me to stop now or I'll explode!"

"No, Mrs Macleod, this is wrong, we both know this is wrong."

"Oh Rhys, please call me Janine and no, it's not wrong. Don't you understand? My marriage to Roddy is over. Look at the door locks and shutters. No one locks their doors like that here on North Uist. Uncle Henry put them up to keep him out! Oh Rhys, surely you must have realised I've been dreaming of you coming to my bed for weeks, since that first time you smiled at me when we were alone in your office. Oh Rhys, I could tell right from that very second, from the way you looked at me that you wanted me and I have been willing you to come here to me ever since. Look, it doesn't matter if this news about Roddy is a rouse. I don't care one whit about him. It's you I want now, not him. Or am I not good enough for you?"

In a flash, Rhys's mind conjured the images from a few months earlier.

Janine had shrugged out of her coat and had sat up pertly wearing a blouse that was undersized for her swollen breasts, smiling boldly at him, transmitting the sort of look he knew well. When he looked away to hide his lust, she had dipped her head to search in her handbag for a handkerchief, giving him the chance to enjoy the view again. She had caught him looking. Perhaps it was the damp patches caused by milk leaking through from

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her nursing bra which had made him linger and the thought of what it would be like to visit the source with his lips.

As he had sensed from the second she had smiled lasciviously at him all those weeks ago, it was inevitable.

Her hand tugged at his nape again, urgently.

He leaned forward.

No longer adhering to the storyline of her novella, Janine was at last free to create her own fantasy. Closing her eyes, she heard him groan, felt his cool hands reach to support her back and his lips arrive, sucking strongly, then holding back in surprise as the milk flowed, making them slippy.

"Oh, Rhys, that is so, so nice." She giggled, "Please keep sucking, I've plenty to spare."

His lips returned and with them his teeth, biting gently and tugging, bringing a delicious edge of pleasure-pain, causing her to squeal:

"Oh Rhys, please be kind and gentle with me. Please. And make it last. Please, please, please don't be brutish and quick, like Roddy."

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Their immediate passion spent, they lay side by side in her bed, her head on his chest, his arm around her, both singing quietly, their voices blending, suspended in a cocoon of subdued euphoria.

For Rhys what just happened was completely unprecedented. Despite their exchange of lustful glances in his office a few months earlier, his visit to impart the news about Roddy had not been a premeditated attempt to take advantage of her.

Until this point in his life his sexual encounters had always been more casual, serendipitous experiences, like his encounter with Lesley.

While at school, his youthful country house weekend party with Head Boy Jeremy in charge had been an impromptu, thrilling, bumbling and inexperienced sex romp with little thought of the outcome, everyone carried away by the sudden freedom and mutual desire to 'break their duck'. Although it had never been discussed openly at school, a few of the more knowledgeable boys with older sisters had said many of the girls were also using what had been mysteriously described as 'female precautions', details unavailable.

His summer nights with Roisin had been a steep learning curve for him and, to his surprise, for her. He had not envisaged any sort of marital or other long term arrangement and neither had she. Although Rhys had depended on her cheerful warmth and companionship

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from the age of seven, his sex with Roisin at seventeen had been based on lust, a realisation of pent up fantasies from his night manoeuvres at school.

Over those summer vacation weeks, he had learned from her, revealed in brief snatches, her night-time encounters with his father had been odd, intermittent events, fraught with tension and, she thought, guilt and apprehension about his fading virility.

As he revisited the details of his few hours of delight with Janine, what puzzled Rhys most was her reaction when he opened the packet of condoms:

"Oh, Rhys, how thoughtful, how amazing, how absolutely fantastic. You are a true gentleman. Please, please let me put it on for us. I've dreamt of doing this so many times."

As she had requested several times before he progressed to ejaculation, he did his best to hold back, slowing to make the moment last.

To distract himself during their act of coitus, he recalled his first sighting of Janine standing on a rocky outcrop, observing the workmen building the radio station.

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From about half a mile away, concealed by his camouflage bivouac, he had been watching a female cuckoo clearing out a skylark's eggs, pecking them to destroy them, sipping at the contents before settling to lay her single egg in the nest scrape.

At the sight of the girl, he had zoomed in on her with his best binoculars, Japanese 10x80 manufactured by Fuji Meibo, an expensive graduation gift from his aunt. It was like a scene for an American movie, he thought, a tall curvy girl in yellow beach shorts and a red shirt-blouse with long dark brown hair blowing freely in the warm breeze. For over an hour, safe from view, he had tracked her as she wandered from spot to spot, watching with a guilty, voyeuristic lust, fantasising. At one point, when spotted by the contractor's workmen, she waved and blew kisses in response to their cat calls and wolf whistles, stirring an irrational feeling of proprietorial jealousy in him.

He had hoped to see her again but it had been a one off. As the weeks rolled by and she did not return, he began to wonder if his lack of female company had caused him to imagine the whole episode.

He had been off the island for a three-week planning meeting in Bath to discuss the possibility of the Norway assignment using the Macleods and their boat. Petra had been there but in the background. When they parted, she had made her position plain:

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"Rhys, I'm so very sorry but I've found the right man for me, at long last. I will want a divorce but not yet. So, when this is all over, we will sort it out, if we survive. Thank you for all you did for me and good luck with your future. You are a good, kind man and there will be someone special out there for you, you'll see."

On his return from the Mainland, the tall girl had moved to work at the *Lochmaddy Hotel*. According to local gossip she was a spoiled brat, a stuck-up bitch, a tease and a vamp and worse. What surprised him most was her age, newly seventeen yet fully formed physically. As he enjoyed her from a distance, he learned of her involvement with Roddy Macleod, a development which had stirred his jealousy once again. Then, within a month or so, he been drawn more directly into her life to help sort out the consequences of her pregnancy. At that stage, watching her reactions, he judged the rumours about her to be correct. A haughty, unrepentant hussy, a loose girl on the make. Only later when he got to know MacPhail did he hear her tragic background and that she was a practical girl with a quick mind, good qualifications, normally cheery and hard-working when set a clear challenge.

This information, together with reports from Corbett and Macrae of Roddy and Donald John's drunken, bragging outbursts in the bar of the hotel, had changed Rhys's view of Mrs Janine Macleod.

As the weeks turned into months and the first child arrived then the second, he noted she had stayed away from Lochmaddy and had only limited contact with her husband, preferring to live in near isolation on her croft. This was a small, ramshackle, dilapidated building passed most days on his motorbike except when he took the longer route to the radio station, for variety and in the hope of seeing the family of ravens he was studying. These six large black birds stayed together throughout the summer into the autumn as the parents taught their clever offspring how to eke a living from the land by hunting for dead lambs and the occasional fishes cast up on the shore after a storm.

Over time he had come to the realisation the girl had been trapped into the life of a subsistence crofter, almost a peasant, an innocent led astray by her beauty and headstrong waywardness.

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Lying beside her, he realised she had drifted off to sleep. He checked his watch: it was nearly eleven-thirty.

As ecstasy ebbed, guilt seeped back. He was the cuckold, taking advantage of a vulnerable, desperate young widow who was dirt poor with two infant girls to care for. He knew most of her circumstances from Corbett stories and Macrae and his records. He also knew of the MacPhails and the support they had provided even though she was not their true kin, just friends of her parents. Rhys liked the man MacPhail who, despite

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his pessimism and solemn Old Testament proclamations, was an interesting man, hard-working and diligent, despite his lack of mobility. Rhys also saw it was Martha MacPhail with her quieter more practical Christian faith who was the guiding hand in their marriage. Based on snippets overheard from Corbett's conversations with others, Rhys had learned it was Martha who had recovered the girl from her deep depression after her parents and grandmother had died within a few weeks, making the girl a penniless orphan.

Looking at her asleep beside him, he studied the curves of her naked body and felt himself stir. Guilt at his recent behaviour and continuing desire to enjoy her again was soon followed by self-righteousness.

Closing his eyes to renewed temptation, he ran through what had happened since arriving a few hours earlier when he had been merely a messenger bringing sad news. Looking back over the initial stages of their encounter, he was sure he had managed to conceal his desire, sparked by her aura, her sensuality. As with Roisin and Lesley and others, it had been the girl who had made the running, leading him on, seducing him by her smiles, her hot, bold eyes, her calculated waif-like appearance, her partially unbuttoned blouse, her cleavage.

There was no make-up, revealing freckles, like Bethan's. Most especially it had been her perfume and milky smell which had breached his defences, and her wanton boldness, approaching close to him, making the first moves, deftly undressing him, flesh on flesh.

He saw it now. She had been the initiator. Working to a plan. Unsaid but obvious in hindsight, her wanton behaviour had been clearly driven by her dire financial situation, her need of a man of substance to rescue her and her lack of other options, trapped in this remote part of the island with two small children to care for. Running through the images and sensations he had experienced; it was obvious she had used her beauty and vulnerability to snare him into an impossible trap.

Dewy-Davies thanked his stars he still carried a supply of protectives in his ticket pocket, a long-established habit against opportunities which arose in War situations. By mutual agreement, his marriage to Petra had never been monogamous. On her part, he knew she was meticulously careful about intercourse. Even when he wore a condom, she had always used a diaphragm with anti-spermicidal gel and had done so since puberty, coached by an elder sister.

The last thing Mrs Janine Macleod needed was another child or for this encounter to become known to others. This single event could not be allowed to bloom into a full-blown affair. North Uist was not like Bath or Oxford where such affairs might be hidden by the anonymity of a large metropolis where secrets could be more easily concealed.

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Self-righteousness turned to self-preservation. To continue to visit the MacInnes croft would risk exposure and ruin his standing in the community, weaken his authority to command. The spurious 'dereliction of duty' accusation which had been employed to manoeuvre Roddy Macleod into marrying the girl would rebound with real force if news of his relationship with Janine got back to Bath and the Norway team. Given how central to the Norway venture the Macleods had been, the Bath planning team had demanded that Rhys provide them with every detail of the girl's previous life, information which he had gathered by stealth from Henry and Martha. He knew that after his split with Petra he had acquired a minor reputation in Bath and Oxford as a womaniser. Given he had sponsored and heavily endorsed the Macleods, if this affair with Roddy's wife got out, his name in Bath and London would be mud. Worse, it might also affect his tenure at Oxford University.

As he made his moves to escape quietly and slip out into the remnants of the storm, he promised himself he would never repeat this adultery.

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Interlude

It was near to midnight when Dewy-Davies left the croft riding his motorbike, heading off to take over night duty from his ratings at the radio station on the far side of the hill. As he struggled through the blustery rain, he was already framing his excuse for lateness: he would claim dirty fuel had blocked his carburettor again, a common occurrence. To compensate, he would give them an unopened half bottle of Johnny Walker he had been saving for a special occasion. Practising his 'stiff upper lip' face, he smiled inwardly, hoping they would not smell her perfume on him. As a second compensation, he would suggest the next changeover would be delayed to 10:30 hours the following morning to allow them to sleep late, a rare bonus.

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With the ratings gone, Dewy-Davies secured himself inside the radio station by slipping the linked three-bolt lever then dropping the latch pin. Certain now he could not be disturbed, he turned the tumbler wheel back and forth to open the wall safe and retrieve the code book. At his desk, he re-sorted the pile of classified signals into time-received order to make sure he deciphered them starting with the oldest first.

Back at the safe, he reached for the hessian tie-pouch containing the remains of his special herbal grass. The Nicholsons had taken several weeks to fill his order, explaining it had been difficult to procure. At £20 for eight ounces the price had seemed high but they had assured him they were passing it on 'at cost plus 5% only'. It was certainly the darkest and strongest mix he had ever used. From this remaining small supply, he took a finger-pinch to weave into his loose handful of aromatic Dutch-mix of conventional pipe tobacco. This ordinary batch had come as a complementary gift to keep him sweet while he had waited for the marijuana, an incentive to turn a blind eye to the goings on between the Nicholsons and Corbett and Macrae.

Inhaling deeply, he settled with a celebratory dram from his bottle of very special *Talisker* malt whisky. The bottle was almost empty, the dribble of spirit mixed with water in equal measure to eke it out into a longer drink almost bereft of flavour.

Relaxed by the tobacco-herbal mix, he made a start at leafing through recent signals. With the flood of American aid and troops, the tide of the War was slowly turning in favour of the Allies. With the increased numbers and vigilance of the latest British flying boats, the German submarine threat in the minches was much reduced. As a result, the Most Secret signals he must decode personally had reduced to a mere trickle. By contrast, they were snowed under by the flood of unclassified and often verbose signals

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which now filled their days. In his view, these epistles should never have been transmitted. The airwaves were being dominated by the mundane, he felt.

Working carefully, he converted his personal batch by hand to a message pad, studied them, decided what to say where a reply was required, drafted his response then converted this to code then typed the characters carefully into the teleprinter, checked the sequences against his hand-written code then finally pressed SEND.

After a few minutes the teleprinter chattered "RECEIVED" which confirmed his signal had arrived and had been deciphered by the team at the other end.

When the backlog of his Most Secret batch had been processed, to complete his work, he filed the coded signal flimsies and his replies in the lockfast filing cabinet using the key which he kept on a long string secured from a loop inside his inner jacket pocket.

In normal use, the radio equipment was pre-set to monitor the North Uist frequency with a feature which sounded a screech alarm should the teleprinter be unattended when incoming signals were detected.

Around 03:00 am the teleprinter fell silent. Since mid-summer, this had become the norm. Rhys suspected the nightshift teams in Bath and Liverpool were on some sort of break, their officers off to catch a nap.

Still not ready to sleep, he sought out his hand-written manuscript and his pile of field notebooks containing his jottings of bird and sea life sightings gathered over these last years. Like many others Rhys considered the Hebrides to be a wildlife haven, pristine, largely unexplored, unknown to many on the Mainland, a personal compensation for his wartime banishment from the hub of decision-making in Bath.

Currently he was trying to complete chapter three and had sent several synoptic extracts to various magazines and journals on the Mainland. A few had been published but now, because of lack of resources, the receiving editors were insisting he submit typed manuscripts. Rhys was a very slow and inaccurate typist. As a favour, Andy Macrae had been persuaded to type up his first chapter but the standard of the man's production was poor, full of errors and misalignments.

From Henry MacPhail and now from herself, Rhys knew Janine was a trained typist and had a high-quality typewriter. As a test, perhaps she might be willing to type up an article for him. It could hardly be worse than Macrae's efforts. He could pay her, which would provide her with much needed cash and, if she was as good as Henry claimed, she might be persuaded to become his typist. It could be a good cover if anyone saw him visit.

After an hour or so, he was ready to catnap in his bed. Leaving the internal doors open, he moved along the corridor to his bunkroom, shrugged out of his clothes, placed them on hangers. Following a visit to the small bathroom, now dressed in his pyjamas, he laid

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aside his pipe, finished his whisky, set his bedside alarm for half past nine, dimmed the paraffin lamp, snuggled under the bedclothes, closed his eyes and started the film running in his mind, once again enjoying the memory of his encounter with Janine. When guilt tugged at the edge of his mind, he promised himself he would not let it happen again, even though he was already planning a next visit.

The hours ticked by until the clock roused him to his breakfast routine of ablutions followed by a light meal of roasted cheese on toast and hot, black, unsweetened tea.

Ahead of the delayed duty changeover, by force of habit, he took a replacement Johnny from his toilet bag to replenish his ticket pocket. Routinely, he always carried three condoms on his person. In total he only had six left. He would have to order more by mail order. If he asked the Nicholsons, tongues would wag.

As he faced the day ahead, with the memory of Janine tugging repeatedly, he realised with the darker Hebridean winter nights approaching when it was often dark by four in the afternoon, he might be able to repeat his early evening visits to Janine without detection.

Perhaps it was time to move his ratings to a twice a week midnight handover rota in exchange for a later start for them on the following morning.

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Shunned

It was common knowledge The Commander spent his nights alone in the radio station on duty watch, dealing with secret signals. Although it was a treacherous four miles by road from the McInnes croft, the hilltop station was less than a mile away on foot over the ridge. However, this more direct route meant a difficult climb using a series of narrow sheep track paths up through the rocks.

Each night since his first visit, Janine had waited for him to call again, watching the coast road every night, always disappointed when he zoomed by, his head down, helmeted, encased in his distinctive greatcoat, never once slowing to turn down onto her track or even to glance or wave in her direction, so tantalisingly near yet so far from her.

During her first summer on North Uist, Janine had watched its construction, a frantic affair with dozens of men under the command of a platoon of military personnel, working from dawn to dusk, sleeping in tents. The REME officer-in-charge had not encouraged contact with the locals. The constructors had arrived in a small convoy, did what was necessary and then departed, back to Inverness from whence they had come.

In Lochmaddy they had joked it had been 'The Uist Midge' which had driven them to complete the project in record time.

The result of their labours was a huddle of khaki-painted concrete blocks located near the base of a wireless tower on the far side of a steep rocky ridge overlooking the minches with only the tip of the mast visible from the MacInnes and MacPhail crofts. As an afterthought, to keep the sheep from using the buildings as a windbreak, the whole place had been ringed by barbed wire fence and a cattle grid installed at the traffic entrance.

Over their years together on North Uist, MacPhail, Corbett and Macrae had become close friends. All three were supporters of Glasgow Rangers FC and Brothers of nearby Masonic Lodges in Glasgow. Henry was the only 'outsider' who had been allowed inside the radio station, a secret tour, a fact he kept to himself knowing that Martha and Janine would spread his secret and that consequences might arise.

What he also kept secret was that it was during the hours of darkness the bulk of classified radio traffic was received. In fact, over a period of months these signals had been a hot topic whenever the three men met alone. Nicknamed 'red specials', they were easily spotted by their red ink signal banner identifiers. Unlike other plain code signals, these important signals came in random strings of letters and numerals and demanded

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immediate acknowledgement, decoding, study and, at minimum, a further acknowledgement that they had been 'understood'. On occasion an urgent, 'by return' response might be demanded requiring The Commander to be fetched from the Pierhouse office to deal with it.

The ratings opined that these 'red specials' conveyed crucial strategic information about the deployments of British warships around the Hebrides and up-to-date sightings of enemy submarines. Henry was sceptical; he knew from close enquiry that Corbett and Macrae were excluded from the decoding and filing these top-secret messages and did not have access to the safe or secure cabinets, activities which were the sole domain of The Commander himself.

The station was accessed by a single entrance secured by a heavy metal door, painted black. The complex of interlinking cubes seemed far larger than was required for three men. Rumour said it had been originally built in error using a set of plans designed for a similar station on the Isle of Wight, a station said to be continuously defended by a detachment of Royal Marines. Whether this was true, no one knew. However, on North Uist and throughout the Hebrides, rumourmongering was a favourite activity. Another version told the complex was intended to house RM Commandos who would be arriving for special training. Others said it was to house POWs, 'specials' to be subjected to psychological interrogation involving torture and drugs. The locals watched and waited but the only people who used the radio station were The Commander and his two ratings.

Eventually the 'wrong plans' version Corbett and Macrae held to was generally accepted and that the overblown establishment was another BHC error, (Balls-up-by High Command).

As there was no mains electricity on the island, the radio equipment relied on an array of batteries, charged weekly by a paraffin-petrol mix engine-generator which had acquired the nickname; 'The Black Beast from Hell'. This monster, the bane of Corbett and Macrae's lives, was difficult to start and hard to keep running smoothly as required by the charging equipment.

During daytime the station was normally manned by one or other of the two naval ratings, sometimes both. CPO James Corbett (Jimmy) and PO Andrew Macrae (Andy) were billeted separately with local families in Lochmaddy, which suited them as they could walk to the bar at the *Lochmaddy Hotel*. For the convenience of the officers and others in transit, the hotel remained open to midnight from Monday to Friday, closing at 23:00 hours on Saturdays. It remained closed to non-residents on Sundays, unless customers could produce a 'military pass' signed by CPO Corbett acting for The Commander. Of course, this made Jimmy Corbett a very popular man.

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Janine tried to imagine what it was like for Rhys living as a bachelor on North Uist: as an Oxford Don with a Doctor of Philosophy degree, he would be used to a much more sophisticated way of living. It was common knowledge the Welshman preferred his own company. Now, through duty, he was obliged to spend his nights alone up at the radio station where he had set up his personal living quarters. According to Henry, Dewy-Davies had converted one of the larger spare rooms into a spartan bedroom cum living area heated by a paraffin heater, a luxury few locals enjoyed. It was here he enjoyed his record collection played on a fancy radiogram, sent out to North Uist from his home in Oxford.

After their night of passion, Janine had found the spent rubber from their coupling, tied off and placed lengthwise on the hearth. It seemed to her this evidence had been presented theatrically, ceremoniously, to highlight that she was safe with him. After giggling, she had wrapped it in tissue paper and kept it tucked in the box containing her best shoes, taking it out to look at it most evenings before retiring, enjoying the memory, fantasising about their future as a couple.

Finally, knowing she must, she at last committed it to the glowing peats to watch it smoulder, swell, pop quietly then catch alight, burning fiercely and briefly with a loud hiss.

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Following the news her husband was missing, Janine's Friday visits to Lochmaddy with the MacPhails proved to be a severe disappointment. She had hoped to catch a private word with The Commander but, frustratingly, she found herself restricted to the outer office where she was presented with a short formal note, badly typed and to a familiar formula:

'It is with regret I have to advise the situation regarding the Macleods is unchanged'.

These curt notes purported to be from The Commander, signed pp by CPO J. Corbett. Janine guessed they had been typed by PO Macrae, correcting fluid spotting his work like measles, a man whose slow pecking at the keys drove her to distraction.

Janine knew Rhys was along the corridor in his cubby-hole office confirmed by the perfumed aroma from his pipe which wafted along to her and by his motorbike which was outside, tied up under its tarpaulin hap.

As Rhys had predicted during his visit to the croft, there was no War Office money order for her to cash at the Post Office making the young widow totally reliant on the charity of the MacPhails. Unfortunately, this did not extend to a weekly cash allowance. As a result, she was forced to economise on the use of cosmetics and fragrant shampoo.

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After the third week of avoiding her, Janine reluctantly accepted she had lost him, concluding his visit had been a one-night stand, never to be repeated, despite the tempting nearness of him overnighing at the radio station.

For Janine, living a near solitary life at the croft, the delight of the experience lingered, revisited nightly, lying back under her bedclothes with the wireless playing softly in the background as she pleased herself in his phantom presence, pretending it was his hands caressing and thrilling her ahead of the slow stroking of Helena's ribbed dildo.

This behaviour, an extension of her adultery, came with an ache of guilt which blocked her from her previous resolve to 'Walk with the Lord'.

When the MacPhails visited, she was forced to pretend, disguising from them her return to the path of 'unbelief', convincing herself there would be time for confession, contrition, repentance and salvation later.

Each time she thought of praying for forgiveness, her old defiance welled up. For the present she would enjoy the memory of Rhys on her own terms.

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Return

Four-weeks to the day after his first visit, as if in answer to an unsaid prayer, The Commander arrived at the croft. It was a fine sunny October afternoon. Henry had been attempting to repair the roof of the outbuilding. It was a temporary effort, like most repairs in that period. Proper materials were almost impossible to obtain. After a struggle, with Janine helping, they had lashed the galvanised corrugated sheets down onto the wooden frame with a combination of binding twine and galvanised wire.

When Janine spotted his motorbike slowing to turn off the coastal road, she was thrilled but jittery. Once again she was completely unprepared, dressed in old work clothes under a tatty old boilersuit of Uncle Henry's. Her hair was unwashed, unbrushed and in a tangle. Worst of all, her face was ruddy from the sun and wind, emphasising the sprinkling of hated freckles under her eyes.

She had been sitting in the doorway, a towel covering Wee Martha who was suckling noisily. Seeing him approached, she exchanged her nipple with a dummy, made herself decent, passed the infant to Martha MacPhail and flew back indoors to tie up her hair with a bright red scarf. Checking herself in the mirror, she added a light smear of cherry lipstick to the front pucker of her lips only, aiming at the peasant girl look, from a long-ago film in Glasgow.

The four adults brought out chairs from the kitchen and drank tea together while the two infants played crawl chases with the MacPhails three collies. Balach had growled continuously at the stranger and had been banished to his kennel in the outbuilding. Bella was out, foraging on the edge of the machair near the slope which rose onto the treacherous peat hag which ran alongside the road and acted as a barrier between the two crofts.

Janine sat out of his eyeline, slightly behind and to one side of the MacPhails, studying him, revisiting her fantasy encounter, a film which had filled her days and nights since he held her, kissed her.

Asking first for their pledge to keep his information secret, The Commander confided there was no further news of MacLeod boat or her complement. Pressed further by Henry, the Welshman repeated his request for their solemn agreement never to reveal what he was about to tell them. This given, he went on to explain his arrangement with the Macleods and their contract with the War Office. Although not officially part of the Royal Navy, Roddy and Donald John had previously reported to him under the War Powers Act, drafted as wartime-only auxiliaries into the Royal Naval Reserve. However,

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this authority had been transferred to Bath when the Macleods were posted away from North Uist. The Nicholsons, Rhys went on to advise, were under a similar, less formal arrangement set up by the Admiralty at Greenock, a looser contract which had been imposed upon him, reducing his ability to control them.

While he was speaking, Balach inched back and raised a paw to Rhys's thigh, asking for friendship. After a few minutes, the old dog lay beside the stranger's chair and dozed.

Relaxed before an attentive audience, the Welshman strayed well beyond what he should have revealed to civilians, adding details of his role in discovering the Macleods, researching them carefully before he had recommended them to his superiors in Bath. In part it was because their vessel was steel-hulled, stronger, built on the Clyde and because its skipper Donald John was experienced at fishing up around the Faroes and as far as Iceland, landing catches at Reykjavik and Stavanger. Importantly, father and son were deemed to look like Norsemen. Should they be captured, their Gaelic sounded like Faroese, according to his source who had interviewed them in Greenock before the appointment was finalised. The deciding factor was Roddy's good English.

The mention of Roddy was greeted by silence. Janine looked away to the shore but out of the corner of her eye, she saw the others glance towards her as Martha held a finger to her lips, mouthing something to The Commander.

The moment passed, Rhys changing the subject and talking about migrant birds with Henry, 'sipping' at his pipe and making jokes with the older couple.

Enjoying the burble of his warm Welsh lilt, Janine watched him carefully, keeping silent, able to observe him closely, pouting a quick smiled kiss to him when he glanced at her, reliving their night of passion in tiny flashbacks.

Without any firm reason to believe how or why, a certainty was planted in her mind:

Rhys would return to her again and again in the weeks ahead.

The late afternoon sunshine began to cool as the solar disc sank to the horizon in a blaze of reds and purples. It was like a scene from a film about homesteaders in the wild west of America, Janine thought. In a brief poignant moment, she closed her eyes and imagined Rhys as a younger version of her father, come back to visit her again. Continuing her reverie, Janine began to scheme. The girls had settled to become sound sleepers, exhausted by playing with Balach and the hens, learning to collect eggs and from long toddle walks on the beach, collecting coloured pebbles, shells of dead crabs and seabird feathers.

She tempted herself with the outrageous thought:

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Would he welcome me if I slipped over the hill and called on him for an hour or two after dark? The girls would be safe and sound. I would lock them in, as if they were Granny MacInnes, maybe put Balach in with them for company, stop him yowling when I left. It could work.

She was brought back from her daydream by his words, addressed to her, in a formal voice:

"Mrs Macleod, I have written to the Paymaster General on your behalf, stating forcefully that in my view your 'marital allowance' should be reinstated at once. So far they have sent only holding letters in response, the usual bureaucratic run around clearly in progress. Meanwhile, I have taken it upon myself to make good the monies due to you from the cash float at my office in Lochmaddy."

At this point he produced a thick brown paper wages packet which he rose and presented to her with a small bow. He then fished inside his greatcoat and produced six packets of tea, three bags of sugar, a tin of condensed milk and a tin of treacle.

"As I think is common knowledge, my colleagues in Greenock have gained the impression I have a much larger complement under my command here on North Uist than just the three of us. I personally consider these items are no more than you are due, Mrs Macleod, and a small compensation for your recent deprivation of monies clearly due."

As he shrugged into his coat and put on his helmet and goggles he added:

"I have also initiated enquiries regarding compensation for the loss of the Macleod boat but I sense that issue will be a long struggle. Nonetheless, one must fight the good fight. This short afternoon visit with you has been a wonderfully relaxing interlude. Henry and Martha permit me to say, it has been a rare pleasure to converse with folks who have had full and active lives and are still yet full of hope despite the deprivations and shocks of this despicable War. And you, Mrs Macleod, although you are so young, you have had to face great tragedy and have done so with resolve and cheerfulness while shouldering the burden of caring so lovingly for your two beautiful girls who are clearly thriving and full of health. The evidence of how you live at peace with yourselves in this wild, free place shines out in your quiet resolve to make the best of everything. My thanks to you all. Now, more than enough has been said and so I'll be off and leave you to your tasks as I return to mine."

Astride his motorbike and out of hearing of Henry and Martha, in a quieter voice:

"Yes, Janine, you are fortunate indeed to have such good and wise friends in Henry and Martha. Perhaps, over the months to come, you will come to count me too as a friend."

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Outcast

Since arriving on North Uist in the Spring of 1940, Janine had gradually become inured to her confined life on the remotest part of the island. By the late autumn of 1943, she was well established in her annual work cycle. This comprised periods of gentle calm when she had as much time as she needed to enjoy her girls, complete her domestic tasks tend her hens and Bella and visit the MacPhails to take them their share of the old cow's diminishing supply of milk. In the season, there were also intermittent bouts of hard physical labour such as cutting and hefting peats for herself and the MacPhails; dragging and barrowing seaweed to Henry's vegetable lazy beds; scything hay from the hillside for Bella's winter feed for the times when the cow must be confined in the outbuilding during periods of wild weather.

Because of Henry's knees, Janine was also cast in the role of principal shepherd, checking on their combined flock on a regular basis, particularly during lambing. In early summer, she had the task of driving them up onto the moor and keeping them there in order preserve the machair grass for winter feed and to deter them from marauding Henry's vegetable patch. This rough walking had helped get her shape back after the birth of her girls and her round of daily toil had kept her fit and strong.

Since her evacuation to North Uist, Janine Macleod nee Robinson knew she was resented as an 'incomer', a Sassenach, a dislike compounded by her marriage to a Lewis man. Because of the remote location of the MacInnes croft, she had been unable to form proper friendships with others her own age.

Working at the *Lochmaddy Hotel* she had been excluded from the social life of the community because of her posh English and nicer clothes. The Gaelic she had picked up had not been enough to follow the quick mumbled personal asides of her co-workers. To her Glasgow ear, their louder exchanges with many voices barking at each other for attention, had made these debates sound aggressive, like full-blown arguments.

Now, as a married woman with two small children she had, in theory, a new status in the community. On her weekly visits to Lochmaddy the locals although polite enough, always referred to her as *Mistress Macleod* with its implied slur before continuing in Gaelic, reinforcing her status as an outcast. When she asked them to speak in English, they deliberately ignored her.

Like the older women, most of the other young mothers also avoided her, even those she knew they often had slow English accented by their local drawl. Conversing with those willing to meet her eye, she was reliant on the MacPhails to translate three-way

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exchanges. With no shared history, these conversations were short and stilted, frustrating.

Those of her own age who had better English, mainly the younger males, had mostly left the island for War Service, the majority going to the Merchant Marine or to jobs in reserved occupations on the Mainland, the girls to nursing and munitions factories.

Even Catherine MacLennan now seemed distant. Martha explained; Catherine had longed for children but the stork had failed her. The MacPhails no longer frequented the hotel thereby avoiding Beaky Fraser or Margo McAuley with the broad Kilsyth dialects and spiteful tongues.

For Janine, a naturally talkative and outgoing person, this was a huge frustration, increasing her feeling of isolation and rejection. What the young mother lacked was intellectual stimulation. As a result, she often drifted off into the world of her novels and magazines, usually with the old wireless playing in the background, whining in and out of the selected station.

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There was a further deliberate hurt she had learned about, almost by accident, one which she knew she could do nothing about.

On North Uist, all new babies born anywhere on the island were celebrated by all, as Martha had let slip. Normally a new arrival like Wee Moira would have attracted a stream of well-wishers bringing small gifts of hand-knitted baby clothes, shawls and blankets. This might also include bundles of cast offs, enough to see the new mother through her child's early years, especially since shop-bought clothes were hard to come by because of the War.

However, because of her background and reputation, Janine and her child were shunned. Weeks passed and no well-wishers called at either croft. On a trip to Sollas, Martha returned with a cardigan and a nursing shawl, beautifully hand-knitted by Martha's cousin Margo Ferguson. Because Wee Martha was a long child, the cardigan was too short and, after a decent spell, was ripped out and re-knitted into two sets of bonnets and mitts.

Sollas, five miles away to the north and east around the coast road was a closed world, inward looking, a small, strung-out linear village which looked north to the islands of Oronsay, Boreray and Berneray and beyond over the shallow isthmus of the Sound of Harris to its towering namesake's mountains. Janine had only visited Sollas once. It had been for a house ceilidh, during her first summer on North Uist. She had been the only teenager present and the event had been conducted entirely in Gaelic, with long interludes of dirgeful music sung *a cappella*, interspersed with prayers and soliloquies which to her ear sounded like angry sermons.

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Rhys Dewy-Davies was the only other educated person Janine could hope to speak English too, apart from the MacPhails, Dr Angus MacDonald and his daughter Miss Veronica at the library and the very deaf Miss Eilidh Ferguson at the Post Office.

From the time of her night of passion, her notion of him, re-enforced by his afternoon visit a month later, was that he was a 'perfect gentleman', a man who would, she convinced herself, rescue her from poverty and isolation.

At every turn, she obsessed on him, scheming grandiose plans for their married future together as man and wife, living in Oxford or Bath or wherever his career might take him after the War. It was in this ferment of emotion and longing she waited, expecting him at any moment, ever hoping that when he came, the MacPhails would not be around to spoil things.

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The Pact

It was a Thursday, a week to the day after his first return when The Commander called at the MacInnes croft for a third time.

Janine had longed for Rhys to come to her again, altering her routine to make sure she was ready for him, watching from the back window from around six o'clock each evening, hoping he would turn down her track. By five-thirty the girls had been fed, bathed, into their night clothes, tucked up and fast asleep in the box room, down for at least three or four hours, she hoped, now that they were on the cusp of sleeping through to dawn.

During that week of waiting, from six o'clock each evening was ready, wearing pyjamas over her newest bra and pants. She had her best green skirt and yellow blouse laid out on the bed, ready to slip on. With her share of her back pay, she had been to Lochmaddy and by sheer luck had been able to source nice shampoo and a selection of cosmetics and a new, dark red lipstick enabling her to wash and brush her hair to a high shine and make her face 'perfect'. She had a new perfume as well, 'Citrus Nights', 'an alluring, zesty blend mix of lime and lemon', according to the label.

Each time he sailed past the end of her track without turning, her mood had swung from certainty to doubt but she clung to his slightly pompous and stilted words, repeating them to herself:

"Perhaps, over the months to come, you will come to count me too as a friend."

There had been a shine in his eye, a gleam of desire which had sent ripples of delight through her. As each day dragged from dawn until dusk, she drifted away from a rational assessment of her situation, believing her fantasy would soon turn to a perfect reality, as if by magic.

When she saw the flicker of his shuttered headlight approach through the gloom, she brushed her teeth, checked on the girls, pulled the box room door closed and quickly changed. As an afterthought, she tuned the radio to dance music, keeping it low. Humming along, zinging with anticipation, she was determined to remain calm, in control.

When she heard him rev the engine prior to shutting it down, she warmed the teapot with hot water. The table was already laid with teacups and side plates and cutlery on the table with a plate of fruit scones under a bowl, a gift from Martha who had called earlier.

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Rhys knocked the door and she almost called out to say it was unlocked but remembered about the girls and so skipped across and hauled it open.

"Shush, please, the girls are asleep."

He smiled, his eyes full of longing. She leaned into him, raising her lips to be kissed.

With the outer door closed and barred, they undressed each other and moved to the bed to enjoy a slow and gentle coupling. For Janine, it was her best ever orgasm, perhaps because she was near to her period or because this time she had longed so deeply for this reassurance of his love.

Lying side by side, she watched as he removed the Johnny and tied it off, holding it up, smiling:

"Safety first, pleasure second. Do you have a damp cloth and towel I might use, please?"

Giggling, she slipped out of bed naked and returned to exchange these items for the condom, holding it at arm's length between thumb and index finger to place it theatrically on the peats before returning to cuddle under the covers, placing her head on his chest, inhaling the wonderful musky, sweaty smell of him.

"Janine, was it as good for you as it was for me?"

"Yes, wonderful. But Rhys, why did you stay away so long? I've wanted you to come back so much. So, so much. It was like a horrible toothache but in my heart. Please promise you won't ever stay away again."

"But I did want to come, honestly. I've hardly been able to concentrate since that night. Everywhere I look I see you moving towards me, haunting me, teasing me with your smile. I felt so guilty taking advantage of you. It was quite wrong of me. I was afraid to come back in case you might send me away."

"Rhys, you mustn't blame yourself, please. When you held me and sang to me, it was as if all my best dreams were coming true. Rhys, I love you, you must know that, surely? What happened with Roddy was a mistake, a huge mistake. He was a brute. I don't want ever to talk about the horrible things he did to me. I only want to be with you, forever and ever."

"Janine, are you sure about this? I'm not free to marry you, not yet anyway and, technically, we can't be sure your husband is dead. He might be a POW."

"But Uncle Henry said if they caught him, they would shoot him as a spy. Wouldn't they?"

"Maybe not. Indeed, I hope he and his father are alive and well. If not, I will have to carry their deaths as a burden for the rest of my life. I got them into this whole mess and now, here I am compounding the whole debacle by coming here, committing adultery with the man's wife. This is wrong, Janine, quite wrong."

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"Rhys, stop. Stop! Forget about Roddy. Think only of me, the woman he abused not that selfish brute. Please Rhys, we must go on meeting. Without you I will shrivel and die. Please don't threaten to leave me alone for so long again. Now we have found each other, we must not let our love slip away. We must nurture it, enjoy it while we can. As Uncle Henry says, who knows what this War will bring, how it will end."

"I know, I know. I do want you Janine, honestly I do. It's just, well, so *conflicting*. Anyway, until you are free of your Roddy and I am free of my Petra, we cannot give the girls the respectability they deserve."

"*Respectability!* Respectability is not high on my list of priorities, Rhys. You must have heard the horrible lies they tell about me in Lochmaddy! I'll never be accepted here. I want to get away from this dreadful place as soon as ever I can. I hate it here. I never wanted any of this. When my parents sent me here it was supposed to be for only a few months. Rhys, please, *please* promise me you will never, ever mention that brute again in this croft. And please, don't say your wife's name again. It makes me feel horrible to think she might claim you back from me when the War is over."

"Yes, sorry, my beautiful girl. Yes, I promise, no more names. Just us, from now on. But if we are to go on, we must be very, very careful. If our relationship is discovered it will affect you worse than me. The woman is always blamed more than the man, in such situations. Now, listen, please. I have a request to make. Or should I say, a suggestion. I think when you visit Lochmaddy, it would be best if you stopped calling at my office. It just stirs things up. Every time you visit me, it fuels gossip, as you know."

"Only if you promise in return to come to me here as often as you can?"

"Yes, of course. Yes, but duty must come first, always. But yes, my dear girl, I'll come as often as I can, so long as it doesn't put us at risk of discovery."

"Rhys, please don't be so, so, **logical!** You sound so cold, so calculating. Say you love me and tell me you will come as often as you can. I'm stuck out here all alone and I *need* you."

She sobbed, tears escaping, wetting his chest:

"Without you, I would die!"

"Now, now, calm down. Yes of course my girl, we will go on, if you're sure it's what you really want?"

"Oh Rhys, there you go again! Are **you** not sure you want us to go on meeting?"

"Yes, my darling, darling girl, yes. I've never wanted anyone more. You are a perfect angel."

She lifted her head back and they kissed:

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"Oh, I'm an angel?"

She slid her hand down and fondled him, tugging and cajoling him to full arousal, forcing his manhood from its foreskin snood, circling his glans between her thumb and index finger, enjoying the sensation of power and control as it leapt under her attentions:

"So, angels do this for their lovers, to help them soar to higher places?"

She moved her hand to take the proffered condom, rolled it into place then moved her hand back to his chest, rounding his nipples:

"Rhys, Uncle Henry says you are writing a book about the birds of North Uist. He says you need someone to type up your hand-written manuscript. Let me do it, please."

"Are you sure? I'll provide paper, ribbons and things. I did have Macrae type up a chapter. It took him weeks and well, to be honest, he is a dreadful typist."

"Well, I am a very good typist, I assure you. Will you be using Latin names for these birds?"

"Yes, but I'll make sure I spell them out carefully for you."

"I was training to become a Medical Secretary so I took Latin at school, just for a year. Oh dear, school seems so long ago."

"Janine, you know what we are doing is wrong, don't you?"

"Rhys, my darling, darling prince, please don't start on that again, *please*."

She moved her hand down to his scrotum and cradled his testicles, tugging and squeezing.

"Come, darling. Let's wave your magic wand, make all our worries disappear."

"Yes, let tomorrow take care of itself."

"Rhys, can I be on top this time, *please*?"

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Going On

From that night in November 1943, a routine of sorts was established for the dark winter months which followed.

When Rhys came, mostly on Thursdays, he brought her weekly allowance in cash, in a brown envelope, an amount which he set at thirty shillings, roughly twice what she had received previously, money which he claimed was from his office petty cash float. This was a white lie; the payment was from his wallet. At each visit, he always brought her a few treats, such as tea, sugar, treacle and the occasional packet of sweets and more rarely a box of chocolates and once, a pair of nylons. Most weeks there would be another section of manuscript to type up in exchange for the pages she had produced.

On the other nights, lying alone listening to the wireless, hovering on the edge of sleep, she replayed the soaring ecstasy of his third visit, her favourite memory, interweaving what had happened on the night he had brought news that Roddy was lost, when she had seduced him.

Now, with so many more encounters and images of him naked to call upon, she began to spin new erotic threads into her ever-changing fantasies. Underlying these was the security of his condoms and the belief he would never spoil their romance with another pregnancy. They had vowed to each other that any children to him must be born in wedlock and, when they were free to marry, he would adopt the girls as his own, to secure their inheritance and good name.

Despite these assurances, repeatedly she was visited by doubts about what would happen when the War was over. She knew the wireless broadcasts were laced with morale-boosting propaganda and differed sharply from Henry MacPhail's less optimistic 'status reports'; these less assuring pronouncements, which he updated most weeks, were based on 'firm facts', he claimed not Churchill's political hogwash. However, the general overview was, despite recurring setbacks, the conflict was slowly moving in favour of the Allies now the Americans were involved in Europe in huge numbers.

Her firmest anchor when doubt surged was Rhys's earnest whisper from the October afternoon of his first return:

"Yes, Janine, you are fortunate indeed to have such good and wise friends in Henry and Martha. Perhaps, over the months to come, you will come to count me too as a friend."

As she went about her duties on the croft, to reassure herself, she spoke aloud to the girls and Balach:

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"Rhys wants me just as much as I want him. I know he wants me. He's right to be cautious, of course he is. If word got out about us, Uncle Henry would put a stop to everything. Anyway, we don't have too long to wait. It will work out fine. Perhaps she will have found someone else too. If he's even alive., surely Roddy will never dare to come back here, not after what he did. But if he does, we can be sure that Uncle Henry will 'deal' with him."

Another lesser anchor was his need of a typist for his writing hobby. The chapters of his book and regular shorter essays were typed up and returned to him promptly. When each page was typed she scrutinised her work word by word, line by line, re-typing the page if required to achieve a clean master and two carbons without any spotting by correcting fluid. On receipt, Rhys always checked her work, reading and re-reading it slowly, checking it against his original, tiny, scrawl, making her nervous. So far, she had maintained a one hundred percent record for accuracy. Sometimes the articles sent off to the Mainland were accepted or sometimes returned marked up for edits and re-worked, to be sent off again. Apart from her paranoia over the typing accuracy, she enjoyed the process and gradually picked up details of the birds and shore life she had previously missed.

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After his third visit, Janine had decided to be open with Henry and Martha about her typing work for him, a necessary revelation to explain the 'marital allowance' payments he brought. She had kept her face 'neutral', she hoped. She was 'helping as a friend', adding casually that the copy/transcription work from his original was 'easy', which it was not, while claiming it was 'a welcome distraction', which it was, insisting 'it is good to keep my fingers nimble, keep my skills honed'.

Whenever they raised the subject of his visits, she felt herself becoming tense, taking extra care with her words, watching their eyes, listening carefully to what they said, seeing and hearing only 'approval' in their smiles and words, relieved they seemed satisfied the relationship was platonic. However, she was much happier and more relaxed when the conversation swung passed Rhys to other matters.

Occasionally, to support her story and distract them, she showed Henry her personal carbons of Rhys's work which he read with great interest.

As an unexpected Christmas gift, Rhys provided her with a 'buckshee' pair of powerful Naval binoculars, an older pair his father had given him while he was still a schoolboy. From time to time she joined Henry on his painstakingly slow wildlife walks while Martha stayed behind and played with the girls.

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Each Thursday evening at the expected time she was ready, watching from her back window. When he did not come she would retire to bed with the wireless and a book, listening desperately for his motorbike to arrive, hating the wind which would whip the sound away.

As the days passed and Thursdays approached, she became distracted, obsessed by the wonderful secret they shared. As she replayed it to herself, their encounters seemed to take on a heady fairy-tale quality and she could feel herself slipping away again from reality.

On one occasion three weeks had dragged passed and yet still Rhys did not come. To add to her loneliness, the MacPhails' Austin was out of action. A part had been ordered from the Mainland but was proving difficult to source.

There was almost no news from Lochmaddy, only what Jimmy Corbett and Andy Macrae imparted to Henry when one or other occasionally called in on their rounds of the coast road, 'checking coastal defences'. This intermittent routine involved stopping at key points to scan the sea with their binoculars and calling at selected crofts to ask if any enemy ships had been sighted.

After the first Thursday without him, the days crawled by. Janine watched for his motorbike passing in the distance but did not spot it. Had he changed his routine? Why? She considered asking the MacPhails for news of him but did not dare, in case she might reveal her secret.

As each evening approached, she began to hope, putting the girls to bed even earlier, telling them made-up stories and singing softly to get them over to sleep. With the box room door closed, she would tune the radio to find music, strip wash, tidy herself, brush out her hair, tie it back with a bow to expose her neck and ears, apply make-up, check she was perfect, brush her teeth and wait, naked inside her pyjamas, peering through the back window but conserving her diminishing supply of perfume in case he did not come.

Later, disappointed, lying under the covers, the wind moaning outside, she would conjure him to come to her, pleasuring herself slowly with Helena's dildo. However, when she eventually raised the final thrill, it was unsatisfactory, tinged with sadness.

In the aftermath and before sleep she rehearsed versions of what she would tell him when he came back to her:

"Rhys, my darling prince, never stay away like that again. I began to imagine you had been moved away to the Mainland. Please, please, Rhys, never leave me in limbo again. If you do, I may not be here for you when you return."

If he resisted, refused to promise, she would say:

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"Rhys, please. You must, must, must see I cannot bear to live without you. If you stay away, I will shrivel and die, I know I will. You must promise. You must."

Yet still Rhys did not come and new possibilities rose in her mind.

Perhaps there was someone else in his life, one of the other 'War Widows' Martha had hinted at, someone more interesting, a woman not burdened by two small children. In this frame of mind, she contemplated a horrible reality in which Commander Rhys Dewy-Davies had finally given up on her to protect his reputation while it was still intact and he had cast her aside to assuage his guilt because she was a danger to his position and authority as the resident Naval officer in charge of the security of North Uist.

In this frame of mind, she was certain she had lost him and she spiralled down to the brink of the depression which had gripped her after her parents and Granny MacInnes died.

When Rhys returned at last, he explained he had been suffering from a heavy cold and did not want to inflict it on her and the girls.

The dull cloud of doubt and loneliness lifted, her fragility evaporated and her pendulum swung from despair to happiness.

Over the months to follow, they settled to a version of domesticity and love-making which satisfied them both, going on to discover secrets, sharing desires and hopes, binding themselves together, satisfying their separate needs.

Dead of Night

Birthday Surprise

Janine's nineteenth birthday on Friday 24 December 1944 had passed without celebration. She had waited for Rhys until eight o'clock before accepting he was not coming. Both girls had bad colds and were hard to settle. Henry and Martha had caught the virus from the children and it had gone to their stomachs, confining them indoors. The people in Lochmaddy were worst hit; everyone blamed the military personnel for spreading the virus from the Mainland. Perhaps Rhys had caught it too.

Two days later he had still not visited, making it over two weeks since his previous visit. Lonely for adult company, she had allowed her mind to wander to the edge of pessimism and the dark ache of depression was looming. The weather was atrocious; she had been soaked through each time she ventured out to check on Bella or to collect eggs. She was shivery, suspecting she might have caught the infection she had resisted for so long. Normally the croft was neat and tidy, sparkling clean but with clothes draped over her clothes horse and kitchen chairs it was untidy, increasing her edginess.

Bella's mastitis had flared again as the old cow neared her two-month dry period. Janine had been washing her udders three times a day with a pungent herbal disinfectant concoction Martha had given her, trying to ease the poor beast's discomfort. Martha had assured her Bella's milk was safe to use provided it was boiled first.

Her aunt had not encouraged Janine to practice breastfeeding beyond a year but Janine defied her advice justifying this to herself by Bella's dryness. Although Martha-Rose was fifteen months and even though there was little milk from either nipple, Janine had continued feeding her knowing that Rhys enjoyed her production too. Despite the occasional nip from her daughter's teeth, Janine enjoyed the comfort from this suckling, especially when she was in low spirits. However, it made Moira-Ann jealous and, after a token resistance, she often allowed the two-year-old to suckle at her other breast.

Eventually, after a long struggle she settled the girls in the new small bed Henry had made for them, a sort of double cot made from a wide, deep drawer salvaged from an old wardrobe. Some nights, after Rhys had left to go on duty at the radio station, if the girls wakened, she would take them to her bed and enjoy their closeness, a practice Martha MacPhail strongly frowned upon.

To cheer herself on such lonely evenings, Janine would turn on the wireless, keeping it down, enjoying the strains of the improvised jazz number based on a clever intertwining of two Negro spirituals, *Go Down Moses* and *Wade in the Water*, both songs she sung in harmony with her father, her mother trying her best for them on the upright piano in

Dead of Night

the parlour with a good going coal fire filling the room with warmth and light. Helena has been an accomplished pianist, gaining all her certificates. Janine had struggled on piano but had the sweeter voice, she has been told. She knew her father would have considered a jazz version of these sacred songs to be in poor taste, perhaps even blasphemous.

Using the last of her fresh tea leaves, she infused a full pot of tea. She was out of sugar and this turned her thoughts again to Rhys and the afternoon in the sun over a year earlier when their affair had taken root. As it often did when she was especially lonely, her mind swung back to the fallow period after the night she had seduced when he came to tell her Roddy was missing in action. During those weeks of waiting her mind had been in turmoil swinging from desire to despair. Even now the thought of him sitting along the corridor in his Lochmaddy office while Andy Macrae fended her off with stupid, badly typed notes rankled, an old sore, like a ragged tooth that the tongue could not resist.

While the tea was infusing, she stripped naked, crouched to pee in her potty then sponged herself, washing her hands and arms twice in fresh soapy water to rid herself of the vinegary 'taste' of Bella's disinfectant.

On impulse, to cheer herself, she dabbed her chest, nipples and 'bush' with spots of perfume from a tiny, nearly empty bottle Aunt Martha had given as a gift on her previous birthday, a bottle her aunt had confessed she had received as a Christmas gift from Henry decades earlier.

Dressed in her pyjamas and curled in her chair with a book she was re-reading for the third time, she tried to shut out the whine of the rising wind by turning up the volume of the wireless. After a little while she began to feel drowsy and thought of moving to her bed but was startled to full alertness by a sharp knock at the kitchen window immediately followed by gust of damp, cold air and a howl from the chimney flue. Afraid Roddy had returned, she whipped round to see Rhys framed in the doorway, his greatcoat dripping, his face beaming out from under his helmet, a large canvas satchel draped across his shoulder.

"Happy Birthday, my angel!"

"Oh Rhys! You scared me half to death. Thank goodness it's you. I thought for a minute it must be. . . . Never mind. Oh! Look at you, you're soaked through. Let me help you out of those wet clothes."

He started to sing loudly in Welsh and she leapt forward to place a finger on his lips, explaining about the girls. Close too, she could taste him; the sweet, smoky breath from his pipe mixed with spicy aftershave. She offered her lips and he pecked, then crushed down on her, pulling her to him and she was at once soaked through to the skin.

Both knew there was no turning back, this is what they wanted, what they needed.

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She stepped back to give him a clear view and shrugged out her wet pyjamas, happy to feel the heat of his gaze on her to which she responded, her eyes laughing. Filled with desire, she threw off her shabby knickers and stained nursing bra, curtseyed boldly, holding his eyes wantonly while moving close again, to help him out of his coat, waterproofs and boots, tugging at his clothes, undressing him quickly until he too was naked, his manhood throbbing with desire.

"Oh Janine, you are the sweetest, most beautiful girl in the world."

She watched as he reached down for his uniform jacket, fumbled for the ticket pocket and found a rubber. It was the new American kind, a *Durex*, the make which had been discussed hotly with the other girls during her time at Skerry's when it had been said it was so thin it was like full, natural sex. Rhys used his teeth to open the packet and, in accordance with their agreed *modus operandi*, she moved closer to roll it on.

"There we are Commander; you are one hundred per cent safe and our Marine Sergeant is ready for action."

"Yes, safe, just as we must be, at least for now. Yes, so be it. But soon, I hope, we will be free to make a little brother for our girls."

Pushing away, she stood and eyed him up and down, searching his eyes to be certain he was speaking from his heart. Catching a glimpse of sadness, she softened, changed her focus, searing his naked image onto her memory. The condom material was translucent, almost transparent. The words came back from a novel inherited as part of Helena's library, a steamy romance discovered after she left to join the Wrens.

Under her breath she let the words "fully engorged" play in her mouth, putting a wide smile on her lips, springing the thought:

Fully engorged Rhys's penis is both stouter and taller than Roddy's but also uncircumcised. Thankfully, Rhys is fastidious, unlike Roddy.

With that thought, her mind swung back further.

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Standing secretly in the lobby, outside the parlour door, she had heard Dr John Robinson pontificate to the MacPhails:

"Henry, I have written to the authorities putting my views to them yet again. Circumcision should be compulsory for every boy child. It is more particularly important for the working classes but the whole of society would benefit. The annulus beneath the foreskin is a breeding ground for a great many infections and a major cause of venereal diseases."

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Thinking of her father and his narrow views, her mind flashed back to her afternoon of shame.

She was thirteen, the summer before her fourteenth birthday. By this stage self-pleasuring was a familiar sin. Her period was due any day which always made her especially wet, slippery and needy.

It was the first week of the school holidays. She was alone, safe in the house until around five o'clock when her mother would return from the 'Wednesday Women's Meeting' at the Church.

Lying naked on her bed, the radiogram in the lounge playing Beethoven's Sixth, 'The Pastoral', she was floating on the edge of an orgasm, her eyes closed, Helena's copy of 'Illustrated Anatomy for Nurses (in Colour)' open at the double facing pages showing renderings of two penises, one 'flaccid', the other 'fully engorged'.

As it always did, this memory sequence brought a flood of guilt as she tried to shut out the anguish on her father's face when he had uncovered her guilt by finding her with her home-made comforter inserted.

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Janine sniffed back her tears and forced a smile, as puzzlement brought worry to Rhys's eyes:

"Oh, my darling girl, have I said something wrong? Tell me, what is it?"

"Rhys, when we have our son, I want him to be circumcised. My father was a strong advocate of circumcision."

"An Old testament Man. Yes, surely and why not, if that's what you want."

Cradled in his arms, their bodies intertwined, locked in an embrace, they kissed, mouths open, exploring tentatively. She moved her hands up to cup Rhys's face.

"Rhys, I love you so much. Yes, I want a boy too. May we call him John, please, after Daddy?"

"Yes, let's call him Gethin John, shall we? My father's second name was Ifan which is Welsh for John."

"Gethin John? All right but only if we call him John amongst ourselves. Yes?"

"John it will be. Come to bed now, no more talking."

Ahead of mounting him as she sat astride, high on her knees, his hands on her breasts, she added:

Dead of Night

"Rhys tell me, why have you stayed away so long? I was worried sick. I thought you had tired of me, found someone new?"

"Shush, now, my beautiful princess, don't torment yourself like this again, please. Yes, of course I want you! Who could not want you? But remember, Janine, please, duty comes first ahead of pleasure, which is as it must be."

"Rhys, the War is nearly over. What 'duty' was so, so important you could not come to me? I've been trapped here alone for nearly two weeks!"

"Look, if you must know, I had a visitor from Bath and no, before you ask, it was a very senior officer, a man I know well, a very shrewd man, the man who is responsible for organising the Murmansk convoys among many other things I cannot reveal. He's been conducting a full review and an inspection of the Hebrides and in particular an audit of my secure signal records files, a selection of which he has removed to Bath for further review by the Norway team. I have no idea what he was looking for but I suspect some sort of cover-up is in progress. Who knows? More to the point, who cares? But no matter, I'm here now."

"Ah, but is your Marine Sergeant still ready for action? He seems a little fatigued."

"Aaaah! Stop that, you minx, you'll spoil it all!"

Filled with urgent passion, their energetic lovemaking was over in minutes.

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As they lay side by side recovering, he said:

"Have a look in the satchel pockets. I hope you like your presents. It was the best I could do, what with restrictions. Yes, open both sides."

Still naked, she scrambled over him. Kneeling, she reached for the bulkier pouch and tugged hard on the heavy zip below the weathering flap. Inside was a well-oiled greatcoat. Holding it up in puzzlement she saw him smile at her frown and moue of disappointment.

Rhys was on his feet, tying off the used Johnny, wiping himself a damp cloth then wiping himself dry with a towel, sticking rigidly to their established hygiene protocol.

"No, that's an extra, an afterthought. Open the other side."

Giggling, she slipped it on. It smelled peculiar, like shoe polish but stronger, sharper. The coat was a smaller version of his own, to the same design, with an inner zip and an outer buttoned weather flap, the disposition of buttons confirming it was a male garment. It was slightly too large in the body and trailed almost to her ankles.

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"A practical gift. I found it in our stores. These greatcoats are used when on Bridge Watch in foul weather. Kept properly treated they are supposed to be fully watertight. This is a stores return item so it's not new, sorry. I got Jimmy Corbett to re-proof it. I thought it might help keep you dry when you go out and about to attend your animals. Now, check the pockets, I've put in two sou'westers, one black, one yellow, so you are all set for a storm! Now open the other satchel pocket, for your proper birthday gifts."

This satchel zip slid more easily and she eased out two separate packages. She would learn later he had ordered them from the mainland, from suppliers with whom the Nicholsons had found, after a struggle.

Inside the first, gift-wrapped in fancy paper and sealed with 'invisible' Sellotape she found a new dress, a summer floral pattern in a heavy linen weave, clearly an expensive quality item. Holding it against her naked self, she thought it also might be a size too large.

In the bulkier package, wrapped in thick, shiny brown paper tied with string, she found a heavy gaberdine raincoat with large patch pockets, also with zips and weather flaps and huge, broad lapels. It was a dark oatmeal colour and, from its style and fitting, it was very clearly a ladies' garment complete with a button-on, button-off hood and long, broad tie-strap.

"It's from Aberdeen but, as with the dress, the label has been removed. Sorry. It seems to be the way of it nowadays. My supplier claims the field coat is also supposed to be one hundred percent waterproof, as confirmed by the information and care label inside the right-hand pocket. I understand it is the same brand our Royals wear for field sports, shooting parties, gymkhanas, point-to-point and the like. Do you like your frock and coat?"

"Oh Rhys, it's wonderful. You are so kind and thoughtful. And I've been bitching at you for staying away. *Sorry!* Really, I don't deserve these. Thank you. But when will I ever get a chance to wear these? The coat is far too good to wear around the croft and if they found out in Lochmaddy I have a coat like this, tongues would flap, wouldn't they? If Martha sees the dress, she grind on an on until I let slip about us. I'll only get to wear it when I'm alone in here. *Oh no, silly me.* Yes, I see it now, it's for us! When we are alone together! Oh Rhys, thank you so much!"

She bounded across and kissed him long and hard.

"Of course, and that's why I searched our naval stores for the other one. The Royal coat is for our future life, when we are married but I thought you should have it now, like a sort of engagement present."

"Ah, yes. A secret for now, what a lovely idea. Thank you again."

"Now, check its pockets."

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In the first pocket, wrapped in red tissue paper, was a lingerie combination in pale lemon, comprising a hip length silk nightie, a plunge-line cupped bra and pair of frilly knickers. In the other pocket was a green velveteen box containing a tiny bottle of expensive French perfume with a name she did not recognise."

She slipped into the lingerie, dabbed perfume naughtily, put on her new dress, then her new coat and re-tuned the radio to a programme of dance music.

Closing her eyes, acting out her fantasy, she synchronised to the rhythm, swaying, beginning a slow strip tease ending in a final flourish by tossing her new knickers over her shoulder, wantonly, as the girl had done in another story.

She opened her eyes. Lying prone on the bed, Rhys was grinning, enjoying her performance. A fresh Durex lay displayed on her pillow. Placing a finger on his lips, she climbed astride him, rolled on the Johnny and lowered herself down onto him, morphing into the bold servant girl who had crept into the bed of the surprised widower.

This was a sequence from another story from Helena's secret library, this time from a large format anthology which had included a section with twelve erotic black and white studio full-page photographs, dramatically lit and described as 'artistic renderings', poses depicting a mature and strongly-muscled black man displaying himself assisted by a partly obscured, well-endowed young white girl standing behind him, her hands at work, eyes down, hooded, in shadow.

As she closed her eyes to concentrate on a slow rhythm, her mind whirled back again to the excruciating embarrassment which followed her father's discovery.

While the afternoon had been filled with tears and sobs, the evening which followed had been worse, excruciating.

They were in the parlour. Despite the warmth of the summer evening, the fire was blazing, the offending carrot in a condom wrapped in a newspaper on the hearth. With tears welling, her mother had risen from her father's side and, using the fire tongs, had dropped the package onto the flames where it caught at once to burn fiercely, disappearing in seconds, it had seemed:

*"Oh, Janine, my baby, when Daddy told me what you were doing to yourself, I could not take it in. My dear girl, even though your body has, well, 'sprouted', inside you are still only a child. Don't you realise you could do your womb irreparable harm, spoil everything. Why oh, why could you not be more like Helena, more dedicated to the Lord. Tell me, Janine, why have you always, **always** been so wayward, so headstrong, so naughty? Dearest, you must look to the Bible. Does not God's Holy Word make it abundantly clear that only within marriage may such pleasures be legitimately enjoyed.*

Dead of Night

"Janine, look at me, will you please. All else is sin! You must give me your personal promise now, this very instant that from this moment on you will 'Resist and Desist'. That must be your motto until you are wed. Now, Daddy, shall I play while we all sing our hymn."

"Yes, my dear. Thank you for your support. Now, please, my dear Janine, sip that ginger cordial and compose yourself. Now, is it not just amazingly appropriate that our hymn of the day is 'Yield not to temptation'. Are we ready, Moira? Take your time, dear. We shall sing it through three times over to embed its words and afterwards we shall kneel together and pray for Janine. I keep thinking, if only Helena were here tonight, she would have dealt with this on your behalf, Moira."

"Now, Janine, stop staring out the window and pay attention. Stand up straight, please. Can't you see this is too much for your mother's nerves. Never again. No more of this sinful, self-indulgence. Never again. Ever. Let us offer Praise in the singing of our hymn. This we ask in Jesus' Name. Amen."

After that fateful afternoon and evening, Janine had learned to become more careful in her self-ministrations, always locking her bedroom door when she visited Helena's library shoeboxes, well-hidden at the bottom of a trunk filled with old toys and play clothes from her childhood, a trunk she kept locked, the key tied to a cup-hook, high in a dark corner, inside her wardrobe.

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Returning from her reverie and putting her guilt away, she focused on the present, opened her eyes and smiled down at him.

Soon she was moaning softly as Rhys caressed and teased her nipples, still slippery with glycerine applied after the girls had suckled themselves to sleep earlier.

Later, as they recovered from a third longer, slower encounter, Rhys explained in honour of her birthday he had arranged with Corbett and Macrae to swap this night for a day turn, claiming had been advised to await a specially coded transmission at noon the following day.

Wrapped separately in the pockets of his own great coat, he had brought fresh supplies of tea, sugar, corned beef, condensed milk and treacle. He also had a tin of sweetened evaporated milk and a large can of diced mixed fruit with an American label. They opened both to eat as an interlude snack before settling to a further coupling.

During their foreplay, a word she loved, she questioned Rhys into revealing her presents had been procured by 'special means'. After badgering and tickling, he confessed they had come through the Nicholson brothers, as she had already guessed, items he had told them he needed to send to Oxford as birthday gifts to his wife.

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Becoming serious, Rhys sternly swore her to secrecy about the Nicholsons. She decided not to burst his bubble: from Martha she was aware the Nicholsons and Corbett and Macrae were running a black market from Lochmaddy, an enterprise which was believed to operate all the way down The Minches, from Barra in the south and up to Stornoway in the north, linking with other black marketeers involved in the same trade. Martha in turn had asked her not to discuss this in front of Henry who was very against such nefarious activities.

Throughout the duration of the War and beyond as rationing and shortages continued, in the Hebrides as on the Mainland, if you had money or something to trade, you could get most things you needed or wanted, provided you were patient and discrete.

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As their special night unfolded, they made love time and again, changing positions and experimenting, discovering each other's bodies.

For Janine it was a fantasy come true, a fairy-tale of entrancing sequences from Helena's novellas, and so different from the ugly, brutal sex she had been subjected to by Roddy.

For Rhys, it was a revisiting of his student days and his early years as a young Oxford Don when a supply of Johnnys and a knurl of hashish resin or a handful of potent weed was the entry fee to delicious, all-night masquerade sex parties.

While resting, and without prompting or mentioning Petra by name, Rhys revealed how he became involved, married in a whirlwind and finally estranged. His wife, a top scientist, was Norwegian. They had met at a signals' training course in Bath in 1939, during the 'phoney war' period. Two months into their marriage, she had been sent to London where she met someone new, a Rear-Admiral in the 'real' Royal Navy. Only then did Rhys discover that all along, his wife had been a senior member of the Norwegian Resistance and worked as an adviser for the War Office.

When Rhys realised how much he had revealed to Janine, he became agitated, demanding from Janine her oath of secrecy, which she playfully SWALK-ed on the tip of a fresh Johnny. Giggling, she had had to explain the meaning of the letters - 'Sealed With A Loving Kiss'.

At six o'clock, wakened by her alarm, they were roused to enjoy a slow final coupling ending in an energetic final gallop to the finishing tape after which Rhys rose, all business and left her to the girls who were now awake, hungry and demanding attention.

Later, she puzzled over his parting words which had been delivered with an odd stiffness, desperately wondering if she had detected sadness or perhaps a fatal resignation in them:

Dead of Night

"Of course, my darling girl, I'll come to you whenever I can, but remember always we must be circumspect. Keep your special birthday presents secret for now, please. Do not judge me harshly nor too kindly either. Please, you must accept that I am a mere man and not a saint just as you are not an angel. As before, we must proceed step by careful step."

Dressed in her new lingerie, she had offered her lips for a parting kiss. Then, with the door closed, she waited while the low growl of his engine settled to a steady burble. When he rode off she watched from the back window as he skidded up the track into the gloom and driving rain of another wet morning.

It was the first night they had spent together, coupling again and again, even after his supply of condoms had been exhausted.

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With the girls fed and dressed, she thought of Bella. Changed into her old work clothes, she pulled on her new greatcoat and raced barefooted through the downpour to the outhouse. There was no milk but at least the udders were less inflamed, the mastitis receding. She removed the bucket of yesterday's meagre milk yield and placed it on the lee side of the outbuilding. Later, when the storm passed, she would cast it into the sea and rinse the bucket and scour it with sand.

The year to come might be Bella's last as a milker. It was becoming certain they would have to find a younger cow to her. If so, it would be down to the MacPhails to fund it. The cost of a replacement milker was beyond her small saved hoard of notes and coins.

Back indoors she strip-washed then changed back into her pyjamas, made a half pot of tea and sat up in bed with the girls who were playing hide and seek under the covers, sipping sweet black tea and thinking over the events of the long night just passed. Although drowsy and half asleep, the remnants of passion held her awake for what seemed like hours.

When would he risk coming again?

Dead of Night

Clandestine Love

After his birthday visit, as Janine waited for him to come again, her passion smouldered, often flaring, sending ripples of delight and frustration through her body, feelings fanned by her daydreams and night pleasuring. When stung by pangs of guilt, she justified herself by telling herself they were both, in effect, free agents and, by his own words, *engaged*.

In the hazy notion of her future she now expected to live in luxury, hopefully higher than the standards she had enjoyed with her parents before the War; not grubbing a living from a strip of machair land on the very edge of Europe, a peasant with an outside privy who must boil rainwater for cooking and personal hygiene, water collected in run-off butts from the roofs of her croft and outbuilding. Worse still, in dry weather she had to pump it by an ancient hand-operated stirrup pump from the wee lochan halfway up the hill to the radio station.

Rhys had money, he had told her, inherited from his spinster aunt, the only daughter of a rich coal owner. Aunt Bethany had paid for his expensive education at Winchester then Oxford and had set up the 'Bethany Blakey Trust'. He had said it was 'well-funded, enough for three lifetimes'. In the present he was in receipt of a generous annual annuity but the residue would not come to him until her death, likely to be a long way off as she was only sixty and in robust good health. Janine had longed to ask how much money there was but she held back, knowing this crassness might cause a gulf between them.

Rhys was from a different class and would never want to stay on North Uist after the War. Roddy had been right, Janine now admitted. Like Rhys, she was a townie and needed civilisation, bright lights, shops with nice clothes, nice shoes, dancing, cinema, theatre and musical recitals.

According to the wireless the Allies seemed to be winning the War, and when it was over and done with, she would take her girls and go with Rhys, make her escape from the MacPhails and their invasive, controlling behaviour.

Rhys would fund the legal paperwork to make her an official War Widow. Alternatively, if Roddy was alive as Rhys insisted was still possible, he would force the brute into a divorce, buy him off, if necessary. It was how people with money operated, commonplace among the upper middle class. She had never wanted to live on North Uist, with its harsh weather and the prying nosiness of its inhabitants who watched every move and despised her because she was better educated and spoke properly.

Dead of Night

During their recovery tete-a-tete conversations they had talked about future children. Rhys thought it would be nice to have at least one boy to balance their family, maybe two or more, if she was willing but only after the War.

Away from this place with Rhys, they would make a fresh start, have sons and live a perfect life. Dr Angus MacDonald had said many times that she was 'a good birther'.

Gethin John Robinson Dewy-Davies.

Yes, that had a good ring to it.

What about other names?

She had always liked Kenneth. And Douglas or maybe Dugal.

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After his birthday visit, a pattern emerged which would persist over the remainder of the War. Rhys would arrive on Thursdays, often around seven o'clock, stopping by on his way to the radio station to deliver her weekly marital allowance. There was also their cover story: she was his copy typist, transcribing articles for nature magazines.

In this remote corner of the island, the roads in the evening were almost always clear of any kind of traffic, even on lighter summer nights when the sun hardly set. In any case, the track to her croft was mostly hidden by a fold in the sloping machair and he always concealed his motorbike behind her outbuilding, under sacking. If the MacPhails were aware of their affair, they said nothing and never called when he was with her, her door barred and shutters drawn.

As the weeks rolled into months they relaxed into their romance, creating their own domestic arrangements, establishing what Janine saw as an equal, loving partnership of the kind she read about in her romantic novels.

There was never any news of *The Stormy Petrel* and soon they dropped the topic.

Occasionally Rhys would miss a visit if he knew she was under the curse but would show up the next week. Sometimes he might catch her out by coming a day or two early.

On one occasion he came two days in a row, adding a Friday after his normal Thursday visit.

It had been near midnight. She was fast asleep. He had freewheeled his motorbike down the track. Entering quietly, he had undressed to slip under the covers, waking her when his cold feet touched her legs. All she could get out of him was he had been lonely and was 'worn out by the demands of problem signals from Bath'. Before they could make love, he had fallen asleep in her arms.

Dead of Night

A few hours later he wakened with a start, full of desire. They had coupled slowly twice with her on top, her preferred configuration. He was gone by five o'clock and she was alone again but pleased he had turned to her for comfort even though he refused to explain his problem further, claiming military secrecy, keeping all details from her.

Whatever it was, she was not the problem and that was all that mattered to her.

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The coded message Dewy-Davies had received the previous night had informed that both MacLeods, father and son had somehow, no details, been rescued by the Norwegian Resistance and were holed up in the mountains in a safe house, part of a larger group of British agents sitting out the War. Plans were being formulated to bring them back to the UK a.s.a.p. for urgent debriefings. Agent Cormorant (Petra) was missing and had not been heard of for many months.

The memory lingered of the night he learned she had been seconded to London.

Petra had always been guarded about her age. Rhys thought she was probably in her mid-thirties when they met. After their marriage, he had raised the idea of starting a family after the War but she had reacted negatively:

"Rhys, no children. Not again! How many times do I say I am no *husmor*, how you say *housewife-kind*. Surely this is most plain for you? No, Rhys, I say you again, no. I have many great things to achieve that children would *hindre*, do you say *scupper-ing* in English? No children, Rhys, never of me. Maybe I have choosened a wrong husband?"

If she was dead there could never be a possible reconciliation. The news stirred up his emotions, flashes of the stunning, vivacious, brilliant Viking woman who has bowled him over when they met. They had married within a month of meeting. For Rhys, it seemed impossible her bright flame had been snuffed and the news had unnerved him, bringing the reality of War closer, making him feel vulnerable in a way he had not experienced before.

Raw, hurt and lonely beyond measure, he had deserted his night duty at the radio station, driving down to be with the teenage Janine, a loving, eager-to-please girl with her ready-made family of two children.

Skidding up the muddy path to the coast road and back to the radio station, he vowed never to weaken again. If he had further important but unacknowledged signals waiting, he might be court martialled.

Dead of Night

A Waiting Game

As Janine fully recovered from the birth of Martha-Rose, her desire for sex increased. It was a pattern which mirrored what had happened after Moira-Ann, leading her to welcome Roddy when he came calling.

At nineteen, she was filling out and the nicest clothes she had brought with her from Glasgow in the spring of 1940 were tight, making her look fat, she thought. Although Rhys's birthday dress now fitted well, she could not wear it to Lochmaddy. It was still hidden, secret from Aunt Martha, a present too difficult to explain. In any case, to wear it around the children would risk food and milk stains.

Taking an idea from a novella, she decided on a new approach.

On Thursdays, she made sure she was wearing her skimpiest blouses and shortest skirts, without a bra, no knickers. The 'freedom' was thrilling, deliciously erotic. She began to paint her nails again, fingers and toes, pampering herself with talc, especially her nipples and bush. She had preserved intact a pair of nylons Rhys had gifted her and wore these with a lavender coloured suspender belt which had been Helena's. With hormones flooding her body and warping her mind, she was writing her own fantasies: she wanted to be a vamp, a temptress and worse, a tramp; the croft was her bordello, her den of sex and satisfaction, Rhys her secret sugar daddy.

On these nights, with her girls in bed early, asleep in the box bedroom by half past five, she made extra sure her hair and make-up were perfect. If she was 'stood up', she would compensate by changing into her birthday lingerie, playing dance music at its lowest volume, swirling around the kitchen table, being held and led expertly by an imaginary Rhys as Fred Astaire in full top hat and tails to herself as Ginger Rogers in *Carefree*. This was a film she had seen six times, even playing truant from school to watch one afternoon matinee, sitting high in the upper circle in a nearly empty cinema while guzzling eight ounces of sherbet lemons, making herself feel queasy, an excuse she had used days later when her absence was reported in a letter posted to her parents.

On the occasions when she persuaded Rhys to dance with her, she judged him to be excellent, accomplished, suave and debonair. Although he said he always enjoyed dancing, he usually avoided it because the twisting and turning caused a swelling in his left ankle, making toe-flip gear changing on the motorbike a painful challenge. The ankle problem stemmed from a compound greenstick fractures incurred playing rugby in his teenage years, an injury which had prematurely ended his career.

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In her new, emancipated and urgent desire for safe sex, frustratingly, Rhys seemed to become more difficult, slow to respond to lewd remarks and touches. Despite her pleas, he was unwilling to risk another full night of passion as on her birthday visit. At best, with the door barred and the curtains pulled shut, their lovemaking felt hurried and furtive and frustrating with her making all the running. When she complained that he seemed distracted, he replied with his stock phrase:

"My dearest, darling girl we simply *must* take the greatest care. We both have so much to lose. You most of all, your reputation, the stigma which would attach to our girls. For my part, they might overlook my role as adulterer but it would affect me too. My reputation would be diminished by gossip. I would lose my authority to command. You must agree, surely. This way is best. Step by careful step. After The Duration, we will move ahead together but not before."

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As the weeks rolled by, their routine was established and she would expect him on a Thursday, ready in full warpaint, in the role of a relaxed, sophisticated woman about to leave to meet her lover. With the girls abed, wearing her special birthday lingerie worn under her new floral dress, she would brush her teeth, check her make-up and hair, add a beauty spot, sometimes two. When she heard him rev the motorbike before shutting it down, she would slip into her Royal coat and grab her shoulder handbag. When Rhys entered, she would say:

"Oh, Commander, how nice of you to call but I'm sorry, I'm just about to leave for the evening. I'm meeting my fiancé. We're dining at the Ritz and then taking in a show. But do please make yourself at home. I'll attend to your needs when I return."

After a first coupling they would dance naked for a while then eat a light snack, perhaps poached eggs with cheese scones, which were his favourite. Occasionally they played draughts or card games while they chatted about the War and goings on at Lochmaddy, avidly checking his version of events against the information filtered to her by the MacPhails.

To prolong his stays, she would make a second pot of tea and offer him biscuits or iced buns, special treats from the very gifts he had bought to her, items made by Andy Macrae. When he brought extra sugar and condensed milk, she used it to make tablet for the girls, saving him a few squares for his next visit. If he brought a tin of treacle, she made him toffee balls.

From Bella, still managing to produce again after her dry spell, she always had milk enough for him and butter and cheese which Martha made. There was always plenty eggs on offer from her own hens, which he would take wrapped in a dishtowel and a surfeit of

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vegetables from Henry's 'Dig for Victory' plot. And, on occasion, she would kill an older hen and make him a special meal.

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On those few occasions when he arrived early or called on a different night, Rhys would sit in her chair by the fire and play with the children, singing nursery rhymes and making up stories to help get them over to sleep. He did not seem to mind that she was not ready for him and often said he liked her natural country girl look, harking back to the October afternoon when he had called and the MacPhails had been visiting, telling her it was on that afternoon he had decided she was the girl he wanted above all others.

Watching him with her girls, it was clear Rhys loved them and would make a good father. According to the wireless, the War was being won. Even Uncle Henry agreed now but Janine held back, resolved again to be patient and to stop badgering him into agreeing to her fantasy plans for their future life together on the Mainland.

For Janine, the best part of his visits was his hot gaze as she moved around wearing only her flimsy lemon lingerie outfit, feeling his eyes on her as she leaned across to add peats to the fire, revealing her bosom, flirting, catching him looking and smiling encouragement, nodding towards the bed, making a moue of ersatz disappointment when he shook his head to defer the pleasure as he drew on his pipe.

On these occasions it was his quiet, calibrated, self-assuredness while deliberately resisting her, she thought, attempting to quench her rising desire which she found infuriating. However, over time, she grew to appreciate this was what novella stories referred to as 'extended foreplay', and 'delayed gratification', settling to enjoy it with him, playing the waiting game, flaunting herself, provoking him, sometimes faking tantrums, watching him smile, playing her along.

Then, when he succumbed, the pleasure was as great as ever.

When it was time for him to leave, she would take the opportunity to fuss over him, touching him straightening his tie, starting her departure routine:

"Now then Commander Rhys Dewy-Davies, let us make sure you are ship-ship and Bristol fashion before you set out on your mission to save us from the Hun. No, this will not do, sir, your fly buttons are mis-aligned. We cannot have that! Never, Sir! Let me get you sorted."

Leaning back, she would proceed to unbutton, slipping her hand inside his underpants to caress him before slowly re-buttoning to send him away with an erection.

"Right, Marine Sergeant Dewy-Davies, stand at ease. Dismiss!"

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After a final embrace, he would be gone and she would be alone, listening wistfully to the receding roar as he gunned the heavy BSA-M34 up the slope, back to the coast road and his world of duty.

In this fashion, with a few ups and downs, the couple continued to meet most weeks from the late autumn of 1943, with their golden future on hold while the War rumbled to its conclusion.

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VE Day Celebrations

After the success of the D-Day landings in June 1944, the inevitability of a victory over the Germans and Italians was encouraged by the wireless news. When Victory in Europe was eventually announced on the 8th May 1945, preparations which had been in planning for months were announced including a huge ceilidh at Lochmaddy Hall.

Pompously and rather sanctimoniously, Janine thought, Henry declared they had made alternative plans to celebrate quietly and reverently with the community at Sollas, joining with Margo and her neighbours in a simple house service of worship and thanksgiving. This was to be held on Saturday 12th May, the same day as the Lochmaddy celebrations. The MacPhails would stay over then take Margo and her mother the next day to the Free Church in Caranish for a more formal Service of Thanksgiving at which Henry would be preaching, based on his favourite text: Joshua Ch 1: V9:

Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.

Martha added that as Sollas was her home village, Miss Eilidh Ferguson would also be at Margo's gathering to perform the inaugural full rendering of her latest work as the centrepiece of the village's VE celebrations. It's title in translation was:

The Hebrides welcomes and celebrates the winning of the War, (1939 to 1945).

This was to be recited again at the Sunday Service but in an abridged version. There was a rumour Miss Ferguson was planning to send a copy to King George.

As a teenager, Eilidh Ferguson had been a Gold Medal winner for Spoken Verse at the 1925 Mod. Since then she had become a minor celebrity throughout the Hebrides for her poetry, writing in both Gaelic and English. Brevity was not her style. Most of Eilidh's works comprised dozens of stanzas which, delivered in her slow, melodic voice, had a soporific effect on Janine.

The MacPhails had assumed their niece would attend with her children but were not surprised when she declined. They all knew accommodation would be difficult and she made this her excuse, adding in confidence to Martha, her tummy was 'uncertain' as her period was due soon. This was almost a white lie; her period was due, making her especially needy and Janine saw their absence as a golden opportunity to get together with Rhys, if he could get free of his duties. She was certain word of the Sollas celebrations would circulate quickly and he would soon learn the MacPhails would be away for the weekend and she would be alone at the croft.

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With the Victory secured, she would press him harder to make definite plans for their future, her long-planned escape to the Mainland and a life of luxury.

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As the MacPhails were about to leave on Friday afternoon, Martha begged to be allowed to take the girls to show them off to her cousins. At the point of departure, while standing at the door of the MacPhails croft, Balach jumped into the already crowded car with his collie friends and refused to come back out. As the old Austin trundled off along the coast road, Janine turned back along the shore to her croft smiling, happy to be left alone with just Bella to look after.

The afternoon was warm with a light, steady drizzle; the midgies were about and biting and she was glad to get back indoors. In hopeful preparation of Rhys's arrival, she closeted the chickens early then went carefully through her routine, washing her hair before strip-washing her body. Seeking the simple country girl look Rhys said he liked best, she brushed out her hair vigorously then pleated it into two pigtails tied off with yellow ribbons, a near match to her birthday lingerie. To follow, she completed a full-scale beautifying and make-up routine, cleaning and varnishing her finger and toenails, plucking her brows, applying her make-up with extra special care and splashing perfume liberally. Her final act was to brush her teeth twice, first with the *Pepsodent* which Rhys had managed to procure for her and a second time, with ordinary minty paste to take away the bitter taste of the first gritty paste.

By five o'clock she was ready, her birthday lingerie and floral dress laid out on her bed, the gaberdine coat on a hanger suspended from a coat hook inside the box room door, everything to hand to dress for a striptease performance to welcome him.

Squirming with anticipation, she sat by the fire in her pyjamas, trying to divert herself by listening to a programme of celebration transmitted live, with the presenter reading a litany of heartfelt messages from the great and the good interspersed with a selection of recordings by Vera Lynn and Gracie Fields, Janine singing along in perfect unison.

Around seven o'clock, Rhys arrived, leaving the motorbike by the door, the cantankerous engine still racing loudly to prevent it stalling. Rhys already knew the MacPhails were at Sollas and had a plan of his own. He had given Corbett and Macrae the weekend off, explained.

When she explained about the girls, he said:

"Come, my darling girl. You've always wanted to visit me at the radio station. This is your chance. Quick now, into your greatcoat, slip on your wellies and jump onto the pillion. I have special treat waiting for us."

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Without a second thought for her cow and chickens, Janine slipped out of her 'Royal' coat throwing it onto her bed and shrugged into her naval version, tied on the yellow sou'wester to protect her hair, stuffed her make-up things and purse into her shoulder bag, hitched herself up behind him, her first time on a motorbike. Snuggled into his back, her hands tightly wound around his waist, Janine screamed with delight as Rhys gunned the big machine along the undulating coast road and up the scary, twisting gravel path to the radio station to thud over the cattle grid and skid to a spectacular halt inches from the door. Before cutting the engine, he revved hard to prime the carburettor for the restart.

On arrival she discovered she was to be feted to a special meal in the style of a Naval Mess Dinner.

Over the previous months while lying side by side in the croft during their recovery *tete-a-tetes*, Rhys had claimed to be an amateur chef; a skill learned in his student days at Oxford when his speciality had been *Bergerac Cassoulet*, a pork and duck *mélange* with special mushrooms and doughballs, to his own recipe.

On arrival at the radio station she was set free to roam, nosing around while he got the food heating. Everything had been prepared in advance, meat and mushrooms supplied by the Nicholsons to Rhys's special order, the doughballs provided by Andy Macrae. It had been cooked in Lochmaddy, needing only to be heated through in the military field oven while the vegetables simmered on a spirit stove.

"Rhys, you are a true genius! This food smells delicious. It reminds me of Helena's cooking. She always said she wanted to be a chef but Daddy insisted she become a nurse. How very clever you are!"

For *apéros* he had tiny savoury fish pies made by Macrae and a selection of olives and anchovies, both items which proved too strong for her palate, their aftertaste swished away with her first ever taste of Champagne.

Apart from a few sips of watered-down Crabbie's Green Ginger Wine from her father's Hogmanay bottle, Janine had never drunk alcohol before and was soon delightfully tipsy.

For afters, *Le Pudding* was to be creamed rice pudding made with condensed milk laced with raisins and sweet Marsala wine and sprinkled with 'diced fruits of paradise', from a tin.

In his bunk room, always kept locked when he was not in residence, he revealed his secret hoard, doubly secured inside a metal cabinet with a heavy padlock, its key hidden in his copy of *Birds in an Eton Garden*, a prized birthday gift from his father when he was ten years old.

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"Look, Janine, first fruits of our success in Europe and a sign the British Merchant Navy is getting back down to business. From some of the signals going the rounds, the more sensible ones at any rate, I reckon fairly soon we will be back to normal. We are most definitely on the final furlong, my darling."

Freshly obtained from the Nicholsons, he proudly recited his selection:

A bottle of sweet South African sherry, six bottles of Spanish wine, four red, two white, a bottle of Port, a bottle of Madeira, twelve bottles of beer, two bottles of Talisker whisky and a rare bottle of VSOP Cognac.

Borrowed from Corbett, for the weekend only, he had a selection of big band dance records.

While the main course heated through, they sipped sherry between dances. At her insistence, they were naked, the metal entry door barred from the inside against the unlikely event of callers.

In the radio room at the far end of the corridor, the equipment hummed, unattended, ignored.

"Don't worry, my darling girl, since the announcement that the Germans have surrendered unconditionally and now Hitler is dead, the airwaves have been filled with nonsense, mostly unauthorised messages telling of new triumphs in far-flung places. Sadly, our American friends are taking a pounding from the Japanese. However, that's for another day. Here in Britain we must enjoy the end of our ordeal and gird our loins to Win the Peace now upon us. Do have another *soupçon* of Champers!"

They drank two bottles of red wine with the stew, a bottle of white with the dessert and sang along lustily and drunkenly with a wireless broadcast of a street party from Blackpool.

At the end of the corridor the teleprinter chattered intermittently, the occasional red-signal alarms ignored, the door to the signals room firmly closed.

After the food, they moved to his bed, the gramophone playing in the background.

As the mushrooms in the cassoulet and the wine took effect, Janine felt free, as if she had wings. Released of all remaining inhibition, she insisted of taking a few puffs from his pipe then moved on to sipping from his whisky.

On the hilltop high above the deserted MacInnes and MacPhail crofts, in their cocoon of intoxication, time and space warped. Janine and Rhys were free of all cares and responsibilities, focussed only on themselves, bent on satisfying their carnal desires and fulfilling their soaring fantasies.

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In Lochmaddy and Sollas the weekend of celebrations continued and The Commander and the posh girl from *Glasgow* were entirely forgotten.

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Consequences

When Rhys's seven-day bedside alarm rang at six o'clock on Sunday morning, they had been bingeing continuously for a day and a half. Janine was still high, sexually aroused, amorous.

It took Rhys an hour to get her dressed, onto his motorbike and back to her croft where he dropped her off before riding back up to the radio station to attend to the backlog of signals which had gone unanswered since late on Friday afternoon.

Bella, her udders swollen, greeted her mistress with an angry bellow. In the outbuilding, there was an urn half-filled with milk and a scribbled note in a hand she did not recognise.

Sinful slut.

God knows where you were and so do I.

Shame on you!

Repent on your knees.

Give thanks that HE is merciful.

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When the MacPhails returned with her girls it was early evening.

Janine was in bed, naked, half-asleep clutching a now tepid hot water bottle to her lower abdomen.

Fortunately, Martha was the first to enter and seeing Janine's fancy underwear, birthday dress and expensive coat in a bundle by the bedside, gathered and stowed these items out of sight before returning to the door to prevent her husband from entering:

"Henry, dear, Janine has a very heavy cold and is in a dreadful state. Take the girls back to our place and I'll get her tucked in with a hot drink and a couple of aspirin. I'll be along as soon as she is comfortable."

Alone with Martha, Janine at first refused to speak but under pressure, she told a hastily invented story:

"Oh, Aunt Martha, the tummy thing I had, well it turned to diarrhoea then this headache started. I was sweating badly. I think I might have the 'flu. I've not been over the door since you left on Friday. Last night The Commander came by. He had been to yours but

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them came along to here, expecting to find us all together. He had a bottle of Champagne to celebrate VE Day. He gave me a little sip."

"Did he now? And what about this expensive dress? Just look at the state of it! And the revealing underwear, the fancy coat?"

"Oh those. Well, he had actually bought those for a niece, on the Mainland, Sally, I think he said. He thought they might fit me which, they do, actually, just perfectly. Anyway, he's had them sitting around for ages, it seems. But it was tragic, actually, because the girl, a Wren, was killed in the Portsmouth bombings. It seems Rhys had the parcels sitting in his office for ages and now he is tidying up, hoping to get a transfer back to Bath when he is demobbed. Anyway, I sent him away almost at once, because of my infection. He was only here for a few minutes, honestly."

"Oh, Janine Robinson, you are such a poor fibber. I can smell the whisky still on you. May God forgive you. Shame on you both. But at least you have found yourself a good man at last. I will see to Bella and your chickens. Get yourself washed and tidied and into your jim-jams.

"When I've gone, get on your knees before The Lord and confess your sins with a contrite heart and put all this behind you.

"Drink plenty of hot sweet milky tea and take two aspirins every four hours and try to sleep off that hangover.

"Tomorrow we shall all start a fresh. We must just hope that whatever happened between the two of you while we were in Sollas does not get to Beaky and her coven of witches at Lochmaddy. And Heaven forbid that Henry gets wind of it.

"And keep those new clothes out of sight."

Rhys did not restart his visits for several weeks.

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When there had been a 'no show' period in May, she had pretended to herself it must have been a light discharge and that she had missed it. When she missed again in June, she held the secret to herself, waiting for the right moment.

During her two previous pregnancies she had sailed through the first months unaffected. Now she had stomach cramps combined with diarrhoea. She suffered stabs of sharp pains behind her knees, followed by an aching which moved every few days from her right leg to her left and back again. When the morning sickness started her diarrhoea stopped to be replaced by constipation.

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Wee Martha-Rose was cutting her molars, dribbling and grouchy. Moira-Ann was being extra naughty, sneaking outside to play with Balach and sometimes wandering off with him to the shore. Janine was not sleeping well, making her edgy.

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Shortly after VE Day, the Nicholson brothers pulled strings at Greenock and were released from War Service. Dewy-Davies had not been consulted. According to Jimmy Corbett, they were back in Ullapool where they planned to retire from fishing and set up a chandlery business and boat repair yard.

The mood on North Uist had changed to one of optimism. Rumours abounded about what would happen after the Americans had won the War against the Japanese in Burma and in the Pacific. Even Henry MacPhail was sure the War in the Far East would be successful.

When the first news of Belsen and the other concentration camps began to circulate, Henry was adamant these reports must be false, scurrilous propaganda invented by the Russians to deflect criticism from their own vile acts of retribution against the Nazis.

VJ Day in August was celebrated but in a more sedate manner. In Lochmaddy and throughout Britain, the focus was on the future.

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September arrived and a few North Uist men returned. When their tales circulated, they were dissected, jumbled into each other and re-packaged with ornamentations to be retold into the myths and legends which would run like deer in the decades to come.

With each passing day, Janine's bump grew and despite Rhys's gentle pleas for calm and patience, she could feel herself becoming more and more anxious. Partly because of her tiredness and because she wanted to keep the pressure on him, romance and intercourse were suspended, adding to the tension.

As yet unaware Janine was pregnant and to counter her demands, Rhys revealed he had written to Bath and to London the day after VJ day, asking to be 'stood down' and allowed to resume his civilian life.

The replies from the RNVR Command London had been short, explicit and disappointing. His North Uist establishment was now low priority. He must sit tight.

Bath repeatedly told Dewy-Davies he must wait his turn to be demobilised and reminded him that many more pressing matters needed attention.

In mid-September, from the Admiralty in London, he received a round-robin emphasising the War was not yet over, most especially not for the Royal Navy who were scattered

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thinly all over the globe, attempting to re-assert law and order over the British Empire and prevent an upsurge of nationalism in India and Africa.

From Plymouth, from a group he had no previous knowledge of, he was advised a strategic review was under way regarding the future of the Royal Navy's ongoing presence on the Hebridean archipelago with the remit to evaluate its importance as a base against future seaborne enemies, especially submarines, with a particular focus on the feasibility of creating a base for Flying Boat surveillance, a unit which might be located at Lochmaddy, Kyle of Lochalsh or Oban.

A few days later he received a copy of a worrying pro-forma letter from the War Office (Equipment and Supplies Division), a unit also based in Portsmouth:

"All Home Operations must be scaled down carefully with a full accounting for and repatriation of all stores and munitions in accordance with Naval Regulations. A new initiative has been launched into reported pilfering of war supplies and equipment. A proper reconciliation of the records involved will be undertaken, establishment by establishment. All commanding officers are advised to conduct a full internal review and ensure their records are fully in order and shipshape, ready for audit."

Throughout the summer and autumn of 1945, the contradictory signals from these and other Naval sources added confusion and contradictions. Despite the pressure from Janine, Rhys decided to keep his head down, refusing to poke the hornet's nest of petty officialdom. Perhaps the stores audit would run out of steam before it reached Lochmaddy or, alternatively, he might already have received an order from Bath making him a civilian.

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The issue came to a head on the first Thursday in October:

"Rhys, we really, really need to make plans, *definite* plans. I'm pregnant. You're going to be a father."

Stunned, he had blurted:

"God in Heaven, Janine, how could that have possibly happened? Are you sure the child is mine?"

Before she had time to control her anger, she had thrust him away then slapped his face with a force she did not realise she could wield, sending him staggering back to trip on a chair. As he fell backwards, his head hit the corner edge of the kitchen table and he fell to the floor as if struck by an axe.

Rhys recovered consciousness with his head on her lap, her tears dripping onto his face, a damp towel under his head as a compress to calm the bruising to his skull.

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"Oh Rhys, don't die. Please forgive me."

"Shush now, my darling. I deserved your rancour. I should never have uttered those horrible words. When is our baby due?"

"I missed my second period after VE Day. He may come in January, I think. I'm sure our baby is a boy, Rhys, as you've always wanted. My dearest, please tell me we will be away from this dreadful hole long before he arrives. I don't want our son to be born here. Can we go to your house in Oxford? But really, I don't mind where, so long as it's somewhere nice, with shops and cafes and theatres and cinemas."

"We shall see, my darling girl. Yes, I'll do my best, honestly. But as you well know I'll need to sort out how things stand regarding Petra and Roddy but, being realistic, it could take months to complete the paperwork to allow us to marry. We don't want our boy to be born out of wedlock, do we? Yes, I'll write again at once to Bath and London both."

"Rhys, can't you do something **urgent** to make them act quicker. It all seems so trivial now, the War. It's over, for goodness sake. Make them act. Kick up a fuss, don't just wait!"

"Now, now, Janine. Calm down, my dear one. Honestly, I *will* do my best, which is all any of us can do when faced with the dead hand of bureaucracy. The trouble is, the team at Bath are being coy about Petra and her whereabouts. If only they would give me leave to travel, even for a week or so, I could go there, maybe even to London, to try to find her, if she's still alive or start the paperwork to get her classified among the war dead. Roddy too. Oh, sorry how awfully callous that sounds."

"Surely Jimmy and Andy could manage without you? I mean, there's nothing *happening* out here, is there?"

"Ah, to compound our difficulties, Corbett and Macrae have written to me formally now offering their resignations. As you know, I've been fending them off but in fairness, both are long overdue retirement. The scuttlebutt tells me have written directly to their home station in Portsmouth. In theory the need my say-so but they have a lot of friends in Portsmouth pulling strings and levers. If they get away before me, who knows what sort of replacements I might be palmed off with. So, Janine, as you can see, it's complex. As ever, one step at a time."

"But Rhys, if you go to Bath or London, will you promise to come back for me?"

"Of course, my darling, of course. How could I possibly live without you, without baby Gethin John and our girls?"

"Rhys, *just* John, please."

"As you wish."

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"Rhys. I'm frightened. I need you to hold me tight and sing to me. You would never abandon me would you?"

"No, never. Just be patient. I'll make things right, honestly."

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As promised, Rhys embarked on a flurry of letter writing. In response, holding letters arrived, signed by names he did not recognise. Each time this happened, he wrote again, with the same result. Weeks dragged by.

On his visits to the croft, Janine kept their discussions centred on how to get her and the girls away to the anonymity of the Mainland:

"Rhys, surely as a senior member of the Royal Navy they cannot keep palming you off with replies from mere clerical assistants. Look at these names! Some of these people are not even Navy. Can't you get the attention of the head of the Norway Team? Surely that chap Admiral Vernon-Blair can get you away from here, can he not?"

"Janine, please, I've written to him three times now. Nothing. Total silence. I'm beginning to wonder if he is still alive. They say now that in the last weeks of the War, over two thousand flying bombs rained down on London, falling day and night. As we might have guessed, this news was suppressed at the time but it seems over five thousand were killed and nearly twenty thousand injured. Checking back, I realise I've not had a red signal signed by him since February."

"But if he had been killed, surely you would have heard?"

"Perhaps not. Like the rest of the Norway Team I am on a secret list. I seem to be in limbo, sorry."

"Rhys, is this the whole truth? What are you holding back? Is Petra back? And Roddy? Is that it? Oh, my goodness, you're not planning to dump me and my girls, are you?"

"Janine, please, not again, darling. Now just stop that nonsense; you'll only upset yourself again. You must know I want to get us away from here as soon as possible and home safe to my place in Oxford before our boy arrives. We've been over this time after time. Look, I'll write again, tonight."

"Can't you send him a signal?"

"No, Janine, official signals are **not** permitted for personal matter such as this. As I told you last time, to do so breaks protocol. In any case, for officers a resignation or posting request must be hand-written. It's Royal Navy protocol, from the time of Lord Nelson, maybe earlier."

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"Rhys, perhaps that's the problem? Who but me can read your tiny scrawl? If you write it here and now, I could type up an transcribe, make it readable, send it with your hand-written version."

"Janine, please, for the final time, **no!** Now look at the time. Sorry, but I must go. I can't be late again. I must keep Corbett and Macrae onside."

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The following Thursday Rhys did not call in at the croft.

Janine's situation had taken a turn for the worse. Henry's knees were giving trouble and Martha, who did not drive, was visiting on foot but calling less and less because of the dreadful weather. Only once did Janine made it along the shore on foot to visit them traipsing with the girls, carrying Martha-Rose when she refused to walk further. Durin her short visit, she pretended a cheerfulness she did not feel, trying to hide her tiredness and gippy tummy pains.

Catching Martha watching her grimace and expecting a query, Janine was tempted to share her news. It would be a to chance explain herself properly, explain how careful they had been to avoid a pregnancy and assure her that Rhys was fully committed to her.

But Janine had learned her lesson, knowing if she 'confessed', her aunt would be duty bound to tell her husband who would almost certainly deliver a long, pompous lecture on morals, sinfulness and adultery. As the War propaganda had warned, *Walls Have Ears* and if she spilled her secret, there was a risk it would reach Beaky Fraser in Lochmaddy with consequences for her and for Rhys.

Grumbling in the back of her mind was what could happen if he was given permission to visit the Mainland, where he might be snared by the mythical Petra, never to return to Lochmaddy.

If Rhys did abandon her, Janine knew she would need the MacPhails more than ever. With a third and bastard child to care for, she would be under their thumb, ground down, and become their serf, trapped forever on North Uist.

Dead of Night

Desperation

Janine had been thinking about Rhys every day, obsessing, angry he had not called in to the croft for nearly three weeks; surely he could spare a few hours from his duties, especially now the War was over. Nearly all the remaining North Uist men were back home, back to their crofts and the fishing. Why could Rhys not be allowed to go back to his old life at the university?

Without her marital allowance, her purse was empty and she was out or low on nearly everything. Surely he must realise her predicament. In addition, she had the last final chapters of his book, her transcripts piled neatly on the shelf above her bed, out of reach of the girls, ready for final checking and editing by him.

She had been wearing the Naval greatcoat constantly, as a camouflage to conceal her now obvious bump and as a covering for the dowdy dresses Martha fashioned for her two earlier pregnancies. Because Henry had refused to drive the Austin down the muddy track from the coast road to her croft, and because Janine was reluctant to walk the girls along the shore through the rain to their croft, she had missed out on Friday visits to Lochmaddy with the MacPhails. In any case to go there in her condition would have been foolish in the extreme.

Surely Rhys must know all this?

*Surely he must realise she was depending on **him to come to her**.*

Every night, not just Thursdays, she had watched for him from five o'clock until the weather news at eight. The Blackout strictures had been removed and normal social life was restarting, church meetings, choirs, dancing and the pipe band gathering for rehearsals all of which meant more cars, vans, tractors and motorbikes were on the coast road during her vigils, giving rise to many false headlamp sightings, raising hopes soon dashed.

Since mid-October it had rained every day, sometimes for hours on end and the hill ground above the machair was sodden, slippy, boggy, with runoff water turning her croft track into a river. Her rational voice told her if he brought the motorbike down her track, he might not get it back up again and it would be stranded at her croft, exposing their relationship. Perhaps he had sped by in the rain or maybe he was deliberately going to the radio station by the other, longer route to avoid passing the croft.

Unable to visit the library, she was reliant on Martha and Veronica to choose for her. Janine judged their selections to be 'worthy but boring'. In desperation she had taken to

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re-reading Helena's novellas carried secretly from Glasgow five years earlier, escaping into the fantasies of her early teens and weaving them into her own experiences with Rhys, filling her with a longing for intimacy and long, slow, gentle intercourse, sitting astride him, his hands on her breasts, tugging and squeezing and reaching up to suckle her nipples.

Instead she had to make do with her own hands and Helena's dildo, always a second best.

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The impartial BBC voice uttered its information for Monday 26th November 1945, delivered without any thought for those whom it would affect.

"Rockall, Malin, Hebrides. Southwest gale 8 to storm 10, veering west to north, rising to severe violent storm 11 overnight. Tomorrow, squally showers with some sleet. Visibility poor, deteriorating before clearing to the North-East to bring calmer weather for a time ahead of another front."

The accumulator powering Granny MacInnes's old wireless was almost spent. Uncle Henry had tried to swap it for a fully charged one but the garage at Lochmaddy had declared Granny's ten-year old battery was beyond recovery. From his stores up at the radio station, Rhys had promised to bring her a new one.

As the radio dimmed and fell silent, the child stirred in her belly, bringing a sharp cramp of pain as **he** kicked - *Gethin John Robinson Dewy-Davies*.

Often, Rhys had gently scolded her for insisting 'baby' was a boy, saying he would be very happy if 'baby' was a girl. In her mind she dismissed the old wives' tale that it was bad luck to sex or name a child before it was born, determined he would be known as 'John' and not Gethin-John as Rhys preferred.

By this stage, more than six months from VE Day, she had hoped to be away, off the island, married and living in Oxford or Bath with Rhys or, if necessary, as his 'pretend' wife waiting for the paperwork to come through.

Glancing at the fire, she eased down and added a few peats. In that moment, the serpent of desire struck again, re-infecting her with an idea she had contemplated many times over, even to the point of testing it on several occasions, one time reaching the coast road before turning back to her croft and her girls.

Filled with certainty, her mind raced ahead, re-running her previous thoughts as she piled on more and more peats. She found an old towel, dowsed it thoroughly and placed it over the top layer of unburnt peats to damp her fire down, to make it last.

The pendulum of choice swung and once again she was unsure. Normally, she never left the girls alone while asleep, except for a few minutes to see to the hens and Bella.

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In her frustration she scolded, in a whisper:

"Rhys Dewy-Davies, why have you been avoiding me? You promised me faithfully you would rescue us from our predicament but where are you when I need you?"

This is all his fault. He should have come.

She was out of tea, sugar but worst of all she was on her last dregs of paraffin for the lamp. He must know that. Twice over he had promised a replacement battery, a pristine one from his vast stock at the radio station.

Her anger flared. He had missed her birthday two days earlier, repeating what had happened the previous year. And again when he had missed several missed weeks before he eventually shared the news of the missing in action report about Roddy and *The Stormy Petrel*. Back then, as she had waited, ready and willing, she had seen him ghosting past the end of her track night after night in the moonlight, in plain view.

Thinking of this, she became certain he was sneaking past her croft, like a thief in the night, becoming a stranger.

Two days earlier she had waited, keyed up, fully certain he would come with presents. She knew it was her own fault, denying him sex for months when she had needed it too.

On her birthday night, she had waited, dressed and ready, her hair and make-up perfect. However, it had passed without his strong arms to cuddle her and his warm, reassuring lilt telling her it would soon be over and they could make moves to escape to the Mainland.

She had been desperate to hold him, see him, strip him naked and explore him, ready to reward him with sex, assuming he was willing to mount her given her condition or to give her hand-relief as she done when he came during her periods.

The thought which had been festering for days give rise to harsh words hurled at the door where he should have entered:

"So, Commander Rhys Dewy-Davies RNVR, Doctor of Philosophy, expert in the Social History of France, you are not man enough to come and tell me to my face that Petra wants you back and you are abandoning me to my disgrace, despite your many promises!"

With these words said aloud, she started to believe them. As soon as he could escape from her, he would return to his comfortable life in England and forget her, a simple girl who had been amusing when nothing better was on offer.

Fuelled by anger, the pendulum swung back: she would go up to the radio station at once and hear what he had to say, face to face.

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Another slab of wind hit the croft, denting her resolve. In her previous plans, she had thought a stormy night would be ideal, although maybe not one as bad as this. In the outbuilding, Bella and Balach were bedded for the night beside the hens in their coop. Checking through the kitchen window, she watched in alarm as a small strip of corrugated siding broke free and whirled up into the night like an evil witch on her broom.

At this hour in this weather, the four miles or so of single-track roads to Rhys's radio station would be deserted. But this was not an option - she would be blown off her bike which meant she must go to him on foot, about half an hour up over the bracken and heather, keeping to the sheep tracks. She shrugged away her fear, telling herself she knew the tracks over the hill to the radio station like the back of her hand. The girls were out of nappies and she would be back before they woke around six o'clock to potty them.

With brisk, urgent strokes she brushed then combed out her hair, did her make-up, dabbed perfume liberally and slipped into the nicest of her baggy dresses worn over her lemon nightie, bra and knickers. Weighing a ton, her Naval greatcoat was soaked through, its proofing perished. Instead, she would wear her Royal coat, it's first time worn outdoors, hoping it would live up to its promise and keep her dry.

As an afterthought, she pulled on an old cardigan for extra insulation. With the coat buttoned to the neck and the hood tied tightly under her chin, her face was all that was showing. For added protection, she added the oversized yellow sou'wester and tied it as tightly as she could.

Before leaving the croft, Janine checked on her girls; both were sleeping soundly on her bed as they had been doing for the last few months, now they were too big for Henry's drawer-cot. Could that be a reason Rhys no longer came to her, unwilling to risk waking the girls? She peered again at the vanity mirror for a final check. Catching her eyes in the reflection, she saw tiredness and anxiety. The baby moved again this time without real pain. She burped away the bubble of indigestion then applied a smear of lipstick to each cheek and rubbed to cover the paleness.

Her bedside alarm showed quarter to nine.

Kneeling by the door, she pulled on two thick pairs of socks and pushed her feet into the oversized wellingtons which Rhys had purloined from his stores at the pier. Her final action was to trim the paraffin lamp to a low glimmer. She unbarred the kitchen door and eased it to a crack. The elderly collie yipped from the outhouse. If she tried to leave without him, he would howl and might try to follow her. She whistled softly to him and he squirmed under the gate and hirpled across into the croft. The tiny old dog was about eleven. With his best years long behind him, he had slowed down, no longer able to work the sheep when they were frisky.

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She cupped his head in her hands:

"Balach, you must do your duty now and guard the girls for me while I go over the hill to see Rhys."

He rolled onto his back and she rubbed his tummy, bringing tiny yips of delight.

"I'll be back by four at the latest and we'll have another go at milking old Bella but she's drying up again. Maybe Henry will send her away to the slaughter and find himself a new milker. Anyway, it won't be our problem. I expect we'll be away to the Mainland before that happens. But don't worry, old man, you'll stay here with Uncle Henry's collies and see out your time with the MacPhails. Stretch yourself in front of the fire now, there's a good boy."

Unsure, the collie crept away and did her bidding; he was seldom allowed indoors and was puzzled by this change to his routine.

She rose to stand behind the door, listening to the moaning cadence of the wind, waiting for the right moment to open it between gusts which might cause the peat fire to flare up and send burning flecks whirling around the hearth. In a lull she slipped out, tugged the door tight shut and used the swing hasp and wedge pin to hold it tightly shut, as the MacPhails had done to contain Granny MacInnes and prevent her wandering out into the sea. Peering through the kitchen widow, she saw the collie scabbling up onto the bed, his head glancing back guiltily towards the door before settling down between the two girls.

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Like a wraith, Mrs Janine Macleod made off up her own track into the slashing rain, keeping her head down, choosing each step to avoid the deepest mud, her right hand cupping protectively below her tummy; holding down the skip of the sou'wester in her left to protect her face against the rising storm now hurtling directly from the North West. Through breaks in the heavy clouds, the quarter-moon shed an eery glow on the watery track.

By the time she reached the coast road, she was soaked through, chilled. The hunting, shooting coat had never been intended for heavy duty rain. The climb which would have normally taken ten minutes had taken nearly an hour but her grip on reality was slipping. She turned left, her eyes fixed on the verge, searching for the particular sheep run she was seeking, the start of a steep, twisting network which would lead her to the Rhys. Why did I not wear gloves, she asked herself, her mind flitting back to her small selection, imagining each pair in turn, rejecting the fancier ones, eventually choosing an old heavy leather pair she used at the peat cutting, gloves left behind by her grandfather, Gordon MacInnes.

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With each passing minute, her core temperature was dropping. The moon was gone. After ages, knowing she must have missed the track, she turned back on herself, moving more slowly. Without warning, the sou'wester and hood came adrift together and whipped away out of sight, leaving her bareheaded, the event distracting her.

Although she could not know it, it was over an hour since she had set out. It was at this point she should have admitted defeat, turned back to her warm croft but she was no longer thinking rationally.

With her face plastered with wet hair, she stumbled on, checking for the path, unaware she was now nearer to the MacPhail croft than her own. When she found it at last, the upslope was shallower and wider than memory served, washed out and streaming water from the hill above. Keeping to the side of the torrent, the normally springy peat underfelt was much softer and boggier than she was used to, causing her to slip and skid, forcing her to slow as she placed and tested each oversized boot, stopping to choose her next step while scanning ahead for familiar landmarks.

When she saw the stunted rowan tree by the small lochan on her right she heaved a sigh of relief, peering into the sleet for the stirrup pump she and Uncle Henry used in dry spells; to her dismay, there was no sign of the it. The track alongside the lochan was rockier and more canted towards the water that she remembered.

The moon was back.

She puzzled as to why the lochan seemed bigger, at least twice its normal summer size with large waves crashing against the far shore, throwing up spume which raced away on the rising wind.

Slowly she realised what she was looking at was **not** her summer water supply lochan, a dissonance which brought a first tinge of fear.

Her birthday coat was leaking at the seams, especially at the shoulders, rivulets of icy water running down her neck and back. Her face and hands were icy cold. She had moved beyond shivering and her sense of time was distorted and she began to feel warmer, safer.

No longer aware she was stumbling, she smiled, reassured when she crossed the broken fence with its rusting barbed wire. On the other side she decided to climb up to Rhys at the top of the hill. Stumbling blindly up a narrow track running parallel to the remains of an old drystone dyke, she did not realise she was scrabbling up a waist high ditch, using its sides to steady herself.

Her hand fell on remains of a rotting creel which had somehow found its way up onto this higher ground. She pulled at it but it was firmly embedded so must have been there for

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years; this added to her confusion; she thought she knew every landmark on this hill, her 'home' hill.

Lost and close to collapse, she kept climbing, each footstep sapping her strength as the mud sucked at her oversized wellingtons. The ditch path levelled out and two steps later she stumbled on a rock. Losing her balance, she cried out, her plea whipped away on the rising gale. Sliding and rolling she turned protectively onto her side. Her descent ended when she plunged into a deep, peaty bog with no firm bottom.

Trying to stand, she found her feet pulled down into deep mud, the water rising to chest level. As a child she had never learned to swim, hating the stink of the chilly swimming baths and the chlorine stinging her eyes. In panic, she grabbed at the tufts of rough grass and bracken roots which fringed the stinking morass. After a long, slow-motion struggle, she managed to pull herself out but she had lost her boots and socks, leaving her barefoot. Also left in the bog were her fancy lemon knickers but she was unaware of this detail.

Pushing herself upright, she stood at a crouch, feeling the mud ooze between her toes which had unfrozen enough to give rise to returning pain. The narrow focus of her mind was upwards, to Rhys, her only imperative. With her eyes closed, she struck out through the rain, climbing footstep by slow footstep, mumbling the words of *The Grand Old Duke of York*.

As her blood retreated from her extremities to protect her core and her unborn child, she felt no pain from her bruised and bleeding hands, feet and face. Unable to stand against the strength of the wind, she resorted to crawling on her hands and knees but found her path was blocked by a huge overhanging boulder. By serendipity, she had found a storm shelter already occupied by a heft of five pregnant ewes, already heavy, due to lamb in early March. Unable to go on, she sank to her knees and crawled towards them, pushing her way in to claim her space and wedge herself into the rock face. Curled into the foetal position, she pulled her bare feet up into her coat as the sheep settled around her, sharing their warmth.

Giving way to delirium, she felt herself sliding gently down a soft, sandy slope into a warm blue sea; the water was as warm as her bath back in Glasgow. Twirling and splashing, she lay on her back but had to close her eyes against the bright Sun above and turned over to swim out from the shore using a gentle breaststroke. In the far distance a phantom Rhys began to sing Welsh lullabies as he swam towards her, his arms slicing through the water like Johnny Weissmuller in *Tarzan and the Ape Man*, a re-run film which Helena had taken her to see as a tenth birthday treat.

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Still fully clothed and giggling, she struck out towards him strongly, changing to a front crawl, knowing her father would be pleased she had learned to swim after all the tantrums.

In her fantasy, she and Rhys had finally settled on a plan.

They would sell the croft to the MacPhails and pool their resources. They would make sure their children got a good education and . . .

If Petra would not give him a divorce, they would emigrate with the three children to New Zealand at the first opportunity. Rhys had cousins in Christchurch who would help him. She would learn to play the piano and they would . . .

Hours passed as the fantasy rewound and replayed, scenes amended as details were added.

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On High Alert

Fifteen feet above the point where Janine was lying unconscious, the gravel track at the hairpin bend led to the final approach over the cattle grid to the radio station. Inside, Commander Dewy-Davies was working through the typed transcript of his book to be entitled, *Wildlife of North Uist, a Wartime Record*. With the last chapters still to come from Janine, it would soon be ready to go to Jeremy Cunliffe, his friend from schooldays. Jeremy, who now had lost both feet to diabetes, lived with his parents in the Cotswolds and had good contacts in publishing circles through his father.

However, Rhys's mind was not fully engaged, still churning over the pronouncements from the BBC Home Service nine o'clock news detailing the opening statements at the start of the Nuremberg War Trials which detailed the almost unbelievable atrocities committed in the Nazi concentration camps.

In the background he had Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony playing. He was on his second relaxing pipe and third large whisky; with the end of hostilities, *Talisker* had become easier to obtain.

Since late October he had been under a restriction, repeatedly warned to stay at the ready, on high alert. No actual reason had been given but the tone of the daily reminder messages had made it obvious that he personally was in some sort of spotlight.

His first instinct was that the issue was regarding his missing stores inventory. It had seemed such a small thing to allow Jimmy and Andy to trade the extra items which the Supply Office in Greenock had refused to acknowledge had been sent to him. When he raised the matter with Bath, after a delay of weeks, he had been told in a terse signal "to get on with it and count himself lucky". For months he had kept these signal flimsies as has insurance but now the clip of files was 'misplaced', possibly misfiled or worse, shredded by Macrae who had a habit of 'tidying up' without due care. All that remained was the damning proof of his culpability in the form of the missing items and his share of the takings amounting to £763, in mixed notes, anonymous black money, money he did not need, some of which he had already given to Janine in pseudo marital allowances. .

From the radio room the alarm heralded an incoming message and he moved along the corridor to check the teleprinter.

The precursor personal identity code was clear; the incoming message was classified as 'Highly Confidential' and for his eyes only.

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He turned off his radiogram, donned the headphones, took up the Morse key, homed in on the wavelength; when the signal steadied on the oscilloscope he tapped out his responder personal identifier acknowledgment code to say he was ready to receive. Seconds later the teleprinter chattered out its long, coded message.

He acknowledged receipt and promised a fuller 'asap' response after de-coding. The use of 'as soon as possible' was officially frowned upon but was accepted because such messages were mere gibberish until decoded.

Using the code book from the wall safe to obtain the DC (decipher combination) indicated by the first open text segment of the message, Rhys began the slow process of converting the six letter strings into plain English.

Inexplicably, the message was timed 00:09 Friday 23 November 1945 with the sender standing by for his immediate reply:

Eyes Only: Commander R H Dewy-Davies RNVR, North Uist Operations, Lochmaddy.

The Stormy Petrel docked in Lybster Harbour 23:20, Monday 29 October 1945. All members of the original 1943 landing party were executed bar the ship's crew and Agent Cormorant. All three are well and in good spirits. I will organise personal condolence letters to the next of kin for those lost, to be sent from my office at the Admiralty.

The message astounded him, sobering him up. As if hit by an electric shock, Rhys Dewy-Davies recoiled from his desk, sending his wheeled chair hurtling backwards to collide with the metal filing cabinets. To check he had not got it wrong, he wheeled forward and began reworking the incoming strings against his decode.

'Cormorant' was Petra Bengtsson, his wife. Petra had refused to adopt his surname after their marriage. Now, despite previous hints she had perished here was factual proof she was alive. So was Roddy Macleod, and Donald John.

Dewy-Davies reached for the whisky bottle sloshed two inches into his tumbler and downed it neat before completing the remaining decode.

The survivors were interviewed by the local Commander from Wick and then by secure telephone by Norway Unit Operational Command in Bath.

FYI the agents led by Agent Cormorant were landed successfully. I am pleased to be able to advise our saboteurs completed their mission but with great sacrifice. Only Cormorant survived.

While making her withdrawal after the raid, The Stormy Petrel, renamed in Faroese as 'Sjófuglar' (seabird), was stopped and arrested. Both Macleods were taken by a German warship and incarcerated for the duration in a German-run prison in Stavanger, Norway. Fortunately, the Macleods appear to have stuck to their cover story that they were

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Faroese fishermen and sat out the duration of the war. Commander Bremner RNVR from Wick assures me they were well fairly treated. On release the refused to leave Norway without their vessel. When it was eventually located, it was being operated by a Norwegian crew who refused to surrender it, claiming they had purchased it from the Germans in good faith. Agent Cormorant intervened and used her authority backed by signals from this office to free the vessel and obtain the necessary papers to allow it to sail back to UK waters.

It is appropriate to offer my heartfelt thanks for your excellent planning work with Agent Cormorant which laid the groundwork for this success. It was for this reason you were promoted when news of the success of the raid was confirmed by aerial recognisance images. As you will understand, security restrictions meant it was not fully attributed at that time. Given the sad loss of life, you may see this as a rather hollow victory but be assured that in time it will be seen this action was a vital strike against the German High Command and their diabolical plans to develop an Atomic Bomb.

Agent Cormorant is currently en route to London to discuss matters in detail with me and senior members of the Norway Operations Unit. Be advised this Unit will shortly be disbanded, paving the way for your possible exit from the War.

The Stormy Petrel has been released from War Service and has been given permission to transit the Caledonian Canal, bound for Stornoway. The Macleods have been released from War Duty and offered a once-only award of £250 to cover war reparations and refitting, a sum they have accepted and signed for. Their Temporary War Service remuneration ended as of midnight, Thursday 22 November 1945.

In due course Agent Cormorant and the entire party will be recommended for a gong but at present the Macleods must not be told of this plan, in case it falls through. You may be included in this recognition but as you will understand these matters are fluid and you must be patient and discrete.

The Macleods have been sternly warned against discussing their experiences with anyone other than yourself.

Given this ends your involvement in Norway Operations, you are to report to Bath for debriefing and discharge. Please do so at your earliest opportunity.

CPO J Corbett RN will take over your duties, assisted by PO A Macrae RN. Do not communicate with Portsmouth as I have already settled this issue with them on your behalf.

Thank you for your service on North Uist. You have done a good job organising your end of this enterprise. It will not be forgotten. Looking slightly further ahead, I expect you will be keen to get back to your post at Oxford. I shall write to The Senate in early

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course with my recommendations, once you are free to resume your duties there. I think a Chair would be appropriate if matters evolve as I have suggested. Keep me advised of your plans.

With all best possible wishes for a Good Peace,

Vice Admiral GK Vernon-Blair RN DSO and Bar.

Rhys let out a slow murmur of contentment, reached for his pouches, prepared a stronger, celebratory tobacco and marijuana mix and lit up before refilling his glass with his normal half-and-half mix of whisky with water.

With a whoop of delight, he articulated his thoughts:

"So, Petra is heading back to her lover. And V-B has made Vice at only forty-three and has added a Bar to his DSO. His star is in the ascendency. I wonder how much V-B knew of the fate of those involved, information withheld for reasons of security and morale? I don't suppose it will ever be revealed. Clearly the great man is sending me a message in this signal. *Stay away from Petra, she's mine. If you comply, you too will get a gong. If not. . . .*"

When he had been sent to Lochmaddy in early 1941 to supervise the building of the radio station, Rhys had known he had been side-lined, to get him away from Petra, to clear the way for her romance with V-B. He was a powerful, self-promoting man of the kind she had always wanted. Although physically unattractive, Vernon-Blair had charisma and wide-ranging influence. Rhys knew V-B was not a man to cross or have as an enemy in the coming peace, no less than he had been during the War.

Although Rhys had already made his decision, he took time to think it all through, enjoying the release from anxiety the news had given. To help him sober up, focus, he made a brew of tea and added three lumps of sugar. Rooting through his collection, he came across a favourite rendering of Stravinsky's *Firebird*, lowering the needle onto his favourite section midway through the first movement and settled to his thoughts.

He smiled. Now V-B and Petra were likely to become an 'item' officially, she would agree to a divorce. Despite his orders, Rhys knew he must share part of this news with Janine so that they could plan their North Uist exit strategy together, without upsetting the MacPhails. How would she react? He smiled and dribbled the dregs from the bottle of *Talisker* into his teacup.

With the long-range Met Office forecast set for more storms, would she be willing to risk leaving with him at once, if they could hitch a lift to the Mainland. There could be no question of asking V-B for an extension. Or, with the baby coming soon and with two toddlers to care for, would she want to stay near the MacPhails until she and baby were strong enough to travel across The Minches? If she was set on staying, she would need

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money. There was the issue of Roddy. Would he dare to return? If Corbett's information was reliable, MacPhail had threatened to maim him for life if he ever dared set foot on the island again. Tribal justice. How would she feel about him, now he was no longer dead? Would she want him again, a younger man, more of her ilk? Would she sell up and move to Stornoway or Canada or wherever, as she had said he planned for them, before the assault. If so, how would she explain the coming child? And how would Macleod react? Would he seek retribution? Rhys stood, balled his fists and set himself in a boxer's pose at the thought, then relaxed and smiled and jabbed at a phantom Roddy, goading him:

"Yes, come and let's see what you have, Macleod! Let's see how you are against a man rather than a defenceless teenager with a child at her breast."

The moment passed and he lit another strong mix pipe and let the vapours do their work.

No doubt the demobilisation procedures in Bath would be lengthy, bureaucratic affairs with endless inquiries into his signals' paperwork. The store inventory issues might still come up and need explaining. It would be best if she was not in Bath to complicate issues. If Petra caught wind of her presence, she would no doubt ridicule his liaison with a younger, prettier woman a girl who was almost a child.

Yes, Rhys decided, it would be best if Janine stayed her until after the divorce could be settled. No doubt V-B would pull strings and get her a 'quickie'.

Only then would Rhys seek out Macleod and force the issue with him, with a pay-out, probably. A few hundred should do it.

He would give Janine the black money from the safe, now, tonight, as her surety that he would make everything right, as he promised her would do. Later, when she was ready and matters were settled in Bath, London and Stornoway, he would return and take her to home with him. Or, she insisted on coming at once, he would take her to Oxford and closet her there with Mrs Granger his housekeeper while he settled matters elsewhere.

He would leave the choice to her but the sooner he explained it all to her and got back to Lochmaddy and briefed Corbett and Macrae, the better.

The words came out unbidden:

"Carpe diem!"

With his decision finalised and his ducks lined up, Rhys drafted a simple reply to V-B.

Eyes Only: Vice-Admiral GK Vernon-Blair RN DSO and Bar

Message received and fully understood.

Congratulations on your promotion and Bar. Very well deserved.

Dead of Night

Excellent news that Agent Cormorant is safe and returned to you. Pass on my wishes for a happy and fulfilling life with the coming Peace.

It will take me around two days to arrange a smooth handover after which I will travel at once to Bath. I assume unless advised otherwise that I am authorised to pass the access code for the safe to CPO Corbett and with it the Code Book.

Commander R H Dewy-Davies RNVR, North Uist Operations, Lochmaddy.

Seconds later the return message confirmed his proposal agreeing that all authority should be transferred to CPO Corbett forthwith.

Rhys's mind was racing. Petra was finally confirmed as a lost cause. Good riddance, she had always been too demanding, too dominating, too damned smart! The only fly in the ointment was Roddy Macleod but he felt sure Henry MacPhail could be persuaded to deal with him, with Murdo MacLennan's help.

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Imperatives

The storm, which had been raging unabated for over a week was predicted to last for several more days. To go out into it now would be madness. Then, as if in answer to an unsaid prayer, the masthead anemometer reading dropped to zero. The eye of the current phase storm was centred directly overhead.

He glanced at his watch. Three o'clock. Time enough. It was imperative he settle the matter, put her mind at rest, get her agreement. A few hours of persuasion and canoodling should do it. He would be back for the duty change well before 09:00 hours when Corbett and Macrae were due. If he missed any signals, he would blame 'atmospheric conditions caused by the storm'.

Moving quickly, he donned his waterproofs, boots, helmet, goggles and gauntlets, packed some tea, sugar, flour and tins of corned beef into his greatcoat pockets. Racing for the door, he pulled himself up short. *The money!* He stuffed into a drawstring canvas bag and then into his double satchel beside the final index section of his book for transcribing by Janine.

For the first time in years Rhys felt fully free, his mind soaring, jittery, excited, longing to be with Janine and get on with planning their new life. Projecting, and not for the first time, he knew she would need coaching if she was to make the grade as the wife in University circles but she would get there, in time, he was sure. His mind was full of images of living again in Oxford; introducing Janine to the glories of the small, introverted city, enjoying her delight at her new higher style of life; watching the three children at play in the garden, climbing trees, flying kites, playing hide and seek. They would get a car and perhaps a country cottage, maybe in the Cotswolds near Jeremy, with a bit of land so the girls could have ponies.

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Outside the station, he banged shut the heavy metal door, slid the bolt and secured it with its brass padlock then hid the key in the agreed hiding place in the mud under the lozenge shaped whitish rock fifteen paces away, directly in front of the door. It was the first time the radio station had been unmanned since completion in the autumn of 1941. He unwrapped the motorbike and stowed the tarpaulin in the metal box beside the spare fuel. As an afterthought, remembering Janine was probably out of paraffin, he rifled the pack to find a full one, checking he had one with a leak-proof cap. The current batch of fuel cannisters supplied by Greenock had been sub-standard, gash, made of the thinnest steel plate, prone to rusting through and leaking. Eventually he found a better one and

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strapped it to the pillion. In his haste he forgot the promised battery. He also forgot to follow basic protocol and sniff the contents so did not realise he had taken a canister of petrol by mistake.

After the short lull, the vortex eye of the storm was spinning on, the wind veering from the North as it rose to a new higher intensity, bringing sub-zero temperatures and heavy with sleet and hail.

Astride the machine, Rhys kicked hard with his good right foot, the engine caught, spluttered and fell silent. He added choke. At the third attempt the ignition caught and the motorbike roared to life, the engine screaming. He took off his right glove and by feel and sound, adjusted the carburettor until the engine was running sweetly, just a little faster than normal, knowing a stall might lead to a dangerous lack of power and control.

As the first drops of pea-sized hail arrived, Rhys Dewy-Davies gunned the motorbike forward and raced downhill towards the MacInnes croft. As he approached the hairpin bend, he was thumped by a slab of hail which started a wobble. The brakes, overloaded with icy slush, failed to slow him down sufficiently. Seeking neutral, his left foot missed the gear change and a slash of pain ripped through his ankle as his Achilles tendon snapped.

The engine stalled and the gearbox jammed, locking the rear drive wheel but relentless momentum took control; the man and his machine flew out over the ridge in a high arc to smash onto the scatter of boulders fifty feet below. On impact the pillion tank exploded like a bomb. Milliseconds later petrol spurting from the punctured motorbike fuel tank caused a second explosion, ripping Dewy-Davies apart.

The short-lived fireball engulfed another, larger heft of sheep. With fleeces ablaze, screaming and leaping like spring lambs, they clambered upwards, driven by herd instinct to the imagined safety of higher ground.

In his death flight, Rhys had curved high above Janine and her ewes. In their terror, their sharp hooves scabbled over her, stabbing, leaving her face bleeding and her back, legs and arms covered in red weals and bruises.

Combined with the pummelling from the hooves, the sound of the explosions had dragged her mind from her semi-coma and she looked out into the driving hail, trying to remember where she was.

The banshee whine from the wireless mast and its supporting cables brought the realisation she must be close to Rhys's place reigniting her imperative to reach him. After a supreme effort she struggled to her feet but beyond the shelter of the overhang, the wind was too powerful and she gave up, reduced once more to crawling on her hands and

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knees up onto the gravel road then heading up the steep slope to the unseen building. Picking her way on her hands and knees over the cattle grid, her energy level surged. She stood and ran towards the black door. Her feet were bleeding freely but she felt no pain.

It was pitch black. At the door she found the brass button by feel, pressing it hard with her thumb, hoping the bell would be heard, holding it in for ages until her other hand found the padlock and she realised Rhys had gone.

Her mind cracked and she slumped to the ground and lay staring wide-eyed, empty, desolate. Minutes ticked by but she was disconnected from reality, suspended in time and space, once more in psychotic limbo as she had been when the reality of her parent's deaths had struck home after Granny MacInnes's funeral.

Another vicious squall sliced along the side of the radio station, pulling her back to near reality. A guilt image came to her of the croft ablaze, its roof ripped away, her children trapped inside, screaming for help.

Running towards the cattle grid, she tripped and fell heavily. Red pain, like a hot knife seared into her left ankle. Past the grid, she rose, limping forwards blindly. Another lump of wind knocked her sideways, filling her eyes and covering her face with a mask of congealing sleet.

Disoriented, she stepped forwards into fresh air, plunging feet first into a deep gully, a narrow fissure between two rocks. She tried to move but found she was stuck, trapped, unable to move her arms, suspended vertically, her self-weight compressing her shoulders and torso into the narrow crevice, leaving only her head and shoulders visible.

The dull ache in her ribs and arms was surpassed by vicious 'stomach punches' as the child kicked and writhed within her. The pain reached a purple-white crescendo, propelling her conscious mind into a kaleidoscope of vibrant colours as their love child aborted and slipped away into the mud a few inches below her feet.

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Gruesome Find

Shortly after eight o'clock, the morning sun struggled above the horizon. The storm centre of the night before had moved on to the Pentland Firth heading for Orkney and Scapa Flow. The wind had veered again, coming from the south-west, warmer and softer, clearing the skies at long last.

Inside the radio station the anemometer was reading force two, gusting four. For North Uist locals, this wind speed seemed like a light breeze, almost balmy. On the far horizon to the south-west, dark clouds suggested the storm was not yet over.

As she did at every dawn after a big blow, Martha MacPhail scanned the machair in all directions, checking for damage and for the tell-tale drift of blue-brown smoke from the peat fires of her neighbours. The absence of smoke from the MacInnes croft puzzled then alarmed her.

With Henry hobbling behind, Martha ran at a slow trot, heading along the beach and up to the croft, their collies racing ahead, enjoying their freedom after the recent days of being cooped up indoors.

Closer to the MacInnes door they saw it was locked from the outside. Apprehensive, they stopped to try take in what this meant. Lighting his pipe, Henry was first to voice their fears, speaking a low voice, as if to himself:

"So, she's run off with Rhys as I said all along she would, choosing Mammon ahead of her Lord. Ach, maybe she has done the right thing in her condition. It would have been hard for here if he had abandoned her carrying a bastard child. As an atheist, the man would not have been my choice for her but at least he's not a wife-beater. Ach, and he has money. A fancy house in Oxford and a hundred thousand to boot, Jimmy says, and more to come from a doting aunt. Welsh coal money, stolen from the hard labour of others."

Then, in a louder voice of command:

"So, Martha we shall have to see ourselves out of this place without her support. As I said all along, that hussy was set in her unbelief from long before she came to us. It was John and Moira who failed her, not us."

They made to turn away towards the outbuilding to attend to Bella when they heard the old collie barking from behind the croft door and then the girls shouting, their tiny faces peering from the kitchen window.

Moira-Ann shouted, mimicking her aunt's slow Hebridean lilt:

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"Mummy is playing hide and seek and we cannot find her. She is being silly, Auntie Martha, we have been shouting and shouting for ages. Moira-Rose was crying but I told her to behave herself because I know Mummy is hiding with Bella and the hens. Auntie Martha, why has Mummy shut us in when the rain is off and the wind has stopped? We were only a wee bit naughty but Martha-Rose was naughtier than me. She stole two biscuits from the tin but I only ate one big one, and only because I was hungry. And Balach has peed against the door so I did *not* give him a biscuit and he growled at me so I chased him with the carpet beater and he hid under Mummy's bed."

As Martha reached for the door to unlock it, Henry re-lit his pipe, cleared his throat of phlegm and turned away to spit:

"So, that is the way of it, she is up there with him, the hooring slut!"

"Enough of that Henry. May God forgive you for those un-Christ-like words. Why are you always so down on Janine, so ready to believe the worst of her? You know well she loves those girls. And, when she sets her mind to it, where on this island is there a better worker, I ask you? She is as strong as an ox and without her we would have had to sell up and move to Lochmaddy long ago and bide with Eilidh. I say there must have been a reason to make her go for help. Just look at the outhouse, will you? She must have been worried about her roof. You know fine well it preys on her mind. That will be what it is, I say. Now, no more loose talking. I will see to the girls and get the fire going. You, Henry MacPhail, get out my way. Go you back and get the Austin and get yourself up to the radio station and find out what is going on. And keep your tongue still and remember Our Lord always held a special place in His heart for loose women. I say again, whatever it was it must have been important to make her go out in that storm".

As she was speaking they heard the Navy truck grinding its way towards them from the south, from Lochmaddy.

With a series of sharp whistles, Henry sent his collies up the MacInnes track onto the coast road and brought them to a stand, blocking the vehicle while he laboured up the muddy slope to speak to Jimmy and Andy. Hitching a lift, he explained he needed to see Dewy-Davies to ask if he knew where Janine was.

On the last quarter mile up to the radio station they saw three dead sheep by the roadside, scorched black. A few minutes later they began to pick out the debris from the motorbike. Stopping to search, they found the head of Rhys Dewy-Davies, still strapped inside his helmet, his wiry black beard singed ash white, his goggles still in place, the lens scorched but unbroken.

Henry's dogs found Janine. At first they thought she was dead but when they eased her up out of the crevice, she moaned and started calling for her girls.

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While Jimmy and Andy fetched a stretcher and blankets, Henry examined the girl. Seeing the blood and mucous on her feet, he peered into the crevice and saw the tiny foetus. Closing his eyes, he said a prayer.

He decided not to tell the ratings. What was done, was done and the girl had enough trauma to cope with without the added burden of being exposed as an adulteress. He resolved to return later to retrieve the remains of the tiny corpse and give her a Christian burial.

Leaving Jimmy to radio the news to Bath, Henry and Andy moved their patient to the MacPhail croft.

As she recovered consciousness, she shouted and screamed delirious nonsense. To avoid upsetting Moira-Ann and Martha-Rose, Henry was dispatched with the girls to Sollas. Aunt Martha told the girls they were going away for a holiday, a big adventure and that Balach would be going with them.

Andy Macrae was sent in the truck to Lochmaddy with a sealed letter from Martha for Dr Angus MacDonald. The hasty note give only a brief outline of what had occurred, requesting he attend Janine as soon as possible.

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Two days later, when Henry returned to attempt to retrieve the foetus from the crevice, there was no sign of it, taken by seagulls or ravens, he thought.

In due course the assembled remains of Rhys Dewy-Davies were certified by Angus MacDonald and, with special permission from Miss Eilidh Ferguson in her capacity as the Lochmaddy Registrar, his partial corpse was interred in Kilmuir Cemetery at Hougharry, on a gentle slope within sight of the MacInnes croft.

Henry MacPhail again contravened his Free Church vows and conducted a short service of blessing for the atheist. The service was well-attended by many from Lochmaddy. Janine was too unwell to be present and in any case, women at a graveside were not normally allowed.

The judgement of the North Uist community was, allowing for him being a Sassenach, The Commander had been a decent man, well-liked, quiet, solitary, aloof but kindly.

Standing further up the hillside, a few hundred yards apart from the assembled mourners, the mad old bachelor Iain Sinclair was heard to say quietly to his invisible collie, long dead:

"Well, Morag, at least the man did not make the Macleod tart pregnant with their goings on. Ach, but never mind, she'll never last here anyway. No decent woman would leave her old cow in agony for the want of milking. Do you remember it, Morag? The old beast

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howling her head off for hours while the bitch from Glasgow was up there hooring on the Welshman at his wireless station while the rest of us God-fearing folk were on our knees giving thanks for our deliverance."

His harsh words went unheard, carried away on the stiff breeze.

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Winning the Peace

Henry's involvement in the burial at Hougary did not pass without notice. Following severe censure by his fellow elders at the next Session Meeting the North Uist Free Church of Scotland (the Wee Frees), the MacPhails had resigned, moving to the less inward-looking (mainstream) Church of Scotland at Lochmaddy.

Martha's earnest prayers were answered. Janine's adultery and the devastating loss of her baby were never discovered. The foetus was a girl, Henry had told her and Martha named the lost infant 'Miriam', a name she had once hoarded in secret when she had hoped for a child of her own.

By the summer of 1946, under the ministrations of Martha MacPhail, Janine had recovered her physical health. The MacPhails put her to hard physical work, partly as therapy but also from necessity.

The girls from Glasgow's mind would take much longer to heal. Gripped by a dark depression, she might go for days without a saying a single word.

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Janine's turning point came in August 1947.

When she went out to milk Florence (Bella's replacement), she found Rhys's double satchel hanging inside the gate to the outbuilding. Beside his manuscript scrawl and held with two stout rubber bands, was the full amount of £763. The notes had been re-sorted into like denominations and in accordance with the imprint of their issuing banks. Folded under the rubber bands was a neatly scribed note in a hand she recognised from a previous admonition:

"The wages of sin are death as the hoo-master discovered. Will you take the Lord's Bounty and turn to Him and promise to bring your girls up in the Fear of God? He is watching and pleading with you to turn from Evil and embrace all that is Good."

Janine kept the money safe and secret while she thought about it. Then, one night, when the girls were asleep, she turned off the wireless and opened Granny MacInnes's family Bible and began to revisit the passages which had been drummed into her as a child.

Once again her father's words returned as she recalled him kneeling beside her in prayer after being caught in her shameful teenage act with her home-made comforter:

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"Janine Macleod, Heed ye the Word of the Lord. God so loved you and me that he gave His Only Begotten Son to die on Calvary's Tree that our sins might be washed away by His Blood, that we might claim our Salvation. Let us get down on our knees together and confess before Him our weaknesses and dark passions. If we do so with a contrite heart, He surely will honour His Promises."

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By the spring of 1948, Janine and her girls were regular church attenders, sitting with Henry, Martha and Miss Eilidh Ferguson, their pew directly behind Dr Angus and Miss Veronica MacDonald, travelling in the Austin or, in better weather, cycling.

Janine was now tending her croft with energy and diligence, building it up again. In parallel, she was working hard to understand and speak Gaelic, set on making a success of her life on North Uist, all thoughts of Glasgow, its bright lights and temptations put aside.

Within a year of her 'full and final conversion' as Henry termed it, she was working part-time as a sub-postmistress at the shop at Clachan, cycling back and forward every day.

In the autumn of 1949 when Henry's old Austin gave out. Janine used some of the money from Rhys's legacy to buy a nearly new Morris Minor.

Slowly her episodes of depression lessened.

Dressed soberly, in blacks, greys, maroons and dull blues, her hair cut short and without make-up, she merged with the other woman of the island. Over time her appearance changed. Physically, she was heavier, more muscled. Her hair bleached by the sun turned a lighter, tawny colour. Weather-beaten, her freckles spread, her cheeks face ruddy, brimming with health and vigour, she shunned the frivolity of eyebrow plucking and nail varnishing, accepted the her blessing of strong teeth which she brushed regularly on grounds of hygiene, no longer striving for whiteness.

In the immediate wake of her final conversion, she had burned Helena's lurid novels and her piles of high-fashion magazines, adding the dildo, no longer part of her new pious life.

She no longer listened to ballroom dance music or trivial radio programmes on the wireless. As her Gaelic improved, she took up singing with the newly formed Gaelic choir which helped her move closer to acceptance by the locals.

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Roddy Macleod did not return to North Uist. After a few brief weeks in Stornoway, he negotiated a sum in lieu of his share in *The Stormy Petrel* and moved to Glasgow where he signed up for the Merchant Marine. In July 1946 he jumped ship at Capetown in South Africa after which news of him failed to reach The Hebrides.

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In the autumn of 1948 when Helena Robinson ended her career with the QARNNS, she had risen to Superintending Sister, a rank equivalent to Lieutenant-Commander. After a short spell nursing in Portsmouth as a Matron in the newly formed NHS, she resigned, frustrated by the lack of attention and discipline exhibited by the nurses under her 'command' and returned to Glasgow. Through her parent's church, she found Janine in North Uist.

When she first arrived in June 1949, Helena had planned to stay only for a month or so.

After a very short spell of living with Janine, they agreed the croft was too small for all and Helena moved first to live with the MacPhails and then to Lochmaddy to board with Miss Eilidh Ferguson.

During an outbreak of scarlet fever, she volunteered to help Dr Angus and over the autumn and winter she struck up a friendship with Veronica. In the spring of 1950, she signed a formal Doctor-Nurse partnership agreement with Dr MacDonald and became an NHS employee, a secure position which gave her a steady income to supplement her dwindling savings.

Like many long-term incomers, Helena discovered the slow and predictable rhythm of island life suited her. She took over playing the organ at the Lochmaddy Church of Scotland and as piano accompanist for the Gaelic choir. When Miss Eilidh Ferguson passed away in 1951, Helena inherited her house. During spells of bad weather, Moira-Rose and Martha-Ann stayed with their aunt to make sure they did not miss their schooling. As time passed, Helena became another main influencer in their lives.

When Henry died in 1952, Martha MacPhail moved to live with Helena in Lochmaddy and Janine took over the running of both crofts.

As Mrs Janine Macleod went about her work around the crofts, the mad Iain Sinclair and his phantom collie Morag were her most frequent visitors, the man conversing with his 'dog' and sermonising in strident Gaelic from the coast road above her.

Under Martha's leadership, Helena, Veronica with occasional inputs from Janine, established an informal group to counsel and provide practical support for War Widows and the sprinkling of wives like Janine whose husbands had decided never to return to North Uist after their War.

Over time, similar groups spread throughout the Hebrides, an initiative driven forward by Helena who assumed leadership when Martha died.