

Hand of God

Miss Agnes Fowler

Ann-Marie Fowler was a large, plain girl, the middle child of seven who left her parent's house in Donegal aged thirteen to seek a job and a husband in Belfast. After several false starts, she found employment in a rooming house near the docks, cleaning, doing laundry and making beds.

Aged eighteen, Ann-Marie was still unwed when she met a tall, thin Dublin man called Paddy Smart who was passing through on his way to New York. Paddy was newly seventeen but with his bushy moustache seemed older. He planned to make a fortune by joining the New York Police Department, he said, where he had an uncle who would speak for him. Believing she had at last found her man, Ann-Marie gave Paddy her savings of nearly £3 for safe-keeping. They caught the ferry to Glasgow where they rented a room in the Gorbals area. A friend of Paddy's got him work in the docks while they saved up for the fare to New York. Ann-Marie worked as a scullery maid in a small hotel near St Enoch's Railway Station until she was nearly eight months pregnant when she was sent home to 'lie-in' ahead of the birth. A week earlier Paddy had literally 'jumped ship' to continue his journey alone to New York, leaving Ann-Marie to her fate.

Without Paddy, who had omitted to pay the rent for the previous three weeks, she was judged to be a woman of low morals and ejected by her landlord. She spent almost a week living rough before she went to the local R.C. church and pleaded for help. They wrote the address on a scrap of paper and sent her off to search for a red-sandstone tenement in Govanhill. At the address she explained herself to Mrs Isobel Sprunt (nee Gallagher), a frail elderly woman whose only daughter Angela was in service in a big house in Pollokshields. Isobel was originally from Donegal but knew nothing of the Fowler family.

It was here in Hollybrook Street Agnes Fowler was born on the 11th June 1853 and lived out her first years in a smart, one-room and kitchen flat with an inside toilet, mains cold water and modern whale-oil lamps for lighting. All cooking was done on the coal-fired kitchen range which also provided (slowly and in modest amounts) hot water for bathing and clothes washing by manipulating a lever which redirected the hot flue gases over the rear of the small cast-iron reservoir. This level of sophistication seemed astounding to Ann-Marie who had been raised in a thatched cottage with earth floors and peat fires for cooking, a home where candles were only lit on very special occasions and the entertainment during long winter nights was singing and storytelling.

Unable to read or write, Ann-Marie's only means of support was cleaning tenement closes. Each day her first tasks were to serve Mrs Sprunt breakfast, get her up from bed, toileted, dressed and made comfortable with a book and a pot of tea by her side.

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Whatever the weather, from Monday to Saturday Ann-Marie could be seen walking out to 'her' closes in the posher parts of Govanhill, Crosshill, Mount Florida and Cathcart and even as far as Shawlands and the nearer parts of Pollokshields. Her infant Agnes was crushed into an old pram in which her mother transported her sweeping brush and pan, scrubbing brush, kneeling pad and a bar of whitening chalk to decorate the edges. Later, Agnes the toddler became her mother's helper, doing the sweeping ahead and following behind with the chalk, swirling flower patterns enthusiastically.

This precarious arrangement lasted until early January 1860. Isobel Sprunt caught a cold which quickly turned to pneumonia. After a struggle during which she needed constant attention, she died in mid-March. During this two-month struggle, Ann-Marie had only managed to do her nearby regulars and feared someone else would move in and take over her closes, territory she herself had 'stolen' from others in previous years.

On the death of her mother, Angela Sprunt announced her mother's rented flat was to be given up and its contents sold. With only one thruppenny bit and a few coppers in her purse Ann-Marie was now to be homeless, with little prospect of finding a new position suited to her meagre talents.

As soon as Angela left to make arrangements with the funeral director, Ann-Marie begged her next-door neighbours to watch out for Agnes when she returned from school. Agnes was now six years old, recently enrolled at the local Catholic school, a school run by fierce nuns. Unaware of Ann-Marie's current dilemma, the Mackintoshes were pleased to help. For years, the poor woman had been the subject of their prayers and minor acts of charity.

Mr and Mrs Mackintosh, faithful members at the Pollokshaws Salvation Army Citadel were elderly, childless, lived very quietly and were deeply religious. Eric Mackintosh had been in the merchant navy as a deck officer. They were described by neighbours as 'comfortable but not rich'. Ellen Mackintosh (nee Fullerton), originally from Pollokshaws, had been a clerkess in the Govanhill Free Hospital.

When Agnes arrived home from school, Ellen intercepted her, took her in, fed her biscuits and milk and read her Bible stories by way of entertainment. Both adults were appalled at how poorly dressed and thin Agnes was, and began making prayerful plans to help the child and her mother.

By early evening, Agnes was still waiting in the Mackintosh's kitchen for her mother to collect her when Angela Sprunt returned with the men from the funeral parlour. They found Ann-Marie dead. Desperate to escape her trials and tribulations, the farm girl from Donegal had ended her life in agony. She had fashioned a crude noose from a clothes line and hanged herself from the clothes-drying pulley by kicking over the chair she had been standing on.

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The police were called. A constable took details and left minutes later, unaware of Ann-Marie's child still with the Mackintoshes. Angela, who had no idea where Agnes was, said nothing, afraid she might inherit a responsibility she did not want. To the constable, it was a familiar pattern; another suicide of a poor young woman from Ireland. There were no suspicious circumstances and no need to look further or make a fuss. The case was opened and closed within an hour, quickly forgotten. The police entry for Ann-Marie Fowler showed she died by her own hand with no known relatives to be advised. By agreement with the policeman, Angela Sprunt contacted the local authority who removed Ann-Marie's body for a pauper's burial.

When Eric approached her, Angela wanted no responsibility for the child. Ellen Mackintosh took charge and after questioning Agnes closely, came to the realisation the girl had no near relatives and had only a vague notion her mother was originally from a place the child called "The Donegal". Ellen knew from her work at the Free Hospital, that foundling children like Agnes were usually consigned to one of the many orphanages where they were often maltreated. After a long, whispered discussion with Eric, she persuaded him to allow the girl to stay with them, at least for a trial period.

Ellen's main concern was that the school which Agnes attended might intervene and remove the child. Wisely, they decided to share their fears with Agnes who immediately grasped the importance of the dilemma. The child knew of several orphan children at various stages in her school and had heard their playground stories of the harsh life in "The Home" (orphanage) where they were often bullied and abused by the Nuns and older children.

"Aye," six-year old Agnes had said. "Ah widnae mind if yees wur to be ma Grannie n' Grampy. Wid Ah git burthday presunts n' toays it Christmas?"

(Yes. I wouldn't mind if you were to be my Granny and Grampa. Would I get birthday presents and toys at Christmas?)

Ellen and Eric had expected tears from the child and to divert her, kept her busy with lessons and Bible stories, teaching her to play their harmonium, encouraging her to sing along to Gospel songs.

Almost from the outset, Agnes Fowler began to flourish in her new life with the Mackintoshes. Now eating better, warmly clad in new clothes, under the influence of her adoptive grandparents, she learned to speak more politely and with better grammar. With each passing day the memory of her mother faded.

Being a bright child, Agnes Fowler soon learned to cope with her dual life in which she pretended at school to be a Catholic, speaking in the twang used by her classmates, going through the motions of learning her Catechism, making her Confirmation, keeping out of trouble. In parallel she was also attending the Citadel in Pollokshaws, gradually taking on

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the mantle of a young Salvationist, praying for the poor people of the world with genuine pathos, knowing she herself had been saved from poverty which she saw all around her. This message was reinforced in varying degrees by lantern slide shows which informed Agnes of poor children in Africa and India with black smiling faces and often very few clothes.

The next change in the life of Agnes Fowler came when she was twelve. Grampa Eric died of a massive thrombosis. Grandma Ellen took the loss badly and became at first reclusive before declining slowly into dementia, talking for hours at a stretch to a vision of her departed husband. The girl carried on as before, helped by a small group of ladies from the Citadel who took turns visiting, bringing food and treats to their friend and her adopted grand-daughter.

On leaving school aged fourteen, Agnes finally broke her increasingly nominal ties with the Roman Catholic church. As if by God's will, a few weeks later, Ellen slipped away in her sleep. Before reporting the death to the authorities and the Citadel, Agnes removed the key from around Ellen's neck and opened the brass box which Eric had referred to as the 'deed box'. This was the box which Ellen had taken to keeping with her, hidden under the covers of her bed in the position where Eric had slept, with her purse alongside it from which she had dispensed money to Agnes for food, rent and other bills as they arose.

Agnes checked through the documents carefully and found a letter addressed to her confirming what she had been told many times over: she was to inherit the entire contents of the two room and kitchen flat. Completely unexpected was a canvas bag containing a mixture of notes totalling £830 and 10/- and a second envelope with a wad of US dollar bills totalling \$1500.

Ellen's purse contained two £10 notes, three £5 notes and four 10/- notes and change, amounting to nearly forty pounds.

Over the next few hours while she came to grips with the staggering sum which she now possessed, Agnes prayed for guidance.

With the help of the ladies from the Citadel she used the money in her purse to arrange a modest funeral and made a £5 donation to the work of the Army.

One of the good works which Agnes had become involved in under the outreach work of the Citadel was visiting local hospitals to bring spiritual comfort to the sick and dying. It was this work which led her to choose nursing as her career. By negotiation with the factor and backing of the Citadel, by paying six months rental in advance, she secured her tenancy of the Mackintosh flat for a period sufficient to complete the process of applying for a position as a junior nurse at Glasgow Royal Infirmary (*The Royal*) located near the city centre in Castle Street.

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Wisely, she decided she must keep her new wealth secret. After a long period of thinking of different options for where to store it safely, she went into Glasgow and bought herself a corset one size too large. At home, she skilfully modified it to conceal her money. From that day and until she was twenty-one and able to open a building society account in her own name, she wore her wealth constantly, despite the discomfort this often caused.

In July 1868, aged fifteen, Agnes Fowler moved into the nurses' hostel and began her nursing education and training.

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For the next seven years Agnes was caught up in the round of general nursing becoming a valued member of the nursing team. Being used to the hierarchical ethos within the Salvation Army, she learned quickly the way to progress was to always show herself willing to obey the Doctors who made all the important decisions. She knew she must never speak out against these men, even when they made glaring errors of judgment.

During her early years at *The Royal*, Agnes became well-versed in the workings of the human body, including its reproductive system and the nature and risks of childbirth. This medical information added detail to the many intriguing references of 'men sleeping with women' which Agnes had found during her years of personal Bible study. From puberty she had learned to control her 'urges' and lewd thoughts by prayer and now, in the swirl of highly explicit conversation overheard from other student nurses, she was shocked to learn what many of them claimed to have experienced. Abhorring their lewd talk as sinful, Agnes Fowler deliberately and rather pointedly removed herself from the company of these 'sinners', earning herself a reputation as a prude and killjoy. However, on the very rare occasions when she succumbed to 'touching herself', she would be filled with remorse for weeks afterwards, believing she had let her Saviour down by her wicked behaviour. With her overtly devout demeanour, long, plain face, large mannish nose and slightly sad grey eyes, she was not pestered by the men around her in the hospital.

When fully qualified, Agnes decided to apply for a post as a theatre nurse, a position which most of her cohort avoided because of the responsibilities this entailed and because it often meant working longer hours if unexpected complications arose during an operation.

Agnes was now also an active and valued member of the Townhead Gospel Hall, spending much of her free time with other much older ladies at the corner of Sauchiehall Street below the Tron steeple, offering Bible tracts to anyone who would take them.

At the Gospel Hall, Agnes Fowler became the deputy harmonium player to Miss Edna Phillips, one of the founder members. Edna and her unmarried sister Vera ran a small guest house used by visiting medical men who came to study at *The Royal* to further their

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careers. When Vera died, Agnes moved to live in the guest house to help her friend Edna. This meant extra work helping to clean the rooming house, attend to its laundry, change bed linen and help Edna cook and serve meals. To make time for these activities, she obtained a post as a theatre assistant in the Department of Anatomy and Pathology, a position which offered more regular hours and less drama.

In February 1884, as she approached her thirty-first birthday, Agnes met the man who would skew her life from its steady path. Dr Owen Evans arrived on a secondment from the famous Guy's Hospital in London and took a room with Edna Phillips. Evans was a small, thin, quietly-spoken man, an academic who kept meticulous records of his pioneering work in the study of cancers.

Working and living alongside each other, Agnes and Owen struck up a friendship. To a casual observer they did not seem a likely couple. He was a head shorter and slightly built, she was large and busty. Unlike many of the medical men Agnes worked with, Owen did not smoke or drink alcohol. He was also an evangelical, a Methodist, a distant relative of John Wesley, he revealed. Despite his name, Owen was a Londoner, and like Agnes, from a poor background, a man who had made his way with the help of scholarships and bursaries, an outsider among his more well-off colleagues. Evans did not wear a wedding ring and Agnes gained the impression he had never been involved romantically with anyone.

Two months after his arrival in Glasgow, they began a quiet romance which progressed steadily from hand holding when they were out walking, to secret good-night kisses in the corridor outside Agnes's room. Theirs was not an openly declared romance which involved talking and planning a future. It was as if to do so would spoil it by throwing up insurmountable difficulties. Almost inevitably, during the last week before Owen was due to return to London, their suppressed desires spilled over into passion, released in three nights of vigorous intercourse, joyous tears and mumbled promises of undying love.

When Owen returned to London he wrote immediately to Agnes, asking her forgiveness, apologising for his gross sin of adultery and deception, revealing he was a happily married man with three small children.

Perhaps she should have followed her first instincts and shredded the letter into confetti before throwing it on the fire. Instead, Agnes kept it under her pillow, re-reading it while trying to think of a way to reclaim her lost lover. Nothing she imagined made any real sense.

Over the weeks which followed, Agnes read the letter time after time, praying over it, asking God to forgive her weakness and keep Owen safe from future temptation. Even as the words formed, she knew she did not mean them. Gradually her heart hardened, and she resolved never again to be so stupid as to believe any man.

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Six weeks after their nights of passion Agnes Fowler had to admit to herself she was pregnant. Her decision followed quickly: she would not have this bastard child. By enquiring on the nurses' grapevine, asking as if for a friend, she discovered the address of a medically-trained woman in Edinburgh who, suitably rewarded, would be willing to carry out a private abortion. This required an overnight rest under supervision at the woman's premises to be sure the procedure did not give rise to complications. Agnes made an excuse to colleagues and to Edna, stating that she was needed by a frail aunt and was granted a one-week period of compassionate leave, unpaid.

Edna, who had seen the Owen Evan's envelope arrive, had noted its postmark and, guessing its contents, had studied Agnes's reaction. Edna had often longed for a man to seduce her, but none had tried. While Agnes was in Edinburgh, Edna had scoured her room, found the letter and read it. It merely confirmed what Edna had suspected - she had watched the couple's secret behaviour and heard their noisy coupling. This letter was the proof she needed to vindicate her gossip borne of jealousy.

The word spread quickly - Agnes Fowler was a woman of loose morals, despite her apparent Christian commitment.

On her return to work Agnes soon learned her secret was out when she overheard her situation being discussed by two colleagues, one an older woman from the Gospel Hall who was a close friend of Edna. Agnes was no longer the paragon of virtue but a fallen woman. Within weeks she was being groped and propositioned by men of all ranks, from porters to surgeons. At the Gospel Hall she was shunned by most and regarded as an object of pity by others. Her few nights of passion with Dr Owen Evans had ruined her life. The final blow fell when Edna asked Agnes to leave, saying she needed the room for a cousin's daughter who was coming to live with her with a view to taking over the business.

Agnes Fowler decided to make a complete break with her present life by resigning her post as a mortuary assistant.

In October 1885, a Monday, she took a horse-tram and headed back to the South Side of Glasgow. She was carrying a new medium-sized suitcase with only her best clothes and shoes inside. Everything else she had dumped in the refuse bin. She did not leave a goodbye note to Edna Philips but did leave precisely enough cash to cover the amount due for her lodgings.

In High Shawlands, Agnes left the tram and found the rooming house called *Merrylee*. The proprietrix was Mrs Christine (Tina) Blair, a widow who had advertised herself in various magazines, offering rooms to single Christian ladies and piano lessons for students from age three upwards.

At *Merrylee*, Agnes would soon learn from Tina that the scandalous gossip of the neighbourhood centred on *Rosemount*, the house opposite, a very much grander villa on

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three floors occupied by people with strange habits, people who scorned normal friendly social interaction with their prying neighbours.

Agnes, familiar with Edna Phillip's many similar fantasy tales, was not easily impressed by such gossip and decided to make up her own mind about the *Graham-Wardley* family, should she ever meet any of them.

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Rosemount

On her third day living in High Shawlands, Agnes was heading towards Pollokshaws. Edna Blair had advised there was a Gospel Hall roughly fifteen minutes away, saying Agnes would find it easily, as it was close to the stables of *G Graham, Funeral Director (Graham's)*. That Thursday was breezy, threatening rain, but she had decided to go anyway.

Several hundred yards into her walk, the heavens opened. Agnes put up her umbrella, glanced back towards *Merrylee*, undecided whether to continue or return. Coming towards her was a fancy gig pulled by a fine-looking dark horse with its mane in curls and wearing a headpiece which jingled pleasantly.

As the driver stopped beside her, the gig door flew open. Inside was a man about her own age wearing a smart grey suit, a black cravat with a black top hat resting on his knee.

'Hello and Good Morning, mistress. I'm your neighbour from across the road. Vic Wardley at your service. Can we offer you a lift?'

'Oh, you're the man from *Rosemount*, the undertaker?'

'The very same. Quick lass, in you get before you catch your death then I'd need to fetch my hearse for you,' he chuckled, smiling broadly.

Agnes glanced up at the man in the driver's seat, his body enveloped in a horseman's cape. He smiled and tipped the brim of his top hat to her.

'Do ye need a wee haund up, missus?'

'No, thanks, I'm fine, 'she replied, grasping the handle and heaving her bulk up into the gig. 'Thank you very much, Mr Wardley. This is very kind of you.'

'Right, then, sit yourself over there, lass, where I can see you. My eyes are not what they were, it's the embalming chemicals. Ah, yes, that's better.'

He leaned across and held out his hand. 'Now here we are. Herbert V Wardley at your service. You are?'

'Miss Agnes Fowler.'

'Miss! What a waste of fine womanhood. I expect there's a pack of them chasing after you though?'

'No, Mr Wardley, I prefer the single life,' said Agnes stiffly.

'Oh, oh. Sorry, no offence intended.'

'None taken, Mr Wardley, none taken.'

'So, Miss Fowler, where can we deliver you?'

'I'm planning to visit the Gospel Hall in Pollokshaws, do you know it?'

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'Yes, of course we do! My workshop and stables are right beside it. **Tommy, did you catch that? The Gospel Hall it is for Miss Fowler.'**

'Right-oh, Vic.'

'So, Miss Fowler, you know all about me, I suppose, from Mrs Blair, my neighbour? But only the nice bits I hope,' he chuckled again. 'Best to keep our secrets secret. Don't you agree?'

'I suppose so. Yes. Yes, I agree, Mr Wardley. None of us are perfect but we must strive to do our best.'

'Well said, Miss Fowler. Now, are you a lady of business?'

'Not exactly. Not just at this precise moment. I'm looking for a business opportunity. I've funds to invest and I'm told Pollokshaws is the up and coming place to be, now that it too is newly part of Glasgow.'

'Well said, Miss Fowler. Indeed, you have the nub of it. There are new buildings shooting up all around us. Pollokshaws is indeed the place to be. I myself have just taken a stake in a new block of tenements to be built directly beside the tram terminus at Pollok Street¹. Should you have a minute to spare, come to my workshop and I'll show you the architectural drawings.'

And that was how it started.

By mid-afternoon Agnes Fowler had walked around most of Pollokshaws and through to Lower Shawlands and the busy shopping area centred on Kilmarnock Road which served the nearby well-heeled suburb of grand mansions in Newlands where the upper-middle classes lived in luxury.

That evening, after supper, Agnes deliberately engaged in a long conversation with her landlady, keeping it focussed on the occupants of *Rosemount* and Vic Wardley in particular.

Later, alone in her bedroom, to help her separate the facts from the fantasies in which Edna Blair liked to indulge, she made bullet-point notes to herself.

- Herbert V Wardley, (universally called Vic, which he encouraged), was an affable man who had worked for the former owner of *G Graham*, *Funeral Director* for around five years.
- When his employer had died, Vic had married *George Graham's* second wife *Marianna* but there were tensions.
- There was an unstable step-daughter by *Graham's* first marriage, a child called *Delilah*. The girl was subject to strange fits which occasionally meant she had to be sent to a clinic for treatment.

¹ Much later, when Pollokshaws was fully integrated with Glasgow, Pollok Street was renamed Greenview Street and renumbered. Number 7 Pollok Street became 84 Greenview Street.

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- Mr Wardley was widely known as a clever man of business with many properties to his name.

Over the next few days Agnes visited both the Gospel Hall and the Salvation Army Citadel. In both places the message was the same. Vic Wardley had been the brains of the *G Graham, Funeral Director (Graham's)* for many years. The previous owner had been a drunkard, unreliable and it was only when he 'retired' the business had recovered and began to grow. More recently it had become common knowledge it was soon to expand into new premises to be built at Pollok Street, confirming what Wardley had claimed.

What impressed Agnes most was the testimony of Mr McConnell, one of the Elders in the Gospel Hall. Mr McConnell, who was Mr Wardley's solicitor, told Agnes that Vic regularly gave generous donations to be used to fund the Band of Hope outreach work of the Hall. Wardley was also the benefactor of many other organisations including St Mary's the Roman Catholic church on the hill above the Gospel Hall.

With this information buzzing in her mind, Agnes Fowler engaged in a period of fasting and praying, drinking only weak tea and nibbling small portions of unbuttered toasted bread. She ended her period of deliberations on the Sunday. After the evening service at the Gospel Hall, she made an appointment with Mr Martin McConnell to discuss how best to progress her interest in the properties at 5 and 7 Pollok Street, the foundations for which were marked out for excavation. Within a week of arriving in High Shawlands, Miss Agnes Fowler was ready to embark on a career as a business woman and put to work the Mackintosh money she had hoarded in her building society account.

The day after her meeting with McConnel, Agnes received a note, hand-delivered by Mr Wardley, inviting her to lunch with him at a fancy restaurant in Shawlands on the following day to discuss a matter of business. When she accepted his invitation, she was not aware Wardley had been checking her out too. Vic now knew quite a bit about Agnes Fowler's past, including her skills as a mortuary nurse, information which Edna had quickly shared with her friend Fanny Wilson, *Rosemount's* live-in housekeeper.

During their long slow lunch, Agnes Fowler learned that Herbert V Wardley was indeed a clever man, a man who listened to her and nodded when she gave her opinion. And he was a cheery man, always ready with a quip accompanied by his chuckle and ready smile.

By late-afternoon Agnes and Vic, (now on first name terms), were back at his workshop opposite the Gospel Hall. A man called Alan Black was present, the Architect for the Pollok Street project. Working together, the three re-designed the ground floor premises to be built at 5 and 7 Pollok Street to accommodate a mortuary with the latest embalming facilities. It had already been agreed Agnes would join Vic as a silent partner in the development, investing around eighty-percent of her available capital on which she might expect to get a return of around 8% per annum net of costs and taxes. Over lunch

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she had also agreed to become a senior employ of *G Graham, Funeral Director* and take over the day to day running of the new funeral parlour and mortuary.

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When the building was completed in the autumn of 1887, Agnes moved into a top-floor flat in 7 Pollok Street. The flat was fitted with every modern convenience and finished to the highest standards. These substantial tenement flats were constructed to a high standard, all with indoor toilets and hot water heated by back boilers. Like Miss Fowler's flat, some had small bathrooms; all had gas for cooking and lighting. None had electricity, a miracle only seen at this date in a few large stores and at St Enoch's Railway Station. Directly adjacent No 7, was a tramway terminal which offered a selection of trams running to Shawlands Cross and its excellent shops before speeding onwards to cross the River Clyde and deliver its occupants to Glasgow city centre five miles away.

As joint owner and landlord with Vic Wardley, Agnes persuaded him that she would ensure tenants for the new building would be selected for their sobriety and good standing. In her new accommodation she would be directly above her place of business at the office and mortuary at No 5 and close to the Salvation Army Citadel where she had decided to worship. The *Graham* stables and workshop were only a five-minute walk away. When she wished to go into town to shop, Agnes had a selection of trams on her doorstep. It was a short walk to Lower Shawlands which also had excellent shops. If she wished to visit the Ayrshire coast, she had a good train service from nearby Pollokshaws West and a selection of alternative locations from Pollokshaws East, both stations almost equidistant from her home.

As if forgotten, shunned like those who lived in them, was a squalid two-storey building from a previous era, known locally as the dye-workers building. This collection of sixteen single-ends was now hidden from general view by newer buildings which formed the junction of Pollok Street and Pollokshaws Road. These substandard buildings were however, still in demand by the poorest inhabitants of Pollokshaws and seen as a step up from living in the squalor of the Gorbals. The ownership of these properties had come as part of the parcel of land purchased with 5 and 7 Pollok Street, properties which had been demolished to create the new tenement building and funeral undertakers premises.

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Within a few years of giving up her old life at *The Royal*, Miss Agnes Fowler had established herself as a woman of importance in the rapidly developing community of Pollokshaws. Although she saw this good fortune as a sign of God's forgiveness for her adultery and the abortion, despite earnest prayer, this painful memory did not start to fade until she became involved with *The Horspool Trust for Foundlings*. This rather secretive independent charity ran a home for unwed mothers and their foundlings. The charity operated from *The Grange*, a huge building standing atop a steep hill. This house

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had once overlooked rolling countryside, built long before the suburb of Newlands which had developed around it. Over a period of several months, Agnes repeatedly heard whispers of this charity and the good work which it did and became convinced God was nudging her to offer her services to it as a penance for the murder of her unborn child.

After several weeks of fasting and prayer, Agnes applied in writing, presenting her qualifications and experience. Prior to being called for interview, Miss Edwina Horspool who ran the charity, carefully and surreptitiously checked Agnes's past career at *The Royal*, the hospital where she had trained as a midwife and still maintained strong connections. On the day of her interview, sworn to tell the whole truth and under close questioning, Agnes broke down and confessed her guilt in its entirety. After a long prayerful induction, she was accepted as a patron and commissioned as an 'Auxiliary' thus beginning a new parallel career, making regular visits to *The Grange* to support its work by deploying her nursing skills and by ensuring the poor mites which did not come to full term or survive childbirth were given a proper Christian burial.

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Over the next twenty years, under the joint leadership of Herbert V Wardley and Miss Agnes Fowler, the business affairs of *G Graham, Funeral Director* thrived.

Now in her early fifties, Agnes's health was in steady decline. Her regular contact with formaldehyde and the other chemicals used to embalm and 'beautify' the corpses of the departed was taking its toll. Plagued by arthritis, her eyesight and hearing were now dulled. Comfortably off financially, she decided to re-focus her life and step back from the day to day operation of the funeral business.

At this watershed, Vic, who appeared to be in excellent health, had no desire to change his life. By agreement, Agnes recruited and trained a childless widow called Mrs Margaret Ferris as her successor in the business. Vic carried on as before, a man well-liked and respected within the orbit of his activities.

Over time, Vic too had established himself, building and nurturing many alliances in the Pollokshaws community and other nearby suburbs, the areas which provided his clients. Vic was shrewdly generous, attempting always to maintain good terms with all sides of the religious divide, gladly giving to good causes, judiciously.

To fill her time, Agnes accepted a leadership role in the outreach work of the Citadel where she now played the harmonium, whenever her arthritic hands allowed. Within a few years of retiring, Agnes was becoming increasingly housebound, dependent on a strong group of lady friends who visited her regularly, to bring small gifts and offer to do shopping when she was feeling poorly. Increasingly, her days were spent at home, playing her harmonium and singing her favourite hymns and gospel songs.

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By age sixty, her outings were restricted to occasional visits to the Citadel or to the Gospel Hall. On better days, she took cab rides to Shawlands to her hairdresser and to visit her favourite dress shops. Increasingly rarely, she might make a visit to *The Grange* in Newlands but the personnel had changed and although they were always courteous, she saw she was no longer needed and resolved to continue her support by donations and prayer alone.

It was generally held Herbert V Wardley was trapped in what was believed to be an unhappy marriage to the shrill and opinionated Marianna and her equally difficult step-daughter. Hence, it was no surprise to anyone Vic spent most of his evenings at meetings of the Freemasons, attending numerous lodges throughout Glasgow where he was well-liked and warmly welcomed. Like his old boss before him, Vic also became known for his generosity when drinks were needed to oil the works of the glad-handing part of their meetings, after the quasi-religious rituals had been completed.

If Vic believed in what he professed at these meetings, which on occasion he did quite ardently, this was probably because he gave secret thanks to the advice and leg-up from a former work colleague, Robert Williamson, who was a Grand Master of his Masonic Lodge. In those long-ago days the younger Vic had been an ambitious but lowly clerk in the offices of *MacLennan & Co, Ship Brokers Ltd (MacLennan's)*, serving diligently but with little prospect of progressing quickly. Seeing that Vic had 'high potential', Bobby had sponsored him to become a Freemason and had coached him. Vic had worked assiduously and progressed quickly through each of his 29 Rites. When he had achieved Master Mason level, Bobby had taken him to the Lodge where George Graham was the Grand Master and had warmly endorsed Vic to George as a 'true brother'. A few weeks later Vic had accepted the opportunity to join George's funeral business in order to allow George to 'step-back'.

The crowning glory of the life of Herbert V Wardley arrived in May 1903. Vic was sixty-six and in his prime when he too was elevated to become the Grand Master of his Freemason's Lodge, following in the footsteps of his long-dead benefactors. Unawares, Vic now had extremely high blood pressure, a condition which had developed undiagnosed over many years. During the glad-handing session after the formal ceremony, Herbert V Wardley suffered a massive aneurism and died in a few short minutes, still dressed in his regalia and clasping the presentation scroll he had been given to mark his new status.

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Ambition meets Opportunity

When George MacLennan Graham arrived at the door of the large stone villa in High Shawlands he was well-dressed, freshly shaved and smelling of cologne, ready to spin his tale and make his pitch.

By this stage, young George was already a man with a checkered past. Like his older brother Alexander (Sandy), George had received a good education at *The Glasgow High School for Boys*. During his early years he had been noted as a possible future Dux but as time rolled by, the youngster had failed to fulfil his early promise. This was mainly due to what his report cards termed 'a lack of application' but the real reason was, when puberty arrived, George had become distracted by lust for various young women he had pursued, with some success. His finest conquest was a girl called Felicity Carswell, the stunningly beautiful middle daughter of a near neighbour. Like George, Felicity was both willing and promiscuous. When she became pregnant, Felicity had chosen another boy as her target father, a young man whose family were richer, even though their only son was far less handsome than George.

Sandy, five years his senior, tall, slim and serious verging on boring, was a much slower thinker. A plodder, he had joined Glasgow Corporation as a clerk straight from school. By keeping on the right side of the right people and by joining the Freemasons like his father, Sandy began a slow but steady rise through the ranks of the huge municipal bureaucracy.

George, five-foot three inches and chubby, was blessed with a pleasant face and a ready wit. When it was to his advantage, he would immediately turn on the charm. He too became a Freemason as soon as he was old enough but quickly realised it purveyed quasi-religious gobbledegook. He saw that Masonic Lodges were dominated by older, slow-witted men who operated a rigid hierarchy to their personal and commercial advantage. Although George continued to pay his dues and remained an occasional visitor, he did not progress beyond the rank of a Master Mason, unlike Sandy who rose up this organisation slowly, steadily and soberly.

After several years of clerking in various offices, and with Sandy's help, George won a rare municipal bursary to fund his studies at Glasgow University. He matriculated in the Music Department to study flute and woodwind. However, he was soon deflected from his chosen path by the turmoil of politics and debate which swept him into the ranks of the student wing of the *Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party*. His quick mind and caustic tongue rocketed him into a leadership position of those who opposed the Socialists and Communists then on the rise in universities throughout the UK. His dedication to the cause of laissez faire economics meant he increasingly missed classes, practice sessions and deadlines for written submissions on Music Theory, a subject which

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he found dull and uninspiring. It was *performance* that George enjoyed, not complicated ideas. After two failed diets of resits, he was rusticated.

During a further year of searching for the 'right opportunity', he served once again as a clerk at *MacLennan's*, his third spell under his long-suffering uncle, Lachlan MacLennan. George was now seated opposite to his distant cousin Archibald, a favoured nephew of Lachlan, a clever and diligent man. It was clear Archibald was being groomed as Lachlan's successor.

George was now living back in the family home with his parents and younger siblings, a crowded lower-ground-floor apartment in prestigious Hamilton Crescent, close to Glasgow's Botanic Gardens. Like the other Victorian families who dominated Glasgow's prestigious West End, George's family was dedicated to a sober, almost sombre mode of Christian living. From the early weeks of his return to Hamilton Crescent, George made a nuisance of himself by disrupting the family calm with his vehement arguments.

Eventually, in the unspoken hope his son might soon move on, his father persuaded George to apply for a position as a 'commission agent'. At that time, *The Edinburgh Life Assurance and Investment Company* was expanding into the burgeoning Glasgow market. Their target sector was the large population of aspiring Upper-Working-Class and Lower-Middle-Class families, a market deemed ripe for harvesting. Their new Glasgow office was in the same building as *MacLennan's*, (who owned the entire building). It transpired that, like George, the recruiting agent was also a Freemason. George used the Masonic handshake and code words, said what the man wanted to hear, winning the position streets ahead of his competition.

At first George was assigned the lowly portfolio of selling 'burial plans' door to door. Although disappointed, George found he was good at door-stepping and had soon built up a sizable 'book' which gave him a handsome weekly income enough to allow him to gad about like a minor toff, frequenting the public houses on Byres' Road near his family home. As George Graham earned his spurs, he was promoted and trained to offer a range of 'savings plans' and 'investment opportunities'. The sums sought from his clients were now much larger and harder to win. The steady commission from his book of burial plans remained his mainstay, although it still required hours of plodding up and down often grubby tenement closes to knock on doors to collect weekly dues. Despite this drudgery, and in keeping with those he now socialised with, men who called themselves entrepreneurs, George had various business cards, some with impressive gilt lettering claiming the sort of qualifications to which he had once aspired. George MacLennan Graham was now a fully-fledged con-man.

On a tip-off from his cousin Archibald, George had recently learned of a ship brokers who were trying to raise capital to build a new steam-powered vessel to carry emigrants from the Clyde to Canada. With the backing of Archibald, George had secured a 5% commission agreement for all funds he garnered. By working the larger mansions in the

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Pollokshields area, he had already raised £5,500, mainly from widows and elderly spinsters who enjoyed his soft-sell approach. George was on the 'up', at long last.

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It was 9th June 1903, a Tuesday, eight days after Vic Wardley's demise, four days after his internment. George, born on 12th June, 1880, would be twenty-four years old in three days.

Straight from *VeZZa's*, a Gentleman's Barber on Woodlands Road near Charing Cross, George caught a tram and headed out towards Shawlands. He was suitably spruced up, wearing his trademark white spats, a dark-grey, pin-striped three-piece suit and bowler hat. With a small military style moustache, his face freshly shaved and liberally sprinkled with a spicy Cologne, he was a young man in his prime.

Shawlands was an area new to him but as he looked around he saw the sort of properties which he hoped soon to be able to acquire for himself. Apart from his three full sex encounters with the willing Felicity, his sex life during his student days had deteriorated, punctuated by inexpert groping and fumbling to no avail. In desperation, and following the example of his fellow entrepreneurs, George had found solace with the women who inhabited 'Family Departments' of the various public houses he frequented. These were 'girls' who arrived during the last hour before closing, some as old as his mother, with bold make-up, flashing smiles, tobacco-stained teeth and ribald innuendo whispered through reams of smoke, ladies who demanded payment in advance.

What George wanted was a proper wife, one he could dominate, who would do his bidding without demur. Ideally, such a wife would come with a suitable fortune. His experience of his daytime door-to-door selling in Pollokshields had convinced him many such young women existed. He fantasied a suitable one would soon appear on his horizon and allow him to live in luxury, as a gentleman should.

It was in this frame of mind *George Graham* dismounted from his tram close to Shawlands School at around two o'clock. It was a warm sunny afternoon and he at once made a start, knocking on the doors of the large stone-built villas in the enclave he would soon learn was called High Shawlands, an area well-served by trams and a nearby railway station. George was well rehearsed, ready to 'spout his spiel', a phrase he joked about with his drinking cronies.

At first business was slow but George was used to this. At a dozen or so houses he did not get past the servant who answered the door to him, refusing even to accept his card. Then he struck gold. The house was called *Rosemount* and the shiny brass plate on the large black door proclaimed the occupant as:

"Herbert V Wardley, Esquire"

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George did not know that Herbert V Wardley had also once been an employee of *MacLennan & Co, Ship Brokers Ltd (MacLennan's)*. Had a casual observer been made aware of this coincidence, he or she might have put it down to serendipity. Much later, had others learned of it, they might have seen it as the Hand of God at work.

The bell rang out pleasantly when he tugged on the pull. As he waited, he checked his tie was tightly fastened and his flies were securely buttoned.

The door was opened by a frail, elderly woman in a maid's uniform. She wore a black cap with a black bow at her neck and peered at him through thick glasses.

George assumed an imperious air and said, 'I've called to speak to the lady of the house about an important matter of business. I believe she may be expecting me.'

The small woman offered an ear, cupping her hand behind it.

'Mistress Wardley, I am expected,' said George, slowly and firmly.

The woman nodded and backed away, shuffling, gesturing to him to enter which he did, closing the door gently with his heel. He followed her along a short corridor which opened into a bright, high, square hall. He glanced up and caught sight of a thin, pale-faced woman dressed in black. She was two floors above, her face shining in the strong sunlight from the glazed roof. She smiled shyly towards him and he nodded his head in reply as she ducked back into a doorway. He judged her to be slightly older than he was, perhaps thirty. In this he was mistaken but Delilah had always looked younger than her age.

The maid pointed to an open door and gestured again, grasping at his bowler which she dropped. He stooped to pick it up for her. She smiled and backed away, pointing again to the open door. George entered and stood before an ornate fireplace with a large mirror above it. Set in the fireplace was a lavish arrangement of silk flowers. In the bow window stood a wrought iron pot-stand with a second arrangement of white roses. As the maid closed the door, a waft of floral scents filled his nostrils.

George let out a quite whistle of approval, summing up the situation as he understood it: a recent death, a household in mourning, plenty of money, perhaps a beautiful widow or daughter needing consoling, needing a man to help steady the ship?

He checked his fob watch and saw it was nearly three o'clock, confirmed by the mantle clock which dinged three soft bells.

At almost three-thirty a solemn woman whom he judged to be in her late forties entered the room. Although she was dressed in black, her clothes were modern, her skirt ending just above her knees, revealing fine legs and slim ankles on high heels. Her finger sported

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a large diamond engagement ring and a broad wedding band of gold. She smiled sadly from a pretty face and proffered her hand.

'Marianna Wardley. Thank you for coming. Clearly there has been a misunderstanding. We had expected you to call on Thursday, hence the short delay while I settled my step-daughter. She had a little turn when she caught sight of you. She's very shy around strangers, especially men.'

Mrs Wardley had the same fine alabaster skin of the younger woman he had glimpsed earlier on the balcony. Her voice was posh Glasgow with an underlying Irish twang.

George came to attention, gave a small bow then presented his card, the most expensively produced from his selection, the one which claimed he was a financial consultant with an MA (Hons). The card was accepted, glanced at and then placed in a small black purse.

'Mrs Wardley, you must forgive my intrusion at this sad time. Please allow me to present my condolences.'

'It cannot be helped. The business needs a man, a proper man. My cousin cannot be expected to continue running it for a second longer. As a man of the cloth in the service of the Holy See, his calling is spiritual, not commercial. And the idiot who is running it now is causing chaos. It is good that you came at once. When can you take-over, Mr, eh?' 'My name is Graham, Mrs Wardley, George Graham.'

Marianna peered at him in astonishment, fumbled in her purse and squinted at his card again. Her words came in a sobbing torrent.

'Oh, please excuse me, Mr Graham. I am not a well woman myself and with Delilah being the way she is and with Nettie Wilson almost dead on her feet and the day girl disappeared to that new factory in Pollokshaws and the agency sending completely unsuitable candidates, every next girl stupider than the previous one, I am completely at my wits end. Please, can you help us, Mr Graham. Please?'

'Of course, Mrs Wardley. Perhaps a cup of tea would help settle your nerves? Shall I ring for your maid?'

'Please God, no! No! Perhaps a sherry. Over there. There should be a bottle in the cupboard, at the back. Here is the key. I have to keep it locked, from Delilah.'

When George returned from the dresser with the sherry in a crystal glass set on a silver plate, Marianna wafted her hand towards an occasional table beside her. Within seconds of the glass being placed, she raised it to her lips, swallowed the sherry in one hungry gulp then placed it back on the plate.

'Mr Graham, surely you will not allow a lady to imbibe alone? Please help yourself to a drink. There should be whisky in there somewhere. My late husband Vic was a whisky man, God Rest his soul, poor dear.'

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'Thank you, Mrs Wardley. That is most generous of you. Do you mind if I light my pipe?'
'A pipe! Oh God, how I love the smell of a pipe! May I let you into a secret? My grandmother smoked a pipe all her life, from when she was a girl in Dublin. Oh yes, please do light your pipe! And do sit here near me. Like Wilson, my hearing is not what it might be.'

Marianna took out a small cigarette holder, inserted a cigarette and lit it with a fancy jewel encrusted lighter. At the first inhalation she barked a sharp cough after which she fished out her handkerchief and wiped away the blob of dark phlegm from her tongue.

(This ritual of lighting, inhaling, coughing up phlegm would become a feature of the afternoon and gradually the room would fill with a haze of smoke as the ashtray filled with neat stubbed out 'soldiers' from her half-smoked discards. Like her accelerated drinking, Marianna had been chain-smoking for over ten years.)

When George returned from the dresser with his whisky, she tapped her sherry glass lightly with her cigarette holder to indicate she needed a refill.

Settled with his pipe pulling well and a full glass of whisky to hand, George Graham set his face to his earnest "how can I help you smile" and said:

'Mrs Wardley, you must tell me exactly, please, what I should do for you and I will do it at once, so help me God. My heart is broken to see you like this, destitute, buffeted by the unkind winds of misfortune. How long has this terrible situation persisted?'

'Oh, Mr Graham, my own dear, dear Vic died about two weeks ago, I think it was. I'm afraid the days are becoming jumbled. Did I say I'm not fully well? Vic has, rather *had* - *Oh dear God!* I cannot get used to the idea he is no more. Where was I? Yes. Vic had many enterprises, residential property, some office buildings in town, retail shops rented to good businesses. McConnell the lawyer has all the details. But these are not the issue, not yet, anyway. *It's the funeral business, that's the issue.* The dead cannot wait to be buried, you know. That's what's causing the problem. Fortunately, Declan, Father Declan Hegarty, my dear, dear cousin Declan has been coping, but only just. The half-wit my husband employed to oversee the day-to-day operations has fallen from the horse drawn-hearse and broken his leg and the two men who work for him are imbeciles, Declan says. They can hardly be trusted to find the right addresses of the bereaved. We need a man of business like yourself to take over at once and run the enterprises for us. My dear Vic was such a treasure, he really was, even though he had certain special, eh, eh. No, no. Well, never mind. Did I say I am not fully well? Are you fully well, Mr Graham? It is very demanding work and much of it needs a good telephone manner nowadays, so they keep telling me. I will simply not have one in the house, dreadful things, spoiling everything. My sister is enamoured of the telephone and wants me to get one too, so she can telephone me from Kilmarnock. I say, "If you wish to speak to me Evelyn, dear, do so face to face. After all, that's what the train service is for." Of course, I myself would never board a train. Trains, horrible grubby things and so smelly.'

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Now in her stride, Marianna stopped briefly to tap her empty sherry glass and insert her umpteenth cigarette into her holder before lighting it theatrically, using a different lighter concealed in a cut-glass, ornamental pineapple.

George brought the sherry bottle from the dresser to top up her glass directly but she scolded him away with the words:

'No, no, Mr Graham, please, never bring the bottle to the glass, always take the glass to the bottle, as a gentleman should.'

As on each previous occasion she drank the pale golden liquor in one greedy gulp before continuing.

'Anyway, be that as it may, our better clients demand we respond to their telephone entreaties, their pleas for help, as Declan calls them. He insists the business must have a telephone. Do you have a telephone, Mr Graham? And are you aware, Mr Graham, how much it costs to bury a man or woman, with all the trimmings, as it were? Run properly, it is a very profitable business, as Vic always said, my poor, poor dear departed. Indeed, it must be said, my dear, dear Vic was a far better businessman than my first husband and much more satisfactory in every department. Much, much more. Ah, Vic, Vic. Such nice memories. All gone. All long gone. Sadly, my dear Vic was also, well, how shall I put it, becoming 'frailer' in that essential department.'

As if to make a point she made an unashamed move which George found highly disconcerting.

Slowly uncrossing her shapely legs Marianna hitched up her skirt well above her knees and slowly lowered her right hand to rub her calf muscles one after the other.

George glanced up to see her lips form a pouting kiss while her eyes moved slowly downwards, checking his groin area, smiling when she found that there was indeed a firm bulge below his trouser material.

George closed his eyes to her challenge and moved both hands to cover his embarrassment.

'Mr George Graham, may I ask how old you are?'

'Twenty-four.'

'And you are in good health?'

'Yes, thank you.'

'Married?'

'No.'

'What a waste.'

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Her hands reached for the hem of her skirt, this time hitching it higher, revealing soft white thighs and the black frilled edge of pink knickers. Settling with one leg dangling from the knee of the other, slowly rocking her foot backwards and forwards, pointing her toe in his direction, she leered at him, again pouting a kiss.

George, uncertain, smiled back broadly while waiting for a further clue as to what was expected of him.

However, Marianna was at once off again, veering to her past, describing her earlier life, the period before Vic Wardley, the period when she first arrived in Glasgow from Dublin and how she became the housekeeper and then wife to the widower who was the father of her step-daughter, revealing that he too was called George.

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In this way, the afternoon disappeared in a cloud of smoke during which Marianna consumed nearly two bottles of sherry. The widow rambled from topic to topic, happy to have a new set of ears willing to listen and a soft, mannerly voice to encourage her. Although George was careful not to show it, he was listening with great intensity, trying to get a handle on the opportunities which might arise from this new liaison.

During his frequent trips to the dresser, George discovered it contained several dozen sherry bottles, many empty, many still unopened. He counted seven whisky bottles still unopened and re-arranged them so that the half bottle he had drained was now at the back.

As the mantle clock struck seven, Mrs Marianna Wardley made her excuses and teetered to the door where she turned, curtseyed and smiled to George, her diction slurred, her eyes heavy:

'Do wait, Mr Graham, dear man. Do not abandon us in our hour of need. Please, please wait!'

George, who was most willing to wait, happily refilled his pipe and his glass, locked the dresser and slipped the key into his waistcoat pocket, deciding he would refrain from further drink until the lady returned. He cleaned the ashtrays into the waste bin in the corner and eased the sash windows top and bottom. Gradually, the fug of smoke cleared and the scent of the flowers re-asserted themselves.

Time passed. George dozed and slowly recovered from the whisky. His bladder was full but he tholed his discomfort, determined to play out this prospect to the end. He checked the door in the far corner and found it led to a short corridor which connected by a second door to an adjacent room. There was a cushion on the floor which he propped

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up against the wall. A further door off the corridor opened into a small toilet with a water closet and washbasin. George took the opportunity to relieve himself and wash his face, comb his hair and apply a splash of cologne from the selection of bottles on the shelf above the basin.

The mantle clock dinged through eight to nine o'clock and still Mrs Wardley did not return. At around nine-thirty a quiet tap on the door preceded the entry of Miss Delilah Wardley.

George judged her to be a few years older than him, and a half-head taller. She was shapely and wore no shoes. (He would learn later she was not allowed shoes, a ploy designed to discourage her from leaving *Rosemount* and wandering off in search of 'fun'.) There was no sign this young woman was in mourning: she was wearing a bright red dress, a party frock with a deep cleavage revealing a huge swathe of her ample breasts. Her eyes were a striking bright green, her lips a shiny scarlet red which matched her dress. Her porcelain-white skin was very lightly made up and she had a black beauty spot on her left cheek.

As she entered, she sobbed. A hand flew to cover her face with a large embroidered handkerchief. In her other hand she held his business card. He stood and moved towards her, his hand outstretched. She smelled strongly of lavender.

'My dear, dear Miss Wardley, come, come, there, there. Please take a seat by the window. Shall I ring for some tea?'

'No, please. No, I seldom take tea. I'll be fine in a moment or two. Please, forgive me. You do know I'm not fully well, as Marianna will have told you, as she insists on telling the whole world.'

She looked down at the business card in her hand, smiled, then slid it into her cleavage, her eyes boldly watching him as she did so.

'Forgive my enquiry, Miss Wardley, but your mother said she was feeling unwell. I've been sitting here worrying about her. She seemed rather, eh, 'overtired'. Has she perhaps, eh, 'withdrawn' for the evening?'

'Oh yes, yes, Mr Graham, how kindly put. Yes, yes, my dear, dear step-mummy's 'overtired'. Very, very 'overtired', as she often is.' Delilah giggled a high-pitched discordant laugh. 'And yes, at long last Marianna's taken to her slumbers, safely tucked up with her Teddy. And dear old Wilson too is also a-bed but that wouldn't matter for she's as deaf as a Dodo and blind as a bat. So, it's just us two who are still awake, little me and little you.'

Delilah's eyes changed, becoming manic. Staring at George, her voice became harsh, demanding:

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'Now, I assume you do have the key? I searched her clothing and her room thoroughly. She stole it from my bedside drawer. You must have the key! I want that key!' 'Ah, this key?'

At the sight of the key for the dresser, her manner changed. Smiling she lunged from her chair towards George, her voice now again light but odd, sing-song, then pleading.

'Oh, there it is! How wonderful! **Please** may I have it, *please*.'

Almost running, Delilah flitted to his side and snatched the key as her voice cracked into a high girlish register, words tumbling from her lips in an uneven, disconcerting cadence, like an over-excited child at a birthday party snatching at a gift.

'Hooray! Sherry time! Sherry time at last! Will you take another whisky, my dear Mr Graham? I used to do drinks for old Vic, my step-daddy, after my step-mummy had become 'overtired' and was fast asleep with her Teddy.'

Delilah let out a tinny, high-pitched giggle and skipped away to bring their drinks.

On her return Delilah did not take a chair but kneeled beside George. Draping her free hand across his leg, she began stroking his inner thighs, sighing and sipping steadily from her sherry, her eyes staring up at him, unfocussed.

'Mr Graham, you do smell very nice, just like old Vic. My late step-daddy was a whisky connoisseur. Do you like this one? *Lagavulin* was one of his favourites. There used to be lots more bottles but I'm afraid dear cousin Declan has rather depleted Vic's stock, removing it to the Chapel House when he thinks we're not looking. Naughty, naughty Declan. It's so nice to have a real man to share a drink with again. Declan prefers choir boys, Marianna says.'

'Yes, thanks, eh, eh, yes, it's, eh, very piquant, most distinctive,' said George, adjusting his leg to accommodate the erection growing inside his trousers.

'So, Mr Graham, George, you do like it, you do like sharing a drink with a beautiful young woman, a very lonely beautiful young woman. You do think I'm beautiful, don't you?'

'Eh, yes, Miss Delilah. You are a very beautiful young woman.'

'And I am much, much prettier than dear step-mummy?'

'Eh, yes. Yes, you are. Yes, you are very much prettier.'

At this Delilah sprang up, to return quickly with a larger glass filled to the brim with sherry. Once again, she draped her arm and resumed stroking his inner thighs, making his head pound and his mind race ahead to the possible undesirable consequences which might arise if Mrs Wardley or the servant entered the room and caught him in this compromised position.

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'Oh, do re-light your pipe, Mr Graham. I love the smell of a man's pipe. Is that a Dutch blend you have? My first daddy, my real daddy, smoked a pipe when we lived in Springburn, before we were rich. It was real daddy who started the undertaking business. Marianna pretends she owns everything but it's not true. It's all in my name, ask Declan or McConnell. And what you could not know, how could you? Is that real daddy's name was also *George Graham*. Now fancy that! What a twist of fate that you should be sent to help us. Our new *George Graham*! Ah, I see from your face you did not know? So, McConnell didn't tell you?'

'I'm sorry, Miss Wardley, you have me at a loss? McConnell is?'

'Our lawyer, of course, silly. It is obvious he sent you to us because of your name, "*George Graham*", just like real-daddy. And all the time we have been thinking of him as a dolt. He comes to see us almost every day. Step-mummy gets him to stand over there, by the fire. She never lets him sit down because he is such a bore and speaks so slowly, like a dripping tap.'

Delilah was gone again, to return almost at once with another large glass of sherry.

Kneeling before him with the glass at her side on the carpet, she leaned forward and massaged both of his thighs at once.

'Oh dear, dear Mr Graham, you are just like old Vic, he liked *Lagavulin* best and the company of a pretty young woman. Not like poor old McConnell, he doesn't like whisky or pretty girls, only his stuffy testaments and heaps of papers tied with red ribbons. Do you agree I have a very pretty face and special eyes?'

'Oh, eh, yes, yes. Aaaah! Oh, yes, let me see. No, yes, I merely got a telephone call which my secretary took. She said I was to come here as soon as possible but she did not say who had requested the service. My business is a bit like that, I'm afraid.'

'Oh dear, Mr Graham, I would so love to have a telephone but so far I am denied. Excuse me, I must have another sherry. It's been a torture waiting for Marianna to 'overtire'. Delilah giggled again in her tiny high-pitched squeal and rose to move to the dresser.

On her return, she flounced into the chair she had sat in earlier, and lay back, splayed her legs and pulled up the hem of her frock to reveal thighs clad in white stockings decorated with tiny scarlet flowers. George averted his eyes but not before he saw her long red pantaloons knickers.

'Do you think my legs are much prettier than Marianna's?'

'Eh, yes. I do.'

'Much, much prettier?'

'Are you sure? Marianna does have quite pretty legs to, doesn't she?'

'No. I mean, yes. Yes, yours are the prettiest legs I've ever seen.'

'Please forgive me, Mr Graham, I have a confession to make. I've been party to everything which has passed between you and my step-mother this afternoon. I was just over there, through that door, in the passage, kneeling on a cushion, with my eye to the keyhole.'

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After another giggling fit, she continued: 'The door leads to a toilet which can be also accessed from the adjoining room. Almost from the minute Marianna entered this room, I was in there, watching and listening. Oh, I see from your trouser you need to use it, just as step-daddy always needed to use it when I made him big. So, yes, of course, please do. After all, you have been trapped here with Marianna for so many long hours.'
'Ahem, yes. I will thank you. Please excuse me for a moment.'

On his return, fully relieved, he found Delilah had settled herself on a settee, sitting cross-legged, naked except for her red pantaloon knickers. Her red dress, underclothes and white stockings were draped over his chair with his business card laid neatly on top.

The sun was stooping to the West throwing its light on her alabaster face. She wore no jewellery except a small silver crucifix with a tiny Jesus, which she fingered absentmindedly with her left hand while sipping steadily from the water glass filled with sherry, a freshly opened bottle on the floor in front of her. She patted the cushion to her side. Glancing at her eyes, he saw she was leering at him.

In that moment, George MacLennan Graham thought Miss Delilah Wardley was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen and decided she would make a very suitable wife.

'Ah, there you are Mr Graham. You must be starving?'

'No, not at all. No, no. I'm fine, thank you.'

'Just a joke, really,' she replied with another high giggle. 'We live like refugees here. Wilson is more or less gaga and neither of us have cooking skills so we live on bread and cheese. Now, *if* we had a telephone, Mr Graham, we could get someone to bring food from that fancy place in Shawlands. One of our girls told me they send out food and a man to serve it but Marianna will not even discuss the idea of a telephone with me.'

'Surely you could go to a restaurant and eat there?'

'No, no. I cannot leave the house, ever. I have a rare condition of the mind and until I am acclimatised to a person, I may have a 'bad turn' and that would mean I would have to go to the clinic again. No, no. I must stay here. Indoors. Always. Always.'

'Oh, Miss Wardley, what a terrible misfortune for you. How sad.'

'Mr Graham, do you think I am beautiful?'

'Yes, very beautiful. The most beautiful woman I've ever seen.'

'May I call you *George*, please? You may call me *Lilah*, like my step-daddy did. I miss old Vic so much. He used to come and tuck me in every night, after Marianna became 'overtired', (she giggled), and Vic had put her to bed with a medicine to help her sleep. He used to tell me bedtime stories and cuddle me. I like being cuddled.'

'Oh, I see.'

'So, George Graham, can I call you *Georgie*, then?'

'Yes, of course.'

'*Georgie*, say, "*Lilah*" to me, *please*. Say "*Lilah*, you are the most beautiful girl in the entire world". *Please, Georgie*, say it, say it!'

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'Lilah, you are the most beautiful girl in the entire world, far more beautiful than Marianna. You are the most beautiful girl I've ever seen.'

'Georgie, Lilah is ready for bed now. Carry Lilah to bed like old Vic used to do. Don't worry about Marianna, she will not waken until late morning. I gave her a medicine and I put the key to her door on my bedside cabinet, just like old Vic used to do.'

'Are you sure, Lilah? I mean. . .'

'Oh Georgie, you are so handsome and strong. Carry me up to bed and I'll make you big, like I did for old Vic. I promise.'

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On his first morning at *Rosemount*, waking beside a snoring, naked Delilah, it was still dark. George slipped out of her bed stealthily, dressed and made a quiet but thorough tour of the building.

An hour later, as dawn crept into the sky, he left all three women sleeping and exited by the basement, locked up and made off, walking quickly, a set of keys for all the main doors and important cupboards and dressers in his pocket. George was now operating to the tight time schedule necessary to bring his plan to fruition. Intent on reaching his parents' house in Hamilton Crescent as quickly as he could, he boarded the first tram of the day at Shawlands Cross, got off at Bridge Street, jostled with the early workers on the Underground, alighting at Hillhead station on Byres Road.

Washed, shaved and changed, he was the first person to enter Stirling's Commercial Library near George Square in the city centre when it opened. Here he checked out businesses in the name of Wardley and Graham. Armed with this information he took a horse-taxi to *McConnell's* solicitors, based at an address on Kilmarnock Road, Lower Shawlands. There he introduced himself to Martin McConnell, a sole practitioner, a tired older man who was immediately pleased at the prospect of being relieved of the duty of calling on the 'difficult' Mrs Wardley at *Rosemount*, a place he dreaded.

By nine-thirty, George had visited several recruitment agencies and found a cook and maid, sight unseen, who could start immediately at the Wardley home, insisting they must arrive at 11 a.m., exactly, no sooner, no later. From their mixed record of employment, George sensed these two ladies, a mother and daughter pairing, were unlikely to be ideal. He would supervise them closely and replace them when he had more time to choose the right people. At the Cooperative grocery store, he forced his way to the head of the queue, collared the manager and bought a selection of foodstuffs including cold meats, bacon and eggs, cheese and milk, fruits and vegetables of various sorts, tea, coffee, a fancy box of assorted biscuits, a dozen brown rolls and several loaves of sliced white bread. These items he arranged should be delivered by bicycle messenger boy to arrive at 11:30 a.m. *exactly*, no sooner, no later.

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Taking a second horse-taxi, he then visited the premises of *G. Graham, Funeral Director* at 5 Pollok Street in Pollokshaws, arriving just before 10 a.m., by his watch. Asking the driver to wait while he entered, he introduced himself as the new manager appointed by Martin McConnell. During the next fifteen minutes he made a snap inspection of the premises.

Seated again in the horse-taxi, George made the short trip to St Mary's Chapel House where he paid off the driver. He caught a bleary-eyed Father Declan Hegarty as he was leaving, 'rushing', he explained, to catch a train. Their conversation was brief. Hegarty, was reeking of stale sweat and the stench of recently consumed whisky and cigarettes. The short man was grossly fat, making his age uncertain. On this first encounter he seemed to George to be about sixty years old, perhaps more. Later, he would learn Hegarty was in his early forties.

Pompously, Hegarty explained he could not be delayed as he was expected at a meeting in central Glasgow. George walked beside Father Hegarty as he waddled down the hill to Pollokshaws East railway station, George pouring out his spiel, keeping as close to the truth as he dared. At first dismissive, Hegarty came around when he heard that George's appointment had been endorsed by Martin McConnell at the request of Mrs Marianna Wardley. Like McConnell the lawyer, Hegarty the priest seemed genuinely relieved George Graham had been appointed to run the funeral and other businesses controlled by the Wardleys.

As they waited together on the station platform, George learned Hegarty was due at the Roman Catholic Archdiocesan offices where he worked in the service of a Monsignor Criety who was, among many other things, the Rector of *Tower Ridge*, a school for gifted children located in the country to the south and west of Glasgow, in the *Glennifer Braes*.

As a final act, as if to seal the bargain as his train squealed to a stop, Father Declan Hegarty touched the ornate crucifix hanging across his corpulent stomach, crossed himself, administered a Latin blessing upon the astonished younger man before saying under his breath:

"God Bless you, my son. I just hope you know what you're letting yourself in for. Let me know if Marianna gets too much for you and I'll do what I can. Delilah, now, I'm afraid you're on your own with that one. She's already given her soul to Satan a hundred times over. May the Good Lord preserve your own immortal soul."

The train arrived, Hegarty opened the nearest door and hauled himself inside. Smiling, George slammed the door behind him. A whistle blew, the engine chugged, releasing clouds of steam into the downwash of smoky fumes from the funnel as it chugged away towards Glasgow. George was already walking smartly for the stairs heading to his new future, whistling *On the Bonnie, Bonnie Banks o' Loch Lomond*.

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At 10:45 a.m. by George's watch, he was back at *Rosemount*. With a large bunch of flowers in his hand and a beaming smile, he stepped up to the front door, eventually found the correct two keys, opened up and let himself in, relocking the door behind him. So far, his bold ruse was working. For a total investment of less than twenty pounds of his own money, George felt he was now in touching distance of grabbing a prize which would set him up for the rest of his life.

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By smiling, fawning and, when required, by telling barefaced lies, George Graham continued at *Rosemount*, gradually becoming a part of the lives of both of 'his' Wardley ladies. As George had expected and feared, Hegarty and McConnell visited *Rosemount* several times, at first coming alone and once together. Happily for George, on each occasion they were quickly shooed away by Marianna who was pleased with her part of the bargain in her new life, delighted with the way George had taken charge of the running of her home and his glowing reports of the progress being achieved at *Graham's*, an enterprise which she wisely saw as paramount to maintaining her wealth and position as the lady of the grandest house in High Shawlands.

At the end of the first week, George took a huge gamble and sold his burial book to a colleague and resigned his position as a commission agent with *The Edinburgh Life Assurance and Investment Company*.

For the first time in his life, George MacLennan Graham buckled down to his various roles, working almost non-stop, juggling his time to meet the demands of running both *Graham's* and *Rosemount*.

After a week of confusion and mistakes, he got into his stride.

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On Agnes Fowler's recommendation, to assist Margaret Ferris now that she herself was no longer fit enough to do so, a girl was taken on to train as a clerkess/typist. Brenda McCaskill was well-made with a long, sad, mannish face, a girl who could have passed as a shorter teenage version of Agnes Fowler. Brenda was already a 'fallen woman' but her secret was kept from George Graham who knew nothing of or *The Grange* or *The Horspool Foundation for Foundlings*.

Brenda's background was not uncommon for girls from poor families sent out to 'service' in the homes of the rich. Aged fifteen while working as a scullery maid in a fifty-room mansion near Newtonards, Brenda had been enticed by the promise of marriage to run away with Winston Foley, the most junior of the three under-butlers. Winston, aged twenty-three was an accomplished flautist and member of the Newtonards Flute Band. He had told Brenda he was "lined up" by a friend high up in the Pollokshaws Orange Lodge

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to take over as Head Butler for a rich family in Pollokshields. This was to happen when the man's father retired, which was to be soon. Foley promised Brenda that once he was established, he would get her a good position, perhaps as an Upstairs Maid or even Assistant Housekeeper.

After two months in squalid digs in the Gorbals while awaiting his friend to 'come good' on his promise, Winston had disappeared leaving Brenda pregnant.

Since arriving in Glasgow, the girl had become an adherent of Cumberland Street Parish Church, where her second cousin Ethel was the wife of the Church Officer. Through Ethel, Brenda had been directed to *The Grange* who had 'recovered' her from her ante-natal depression by keeping her busy working in the laundry and kitchen, earning her keep and learning how the establishment operated.

When Brenda's baby arrived, a healthy girl, *The Horspool Foundation* arranged for the infant to be adopted by a family able to give her a good chance in life. Through her visiting work at *The Grange*, Agnes had met and nurtured Brenda, paying for her intensive courses at Skerry's Commercial College and finding her a job as a junior clerkess in the *Govanhill Free Hospital*.

What made Brenda particularly suitable for the work at *Graham's* was, like Margaret Ferris, the girl had almost no sense of smell. Over the months to come, Brenda would progress to become an able deputy to Margaret both in the office and the embalming ante-room.

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By seven o'clock each morning, George was in the office at 5 Pollok Street assisting Margaret Ferris, learning the ins and outs of the administration of a funeral business. By nine o'clock he would be seated beside a driver in one of the five hearses, out to make one or more 'collections'.

Later, donning the regalia of a Principal Undertaker he would lead the cortege at one or more 'interments', learning to lead the designated burial team, avoiding pitfalls by accepting coaching from Margaret and urgent whispered advices from colleagues, quickly adapting his skills to make himself 'acceptable' to the families and friends of the deceased.

Within a month, with Martin McConnel's help and by vigorously pulling strings at the local Masonic Lodge, George got a telephone business line installed at 5 Pollok Street and personally coached Margaret Ferris how to answer and make calls with confidence.

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Both the telephone and Brenda proved a great success and soon the 'behind-the-scenes' side of the business was running smoothly again.

George also realised how the power of the telephone would help him to organise his personal and domestic commitments. In his second month in residence at *Rosemount*, he arranged for a second business telephone line to be installed in a room which George had designated as his 'home-office', keeping the door locked and the key hidden in a vase on an occasional table in the main hallway.

To help recover order from the chaos at *Graham's* stables and coffin workshop, again at Agnes Fowler's suggestion, a former Principal Horseman and Lead Driver called Tommy Sweeney (Old Tommy) was brought back from retirement on a temporary basis during the recuperation of his son (Young Tommy), whose broken leg was proving slow to heal.

Briefed by Agnes in George's company, Old Tommy was directed to again take charge of the stables as in the past and, in addition, to act as mentor to keep his new boss right as George Graham made his first attempts to perform the front-of-house duties of a Funeral Director. Although it was not a role George had ever envisaged might become his life's work, he discovered he had a talent for it. Of course, being 'Mr George Graham' of *G Graham, Funeral Director*, helped greatly by establishing his 'position' and George 'acted up' with aplomb. Within a few weeks he had gained the poise required to make himself both respected and well-liked by the families and friends of the bereaved.

By word of mouth the undertakers' grapevine soon learned the 'crisis' at *Graham's* was over, and that the new man in charge in Pollokshaws was a 'natural'.

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During the early weeks of his new life at *Rosemount*, from around mid-day onwards, George endeavoured to be present and make himself available to his two ladies. He was soon to learn this role included 'minding' Delilah, so that Marianna could take a horse-taxi to shop for clothes, visit coffee-shops and tea-rooms and meet with friends for long alcoholic lunches, returning by late afternoon slightly inebriated, ready for a drinking session with her new 'butler cum drinking companion and confidant'. During these encounters, George was obliged to listen to different versions of the tales he had heard on the first afternoon when it had all been new and almost interesting. At first, George had dreaded Marianna might try to snare him to her bed, fearing the complications and jealousies this might throw up with Delilah. However, apart from flashing her thighs at him on a regular basis, it seemed all she wanted was that he ensure a ready supply of her favourite sherry was always available and that he serve it to her on demand, 'as a gentleman should'.

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Wisely, George insisted on keeping the dresser key on his person and kept his own drinking strictly under control. He was after the true prize which he now knew was Delilah.

Although these drinking sessions with her step-mother had become boring, what kept him going was George saw from the business accounts how true Marianna's assertion had been: *Graham's* was indeed a very profitable business. And, as compensation, when Marianna was in bed after taking her 'medicine', normally he could expect to enjoy the delights of Delilah's teasing foreplay followed by luscious sex.

When the day servants had departed, with Marianna comatose in her room, his 'romance' developed with her step-daughter, who asserted frequently she was the legal owner of all he surveyed. George soon discovered Delilah was experienced, an expert to his novice, with an extensive repertoire of sex games to offer. Alone in the large many-roomed house, with Wilson confined behind the locked door which led down to the servants' quarters in the basement, the couple played out many versions of her teasing games. A common pattern evolved in which Delilah, partially clothed in a variety of flimsy outfits but always with a large tumbler of sherry in her hand, would 'hide' in one of the many darkened rooms. With a top-up sherry bottle in hand, it was then George's task to 'seek' her by following the sound of her high-pitched giggles. His 'rewards' on discovery, dispensed in various nooks and crannies of the darkened house, might include mutual masturbation involving hands, breasts and toes or mutual oral or, occasionally, anal sex, using one of her wide selection of dildos.

These long evenings always ended in her bedroom where she washed down her own 'night fears' medicine with a tumbler of sherry. (This sleeping draft was dispensed daily by Marianna and left by Delilah's bedside table.) Delilah, now fully inebriated and slurring her words but still needy, demanded her 'Georgie' serve her conventionally if he was able to do so, he on top and she on her back, wide-legged in a star shape. If he was already spent he must serve her vigorously by hand or her chosen dildo as directed, continuing until she slipped under into her oblivion.

Where a less ambitious man might have tired and decided to slip away and seek a more normal, more sedate life, George stuck to his task. Without being aware of it, over time he too was becoming dependent on this continual diet of alcohol and bizarre sex.

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Three months later, George MacLennan Graham married Delilah Graham Wardley in a private civil ceremony at *Rosemount*.² This was done under a special licence arranged by

² Several months later, George Graham would learn Delilah's father (real-daddy) had been a secular Jew called Gavri Gershom who had traded under the name of "G. Graham" for purposes of convenience. During the final weeks before the arrival of their twin sons George and Albert, George the father would learn his new wife had

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his brother who sent an official from Martha Street Registration Office to conduct the service and sign the papers, papers witnessed by Sandy Graham as his Best Man and Martin McConnell acting as 'The Father Figure', on behalf of the Wardley family.

Afraid it might put George off, McConnell did not reveal until much later that under the terms of the trust document dating from before her father had married Marianna, Delilah's estate was to be divided equally between her surviving offspring regardless of gender, with no provision for any future husband or husbands.

This document had been drafted by Mary Scullion, the long dead wife of Martin McConnell. Mary had been an unconventional woman who, from the age of eighteen had always dressed as a man, kept her hair short, sporting a bowler hat even indoors, seldom seen without a large Meerschaum clamped between her teeth.

Mary Scullion-McConnell had been a life-long agitator for the rights of women. Some said she might have become Scotland's Emmeline Pankhurst, had she survived to that era. Although she had not attended university, Mary had been her father's protégé. Terrence Scullion had founded the business which took on the McConnell name only after Mary's early death from throat cancer, aged only thirty-four, leaving McConnell with a precocious daughter to rear, a toddler imbued with the same stubborn cleverness as her mother.

A week after their legal union, following an acrimonious wrangle with Marianna and a side payment by George, Father Declan Hegarty blessed the couple's marriage in return for a donation of £50 in cash for the 'work of the parish', money which the priest slipped into his wallet with a wry smile.

On 15th March 1904, seven months after their marriage, the first of the new breed of Grahams arrived, a fine strapping boy who was named George Wardley Graham. Several minutes later, quite unexpectedly, he was joined by a twin brother, Albert MacLennan Graham, a runt child who had not been expected to survive and had been given the Last Rites an hour after his birth.

The drama and pain of this event tipped Delilah into a depression from which, untreated, she struggled for the rest of her life, causing her to slither into full-blown alcoholism. Fortunately for the twin boys and their father, by this time the household was being run on a day-to-day basis by a stern woman called Miss Amelia Netherton, an evangelical Christian who did her level best to stop both women gaining access to alcohol. This task was made almost impossible by their use of George's telephone and an account with a helpful licensed grocer in Shawlands, a devious man who colluded with them by hiding the

been sent to 'clinics' to have several abortions arising from a history of nymphomania, treated as 'mental instability aggravated by alcoholism'.

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deliveries in various agreed locations in the outhouses entered from the rear lane to the premises.

However, where Amelia did succeed in her evangelical work, was in her care for both boys whom she took with her to the Pollokshaws Gospel Hall, an Open Brethren Assembly near the stables and field where the flourishing business of *G. Graham, Funeral Director* kept its horses, the same Christian, the same evangelical outreach meeting place in which Agnes Fowler had once been a Sunday School teacher.

Cast in his new role as funeral director, *George* soon discovered there were many hidden aspects to the profession, opportunities to help the bereaved, many of whom were elderly, some entirely alone and in need of support and counselling. For those who needed legal advice, *George* directed them to *Martin McConnell* under a *quid pro quo* arrangement in which *McConnell* recommended *Graham's* when the grim reaper visited his established clients.

George Graham and *Martin McConnell*, working as a team, took their opportunities, guiding those among the recently bereaved who needed help with estate planning and investments. This work they did quietly, carefully, professionally and entirely legally while making sure in the process they received suitable commissions from the investment funds to whom they directed business. In this work *George* was merely following in the footsteps of both *Herbert V Wardley* and the original founder *George Graham* of *Springburn*. Burying the dead was indeed a most profitable business.

Some younger widows appreciated the comforting arm and the little follow-up attentions which the 'awfully nice' *Mr Graham* offered in the months following their bereavement, visits which often led *George* to pleasant afternoon interludes behind drawn curtains. *George*, now an experienced lover, knew how to play the seduction game and, during the later stages of *Delilah's* pregnancy when she had lost interest in sex, he had built up a small harem of ladies happy to accommodate his lustful needs. By this stage *George* was careful to use protectives which he carried secreted in a hidden pocket in his waistcoat, ever ready to exploit an opportunity, should the occasion present itself.

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Within two years of stepping from the tram at High Shawlands to tout 'investment opportunities' door to door, the young con man *George MacLennan Graham* now had a wife and two infant sons and had firmly established himself as the head of the household at *Rosemount*, the largest and grandest house in his district.

He was also running a successful and highly profitable business, with money steadily accumulating in his personal bank account from fees garnered from his sideline operation with *McConnell*, wealth undeclared to his new wife and mother-in-law. However, what he needed urgently, was a man to run the stables and workshop side of the funeral business.

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Continuing with Old Tommy Sweeney was becoming increasingly difficult; the man's body was racked by arthritis and his memory was starting to falter. Young Tommy's leg had turned septic and had been amputated above the knee. Agnes Fowler had found him a position as a lift operator in Glasgow, in the service of Glasgow Corporation.

It was in this circumstance that George interviewed William (Willie) McFetridge, a member of the Pollokshaws Orange Lodge and Master Mason who came recommended by a funeral undertaker based in the Gorbals area, where McFetridge's brother worked. Willie was a tall, well-built and impressive man who spoke well with a distinctive Irish twang. In a short test, he demonstrated to George he could read and write well and claimed he had worked with horses from a child. When he pitched up at Graham's offices at 5 Pollok Street, McFetridge was still dressed in the uniform which had been provided by his previous employer, a well-to-do family in Newlands. By his side was a slightly-built fresh-faced girl clearly pregnant. They had been 'released' because of Jean's condition, Willie explained, adding he needed both employment and accommodation.

To George, William McFetridge seemed to be a godsend.

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Morningside

Mrs Verity Shepherd (nee Mullholland), previously a Roman Catholic but now a fervent Episcopalian by marriage, had been scheming for years and by late 1903 had eventually been appointed to several prestigious church committees, necessitating travel to meetings in Pollokshields and Glasgow's West End.

On her husband's death, rather pretentiously, Verity had added the name *Morningside* in gold lettering to the fanlight over the main door of her semi-villa, doing this as a reminder of her Edinburgh roots. It also provided implied status when imprinted on her personalised letterheaded paper, she believed.

Verity, originally from Edinburgh, strived to retain her version of 'Edinburgh posh' intonation in her speech, an affectation which she believed set her apart from her Glasgow peers. Her father had been a lowly clerk in a firm of solicitors which is how she had met Edmund, her deceased husband.

Morningside, where she lived with her brother-in-law Harold, was quite small by the standards of Newlands. Located in an unlit nondescript side-street, it comprised only three public rooms on the ground floor with four bedrooms and a family bathroom on the first floor. At the rear, formed of dark black-red engineering brick, there was a kitchen and scullery wing and maid's room adjacent to a 'servants' only' water closet and wash basin. The front and side façades were of inferior quality blonde sandstone, now stained nearly black by smut spewed out by millions of coal-fired chimneys whose smoky fumes often gave rise to acrid smog which hung over the city for days on end. Several times a day, never vocalised, Verity wished *Morningside* had been built of the higher quality red sandstone of surrounding buildings.

Embarrassingly for Verity Shepherd, her conjoined neighbour was a coal merchant, a man with whom she pointedly avoided conversation. This roughly-spoken man frequently left a horse and coal cart standing outside the frontage to his house, lowering the tone with its heaps of steaming ordure.

Harold, as his older brother had been, was also a lawyer. Generally accepted as having a 'brilliant mind' but with a shy, retiring nature, he was unsuited for the cut and thrust of commercial or criminal law. Harold Shepherd was an academic, a part-time lecturer at Glasgow University, where he taught senior students the law of contract. Now in his late forties, Harold had never married, amusing himself as a gentleman hobbyist whose chief passion was music, playing the organ and leading the choir in the local Episcopal church.

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Harold lived mainly in his suite of three rooms on the upper floor. One bedroom was dedicated as a music room, dominated by a large, battery-powered organ. A second bedroom was rigged as a photographic studio with a walk-in cupboard he used as a dark-room. The third, his personal bedroom, contained a writing bureau where he prepared his lectures and ate his food separately, leaving the lower part of the house entirely to Verity and her many visiting ladies, each one hell bent on outdoing the others with scurrilous and decidedly un-Christian-like gossip. Harold's hours of work were varied, unpredictable, and he came and went as if on a whim, using his keys to enter the front door unannounced, deliberately avoiding contact with his sister-in-law.

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During the autumn of 1903, the household at *Morningside* was currently staffed by Mrs Williamson, cook and housekeeper, and Jean Mulvaney, a live-in maid who hailed from Fenwick, fifteen miles away to the west of Glasgow, near to Kilmarnock.

This small, slim teenager was an attractive dark-haired beauty, the eldest of eight children from an Irish immigrant family who had relocated to Scotland in search of work and a better life. When her mother died in childbirth, Jean had been expected to take her place and raise her siblings. After a few months of struggling under this responsibility, the thirteen-year-old had decided to follow the path of many others from her school. There were good jobs to be had as live-in maids in nice houses in Glasgow, the schoolyard grapevine advised, living in comfortable surroundings in rich people's homes where you were well looked after. Magda Walsh told the tale of her eldest sister Orla who had started as a lowly maid in a large house in Glasgow. Orla, by succumbing to the advances of her widowed employer had married him and was now mistress of his household with 'dozens' of servants of her own, Magda had opined.

One morning, when she could not quell the high pitched screams of her hungry infant sister, Jean made her decision to flee. Shortly after her father went to the auction mart at Kilmarnock with his employer, a farmer called 'Mr Symington of *Nether Mains of Fenwick*', Jean seized her chance. Leaving her brother Peter, aged twelve, in charge of the rest of the brood, Jean ran off with the family purse and her mother's engagement ring.

Dismounting from the Glasgow bound stage-coach at Shawlands Cross, she asked at a hardware shop and was directed to an employment agency located in a small shop-office in Skirving Street, just off Kilmarnock Road. On entering the premises, Jean gave her details to Miss Evelyn Simpson the proprietrix, altering her date of birth by two years to make her almost sixteen, saying she was from Galston, not Fenwick.

Based on this mis-information, Miss Simpson prepared a letter of introduction addressed to Mrs Edwina (Edna) Williamson at *Morningside*, getting Jean to repeat the name and address and then coaching her with directions on how to find it on foot. The thirteen-

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year-old Jean was being sent to become a live-in servant, to be employed initially on a temporary basis, on trial as a replacement for a similar 'country' girl to herself, a girl who had left suddenly, without giving due notice.

Like her employer, Edna Williamson was also a widow: she had lost her husband to the Boer War. Edna did not live-in, visiting daily from dawn until early evening, except on Sundays when she did not start until two o'clock to allow her to attend the Pollokshaws Salvation Army Citadel, where she was a Sunday School teacher.

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During Jean's first weeks at *Morningside*, she had crept about quietly, overawed by the luxury of her surroundings, afraid to touch anything in case she broke it, terrified she would fall foul of the demanding Mrs Shepherd. However, Jean slowly realised that while her employers were toffs, they were not as rich as their neighbours because the semi-villa where she now lived was one of the smallest and least impressive in the short and smelly side-street where it was located. Although Jean knew she was dirt poor, the Shepherds were not the richest people in the world. In a way she could not explain, this realisation seemed to give her confidence.

As her first weeks passed into months, Jean Mulvaney gradually settled. Under the plentiful fare served up by Mrs Williamson, she filled out, blossomed. She also looked much smarter: her every item of clothing, from underwear to stockings and shoes was provided by the Shepherds. Jean now had three changes of everything. Unlike the ragged clothes worn when she first arrived, now her clothes were always freshly laundered and newly starched by a laundry service which called twice a week to collect and deliver. Regarding personal hygiene, one of her employer's many obsessions, Jean was permitted to bathe twice a week in the family bathroom. Under Mrs Williamson's supervision, Jean was allowed only five minutes. In preparation, Edna sprinkled lavender-scented bathing flakes into tepid water restricted to a mere three inches in depth.

In her new sweet-smelling life, Jean took to washing and brushing her long black hair regularly and staring at herself in a little mirror nailed above the washbasin in her tiny maid's room. This mirror hung below a huge print of a long-haired smiling Jesus sitting side-saddle on a donkey, surrounded by laughing men, women and children waving branches.

Although she was on constant call at the ring of the servant's bell, the girl's duties were light compared to her labours back in Fenwick. From age ten Jean had been responsible to the farmer's wife for feeding the pigs and managing the hen house, everything done under the woman's strident commands with the occasional slap or kick if she annoyed her mistress or showed defiance. At *Morningside*, the most arduous part of Jean's duties was lugging her large coal scuttle and ash bin around the house to keep the fires ablaze,

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a task she was required to do several times every day, even in summer, learning from Edna that Mrs Shepherd hated cold and draughts.

By November, Jean Mulvaney had developed into a prettier, fragrant and more confident version of the unsophisticated country girl who had become fourteen in mid-October, while claiming it as her sixteenth birthday. As she went about her daily tasks, the teenager sang and whistled, behaviour which attracted the attention of Harold Shepherd. Covertly, the bachelor began to study his new maid, noting her routines, waiting for the right moment to cast his spell upon her, intent on using a ploy he had perfected over many years.

In her new life, Jean looked forward to the quiet spells which occurred most weekday afternoons when her mistress was out at her meetings and Mrs Edna Williamson was dozing beside the kitchen range in her armchair, with her feet up on a pouffe. Left to her own devices, Jean would move from room to room with her coal scuttle, checking the coal fires were topped up, raking out cinders and removing ashes, sitting in the fancy chairs and pretending to be Mrs Shepherd, waving an imaginary cigarette held in a long, imaginary cigarette holder.

It was during these quiet times her seemingly innocent friendship with Mr Harold began. Over several weeks she had noticed him watching her go about her afternoon duties. At times he appeared silently, standing near the door of a room when she was on her knees fixing the fire. When she realised he was there and glanced round, he at once disappeared. This became a pattern. Jean now looked forward to their 'game' as she thought it until one time he stayed and watched her complete her task. As she swished past him on moving to the next room, she proffered a shy smile which caused him to look over his shoulder guiltily to check if they were being observed.

Then, one afternoon shortly after Verity left for a meeting in Glasgow City centre, he made his move.

'Jean, would you please bring a jug of water. I wish to water my orchid collection.'

A few minutes later she climbed from the kitchen to the upper floor, to the room next to his bedroom, his photographic room, where he kept his orchids and other paraphernalia. Edna, if she had seen the maid enter and leave the kitchen quietly, gave no sign.

'Thanks, Jean. Just leave the jug. I'll do the rest.'

'Mr Harold, yer wee fire there's near oot. Ah'll awa' and bring ma scuttle, will I?'

'No, not yet, Jean. Come and stand over here. Yes, just here.'

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He reached out and took hold of her shoulders, gently turned her so that the light fell on her face and neck. Then, to her astonishment, he moved his hand and cupped her chin, easing it gently upwards.

'Jean, hold that pose, please.'

He moved across the room to a camera mounted on a stand.

'Jean, how old are you now?

'It wiz ma burthday last month whinna wiz sixteen, sur.'

'Sixteen! My, Jean surely not just *sixteen*. You look much older, already a woman in her prime, like a rose in full bloom.'

'Thank you, sur,' replied Jean, blushing and adding a tiny curtsy for good measure.

'Oh, dear, now we've spoiled your pose. Here, let me.'

His hand was on her chin again, lifting and turning it. 'Now that's it.'

Then both hands moved to her shoulders, turned them slightly and then, as if by accident, they feathered across her breasts and down to her waist where they lingered for a while until he backed away a few steps to check his handiwork, before returning to his camera.

'Jean, I've joined the photography club at the University. It's quite prestigious and competitive. They require monthly submissions. These must be on a theme, chosen by the member and sustained over a year to produce a portfolio. I've chosen the title "Beauty Revealed". Do you understand what I'm saying, Jean?'

'Sorry, Mr Harold. Is it ye want tae tak ma photae?'

'Good girl. Yes, so, may I take it you're happy with that proposal, happy to enter into a contract with me on this matter. A personal contract?'

'Yes, sur. Ah've never hid ma photae took afore. Kin Ah get wan tae keep, sur?'

'Of course, Jean. And I will pay you for your personal services. How about two shillings per session?'

'TWA SHULLINS?'

'Shush, Jean, we don't want to awaken the venerable Mrs Williamson, do we? This will be our secret arrangement, do you agree?'

'Oh, yes, sur. Jist a wee seecrut atween oorselves.'

'Excellent, Jean. Here. Let's shake on this. Good, now we have a personal contract in place, based on a patent exchange of verbal affirmations. And here, I'll pay you for this session in advance, shall I?'

'Yes, please, Mr Harold. Thanks a lot. Yer awfy kind.'

In this way what started as Jean's seduction soon became a willing cooperation, the farm girl believing she was set for life, like Orla Walsh who had wed her elderly employer and now had servants of her own.

Hand of God

Within two weeks of her first 'innocent' photographic session, shortly after Mrs Shepherd had retired for the night, Jean was creeping up the stairs after dark to skip past Verity's door into Harold's bedroom where she slipped naked between his sheets.

It was not the first time Harold Shepherd had used this tactic. It was, however, the first time he had plucked a complete innocent who believed his many hollow promises of trips to see a show at the Ayr Gaiety Theatre, to Blackpool to see the famous Tower, to London to see all the best and biggest shows. They would go when Mrs Shepherd went to visit her family in Edinburgh, he said repeatedly. Jean just had to be patient.

If his sister-in-law suspected what was happening, she said nothing. In a very real sense Verity was also a 'kept woman', dependent on her brother-in-law's goodwill for free lodgings and food and a 'sufficient' monthly allowance to pay for her personal outgoings. What was not generally known was, in the absence of children, Edmund Shepherd's Will had entailed his estate to his brother, providing Verity with a personal allowance of £100 per annum, money which she hoarded against a day when Harold might find a wife and she might be asked to leave.

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Willie McFetridge arrived in Glasgow in 1902 from Ulster, well ahead of the partition of Ireland. He came as a raw nineteen-year-old with his older brother John. The two young men were helped, orientated and settled by an older cousin Archie McAlister, who found them rooms in an overcrowded tenement property in the Gorbals area. Here they rubbed shoulders with other families and younger people like themselves from all parts of Ireland and Scotland's highlands and islands, people hoping to make their fortunes in the booming metropolis of Glasgow, the Second City of the British Empire.

The McAlisters and McFetridges were horse people and saw this move as their best chance to exploit their skills rather than be stuck behind a plough or farm cart in the service of an absentee landlord. Archie had made the move from their home town of Enniskillen a few years before them and had learned the ropes. He encouraged and sponsored both John and Willie to immediately join both the Orange Lodge and the Masonic Order. Through contacts in the Orange Lodge, Archie got Willie a job working in a livery stable which provided gigs with drivers for hire by the hour or day. Through his Freemason's Lodge, he found John a position as a driver with a firm of funeral undertakers based in the Gorbals area.

At six-foot and two inches with broad shoulders and a narrow waist, the young Willie was a handsome man, fresh-faced with angelic gold-blond hair from his Viking roots. In his fancy gig-driver's uniform, he cut a dashing figure and shared secret smiles with most of his posh lady hirers who were keen to press a threepence coin into his open palm as he helped them down from the gig at the end of the hire.

Hand of God

One day in late January 1904, Willie got lucky.

Mrs Shepherd, one of his regulars, had received a small windfall on the death of her older spinster sister Constance, the last of the small Mullholland clan from Portobello in Edinburgh. To facilitate her travel to her many committee meetings, Verity had decided to use this money to purchase a pony and gig of her own for which she needed a driver. Having a pony and gig at her constant disposal would also put her a cut above most of her rivals, a thought unspoken but one she savoured with relish.

After a simple negotiation, Willie extracted a generous starting bonus of five shillings and agreed to become her driver, horseman and gardening assistant. Willie would live in a refurbished stable block which had fallen into disrepair when her husband Edmund had died of brain cancer, ten years earlier. Although this accommodation was basic, it was far above the squalid slum Willie was living in at that time and, being from a successful Ulster family, he had been used to better.

Impressed by his appearance, his sensible and well-mannered conversation delivered in his distinctive Ulster brogue, Verity was soon schooling 'William' to become her butler, a move which she judged would increase her status in the well-heeled neighbourhood of Newlands.

Harold had only reluctantly agreed to the notion of Verity's pony and gig proposal, and the arrival of the new man McFetridge into the Shepherd household in February 1904 proved unwelcome. Unlike the small, thin, aging academic, Willie was tall and handsome and cut a fine figure when dressed in his various outfits. Although he was already a reckless gambler, at that stage McFetridge did not smoke, only drank occasionally and kept his meaner streak well-hidden.

Harold spotted at once he had an unwelcome rival. Perhaps the whole notion of a gig and pony was a mistake, he suggested to his sister-in-law.

The matter grumbled along for several months while Jean continued to collect her nightly rewards of two shillings. During the day, from his studio, Harold watched secretly and saw 'his Jean' flirting with the new man as he rubbed down the pony and cleaned the gig. Stung by jealousy, Harold rightly suspected she was sharing her favours with the driver cum occasional butler.

When Jean began to 'show' at five months, Verity Shepherd was briefed by her brother-in-law and directed to act to avoid the impending scandal. It was not the first time one of Verity's maids had fallen pregnant. Over the years the Shepherds had developed a routine, a formula. The dismissal settlement was not ungenerous, a payment of £20 to McFetridge and £30 to Jean Mulvaney. In addition, both could keep their clothing.

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By lunchtime on the day of the disgraced couple's departure, Edna Williamson had already been to the agency who knew from long experience what the Shepherds preferred in a maid. Miss Simpson had a suitable girl newly on her books, a willowy, fresh-faced and eager farm lass from Kilsyth, who claimed she was fifteen but looked much younger. Marie Steward was immediately available to start at *Morningside* and arrived for interview just after noon. Harold, watching Marie's approach from the front parlour window, nodded his approval to Verity and then left her to quiz the girl before agreeing to take her on.

Without debate, Harold arranged for the gig and pony to be sold and the money paid to Verity's bank account. Instead, Harold would arrange for a telephone to be installed. As and when Verity needed transport, Harold advised, she could easily call a gig or one of the new motor taxis, these hire costs to be covered by an increased allowance provided by him and set at a generous £10 per month.

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A Helping Hand

Fortunately for Willie, his brother John had told him of an opening at *Graham's* in Pollokshaws and had telephoned on his behalf to obtain an interview.

John had also had 'a quiet word' with a Brother from the Masonic Lodge in Shawlands, a man called Abe Reuther who worked as a rent collector.

The three men met at a café near John's flat in Mount Florida. Willie learned that a 'fully-furnished' ground-floor tenement room, a single-end located in the dye-workers buildings, was available for immediate occupancy directly adjacent *Graham's* funeral parlour and offices. The rental was set by the owners at a bargain price of six shillings a week, Reuter advised, subject to an upward review every other year.

What Reuter failed to reveal to either of the McFetridge brothers was that this single-end room was in a squat, two-level building located behind the modern red-sandstone four-level tenement where Agnes Fowler lived with access through the ground floor close of No. 7 Pollok Street.

What Willie did not know was that John's schoolteacher wife Sarah had told him, most emphatically:

"John, before you get involved further, be clear I will not allow that scrounger of a brother of yours or his harlot over the threshold of our home."

In the years ahead, Sarah would steadfastly avoid contact with her brother-in-law and his family and would never learn of Jean's true nature and her predicaments.

At this meeting Willie had taken an immediate dislike to Reuther and his first instinct was to refuse the 'bargain' on offer. However, as John had pointed out, Willie was in urgent need of accommodation. Pressed by his brother, Willie reluctantly 'signed' for the property sight unseen, paying a non-returnable key-money 'deposit' of £5. Abe had 'forgotten' his receipt book and promised he would issue one soon.

Only when Abe had the money in his wallet did he disclose the previous tenant had been elderly, hence the property required 'a little redecoration'. As was well-known to everyone in the area, Duncan Grimley, the middle-aged bachelor who had been the previous renter, had declined into double incontinence six months before his death from bowel cancer. During his final weeks, Duncan had given up trying to reach the external water closet located in the yard beside the building and had used a leaky bucket. Although the framework of the 'high bed' set in the bed recess was in reasonable

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condition, its mattress was still damp from Duncan's urine and so badly stained by his excrement it had been removed although the smell lingered. After his death the room had been unlet for almost a year and although it had been inspected by many potential tenants, all had refused to take it on.

Each single-end also had a small coal-fired range used for cooking as well as heating. However, the McFetridge's range had a faulty flue and was unreliable unless kept fully stoked. The sole redeeming feature of the McFetridge's single-end property was that it alone had town's gas for lighting and cooking, an improvement funded for his personal convenience by Duncan Grimley before his illness took hold. The other dye-workers houses still used oil lamps.

Reuter alone knew Willie McFetridge had just signed up for the worst property on his books. Never voiced, Abe believed it should have long-ago been condemned by the local council.

After the meeting, on viewing the property, Willie had tried to withdraw from the agreement. During the argument which ensued, Reuther offered to sweeten the deal by giving free rental for the first six weeks provided the McFetridges agreed to redecorate and repair the room at their own expense.

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The Dye-Workers Houses

In the burgh records of 1900, the dye-workers houses had been dubiously re-classified as mews properties. Earlier records, now lost through mis-filing, would have revealed they had been thrown up to minimum standards in the 1860s to house employees of the burgeoning local dye-works.

When these dye-workers houses had been built they had stood in what had been a large bleaching field, but they now were overshadowed and boxed in by more modern structures being erected in the on-going building boom in Pollokshaws.

The dye-workers building was laid out in two adjoining sections of eight rooms, each with two rooms front and back served by a narrow close with another four rooms directly above, its close accessed by a simple stone stairway open to the elements. In recent years the arrangement had become 'territorial', with each eight-roomed half of the building in separate ownership, each part hemmed in by a high dividing wall.

The McFetridges' half-building was served by two unlit external WC shacks with drains which were frequently blocked. Unheated, these toilets froze during cold winter weather, causing the residents to seek alternative means of disposal for their effluent. For the majority, this meant dumping it in the ashpit which was emptied only sporadically by the council. As a result, the yard was constantly malodourous and plagued by flies in summer.

The ownership of these unkempt properties had changed many times since they were built. No one really wanted them, and they had been 'bundled' with the parcel of land purchased in 1883 by Herbert V Wardley during the planning stage as he sought to develop a modern, high-quality tenement block at 5 and 7 Pollok Street which would house his premises. Even then everything about the dye-workers houses was decrepit, needing money to be spent on them. Vic saw no future for them and as soon as his own buildings were completed, he instructed Martin McConnell to find someone to off-load them to.

After a short exchange of letters, Vic sold the sixteen single-ends to Edinburgh-based solicitors *David Shepherd & Co*, a firm which specialised in buying up such properties with a view to the long-term potential the land might have as a 'ransom-strip site' under future redevelopment. *Shepherd & Co* already owned similar low-grade properties in Pollokshaws, a district which was gaining a good reputation for property investment. Their decision to buy was of minor importance to them and they were happy to collect the rents and do nothing in return, expecting the houses would eventually be condemned as unsanitary and bought up by the local council when *Shepherd's* would begin their stubborn negotiations to maximise their investment. To this end they appointed a local Glasgow firm of bailiffs to collect rents or evict those who defaulted and find new tenants, if they could. Abe

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Reuter, a freelancer whose patch covered Shawlands and Pollokshaws, was appointed 'to do the best he could' with them.

Only much later when Willie knew Reuter better, did he hear the rumour that Abe was believed to be 'skimming' most of the rents in his 'book'.

However, it would take fifteen years until, during a heavy drinking session and with an uncharacteristic outburst of bravado, Abe let slip to Willie the tariff for the McFetridge single-end had been fixed by the owner at 4/6d per week throughout his occupancy. Worse still, goaded by Willie, Reuter seemed to forget during those fifteen years he had deviously, step by step, raised the weekly rent to be paid by the McFetridge's and others like him in the dye-workers single-ends to 7/9d while paying the owners only their 4/6d rental less Reuter's 15% collection fee.

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A Fresh Start

In early July 1904, feeling full of himself and with nearly £48 left from their pay-off, Willie McFetridge, freshly shaved and smartly dressed in his gig driver's uniform from *Morningside*, attended an interview with George Graham at 5 Pollok Street. Willie had been rehearsed by his brother John and put on a good show.

To George, Willie looked the part and seemed to have exactly the attributes needed. By contrast, George knew nothing of horses and they scared him with their size and unpredictability. Perhaps overly keen to settle the business and get himself out of the firing line, George conceded to Willie's demand for a wage of £1-10/- a week and the title Assistant Funeral Director. McFetridge would also be provided with changes of uniform and clothing to present the correct image.

As a final bargaining demand, Willie extracted an annual holiday weekend, to coincide with the race meeting for the Ayr Gold Cup.

That same afternoon, Willie and Jean Mulvaney, (now calling herself Mrs McFetridge), moved into the derelict single-end once occupied by Duncan Grimley.

Although her single-end was in dreadful condition, stinking and riddled with damp and rot, to Jean, who had lived in squalor at *Nether Mains of Fenwick*, having her own front door and the assumed status of a married woman, the single-end room seemed like a palace.

Willie, who had been brought up in better circumstances, realised he had been duped by Abe Reuter. Although the proud Ulsterman was not the sort to apologise easily, he sought to re-assure his new 'wife'.

'Aye, Jean, our John tells me he as near £200 saved up and if I can match him, we'll be moving up and starting our own funeral business. John tells me there's right big money to be made at it. Aye, and John knows a man, a Brother of his Lodge, who has a good stables and workshop on it with a field that'll take up to four horses. Aye, Jean, we'll be out of here and into a proper house in two shakes of a lamb's tale, you mark my words, lassie.'

'Where'll ye git that kinda money, Willie? Wid ye borra it? Who wid ye borra it frae?'

'Jean, don't you worry your pretty wee head on that account. Just leave it to me. I'll get the money, no bother at all.'

'Whit wull Mr Graham hae tae say about ye startin oot agin him. If he finds oot whit yer up tae, sure an he'll sack ye. An' this is a lovely wee place. Just you wait an' see when Ah git it cleant up fur us. And there's a rare big park oot the back, full o' weans fur oor wee William tae play wi whin he comes.'

'William? No, Jean, he'll be called Gordon, after our Grandfather.'

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'Willie, whit if the wean is a wee lassie?'

'The wean'll will be a wee boy, you just wait and see. There's no a single lassie I know of who was born of a McFetridge.'

'Bit if the wean's a wee lassie, kin a cry her Margaret, efter ma mither, God Rest her Mortal Soul, an' in the Name o' the Father an' the Son an' the Holy Ghost an' his Blessed Mother the Virgin Mary.'

'Jean, mind your language, lassie. I'll have none of that Catholic talk in this household, do you hear me? Remember, the McFetridges fought with King Billy at the Battle of the Boyne and this is a Protestant household.'

'Sorry, Willie, they words jist slipped oot o' ma mooth. Ah didnae mean ony affence.'

'Aye, well, we'll have no more such talk. Here, take this half-crown and run an get us bacon and eggs and a dozen rolls and some iced buns and tea and milk and whatever. C'mon Jean, we'll have a wee feast to ourselves and then have an early night give that new mattress a try out, eh? C'mon, scoot! I'm starving.'

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Sadly for Willie and Jean, their substantial nest egg was squandered on the following Friday at Ayr Racecourse. After a short winning streak Willie had accumulated a wad of £63, each win celebrated by the consumption of an unaccustomed quarter gill of whisky. Topsy, and enthused with the certainty which rules the minds of all true gamblers, McFetridge backed his entire bundle on the Duke of Montrose's horse *Raeberry* which lost out to *Charis*. The pay-off from their dismissal from *Morningside* was gone.

When he got back to Pollokshaws, Willie used the remaining coins in his pocket to get blind drunk. When the pub closed he staggered home and crashed through the door, scaring Jean who had been dozing in front of the fire in the kitchen range.

'Aw Willie, whits rang wi ye? Oh, Mother of God in Heaven, ye've got yersel drunk. Whore in God's Name huv ye been. Ah've been a' ower the place. Ah even went tae John's place in Mount Florida tae see if ye wur there an his wife Sarah widnae answer the door tae me but said intae the letturbox ye hud went tae the races at Ayr. Here, let me help ye up. There ye ur, that's bettur, eh? Ye just sit there an' Ah'll make us a wee pot o' tea.'

'Jean, I've lost all our money. I backed the wrong horse. I was sure it would win and the odds were really good. But everyone else had their money on the winner. It was a fix up, I'm sure of it. You see, I just knew the Duke's horse would win. It had the look of a winner written all over it.'

'Mother of God in Heaven, Willie, ye huvnae lost a' oor money, huv ye? Tell me yer jestin me. In the name of the Holy Virgin Mother tell me yer jestin me, Willie.'

At this outburst Willie lurched from his chair and skelped Jean hard across her face, knocking her towards the kitchen range where she tripped and fell backwards and sideways. Trying to catch herself, her left hand landed on the glowing embers, causing her to scream with pain.

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'Dear Mother in Heaven, Willie, look! Look at ma haund, Willie!

'Fucking shut that racket, you wee Catholic shite. D'you hear me? How many times do I have to tell you, there's to be none of that fucking Catholic fucking language in this household.'

'Mother o' Christ, Willie, don't. Oh, please don't. Willie, look, help me, ma haund's burnt bad. Fur God's sake lit me past tae the sink tae rinse oot the heat.'

But Willie was only getting into his stride and as Jean ducked past him to the jaw-box sink at the window, he was removing his belt and wrapping it around his hand, buckle end dangling down.

Standing over the sink running the cold tap over her damaged hand, Jean was unprepared when the buckle struck the side of her face, drawing blood, causing her to scream and sob as the blows rained down on her back and legs.

'Willie, stoap. Fur Christ's sake stoap. Help me, Daddy, help me. Daddy, Daddy.'

The next blow from the buckle struck her upper arm, tearing the material of her blouse and causing a bloody white weal which would later turn a dark red-purple from blood trapped below the surface of the skin, a mark which would persist for several years.

'Help. Help me. Sumdae cry the Polis. Ma man's gone aff his heid wi' drink.'

As such domestic rows and beatings were not uncommon, not a single neighbour responded.

Willie's punch to Jean's solar plexus felled her and she curled into a defensive ball, trying to draw breath, tears flooding down her face. Neither Jean nor Willie had any thought that this blow might affect the child inside her. That worry would come later.

Willie leaned over her and hissed, 'I fucking warned you, didn't I? This is your last chance to take a telling. There'll be no more of your Catholic tripe talk in this household. Just one more word of it and I'll drop you on your head off the Shawbridge into the River Cart and be done with you. Now get you to that fucking bed and get your knickers off and legs wide or so help me I'll do you in right now!'

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When Willie came around late the following morning, his head was thumping and his throat red raw. Ashamed but unable to bring himself to apologise, he pretended to be still asleep and lay in bed watching Jean moving quietly about the room, wiping surfaces with a damp cloth. Her face was badly bruised, her left eye swollen and partially closed with her left hand wrapped in a dishtowel used as a make-shift bandage. He looked around and saw his

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clothes neatly folded on a hanger, sponged clean, with fresh underwear and socks laid out for him, his shoes freshly polished, shining. There was a new cravat, bright royal blue, draped on top.

The room was warm and although the window blind was pulled down, the sun was shining through it, making the room bright. In the range, a fire was blazing cheerfully with a large kettle suspended over it, steam rising from its spout. Suspended above the glow of the fire, porridge bubbled quietly in an iron pot. In the corner, on a two-ring gas cooker hob there was a skillet containing rashers of bacon and link sausages ready to be fried. To the side was an ornate white bowl containing a pile of eggs, tomatoes and mushrooms. The small kitchen table was set with placings for two, with main and side plates, cups and saucers, full-sized knives and forks and smaller butter knives, even teaspoons, all new and shiny. On the table there was a teapot and a fancy tea caddy. Beside the teapot there was a jug of milk and the breadboard with a large loaf, a pat of butter and a huge lump of cheese and a jar of red jam.

In her simple way, Jean was attempting to mimic the 'splendour' of *Morningside*.

Willie gave no thought about where Jean had got money to buy these groceries, pots and utensils or the new mattress and bedding they had slept in the night before. If he considered the cost of this display later, perhaps he thought the ten shillings house-keeping money he had given her was enough to cover her costs. From this, in the future, she would be required to pay the rent of six shillings per week which would leave her with only four shillings for food, coal, gas, clothes and everything else. In fact, Jean had used the money she had saved from her 'fees' received from Harold Shepherd, money which she had not let on about to Willie, afraid he might want to know how she had come by it.

Over the months ahead, as Willie continued to gamble and drink most of his weekly wage, Jean was forced to delve into her hidden cache until finally, shortly after her child was born, the last of this money was used up to buy baby essentials.

It was pressure in his bladder which caused Willie to rouse himself. He slid out of bed and strutted across to the jaw-box. Jean had already learned Willie was vain and liked to display his magnificent body to her. At this stage seeing him naked was still a novelty she enjoyed. She was also proud of the fact she was 'married' to probably the most handsome man in Pollokshaws. Although Jean did not like him peeing in her sink, she was afraid to complain and turned away. Shunning the expense of using gas, she placed the skillet on the hottest part of the range, making the bacon and sausages sizzle.

'Aye, Jean, you're a grand wee housewife and no mistake. And don't worry, I'll soon get us back up there alongside John. Do you have any fags? I'm all out.'

'Bit Willie, Ah thought ye said ye wur geein them up fur good?'

'Aye, well, I not ready to give up yet.'

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Jean proffered her packet of five Woodbine, four remaining. Willie removed two, put them to his lips and lit them from a lighted spill she held to them. He removed one and placed it in her mouth and she inhaled deeply and smiled up at him. Clearly, her husband was in a good mood again.

'Willie, wid ye like me tae fill the galvy bath fur ye tae huv a wee wash? Ah' got the fire roarin' and yon back-biler's full a' hot watter.'

'No, not yet. Maybe in a bit, after we've eaten. So, Jean, no more of that lose tongue of yours and we'll go on as before. Aye, I'm a lucky man. You're a good wee wife, and as pretty as a picture. And I'm on holiday again today. What do you say to having a nice day in bed, eh?'

'Aye, Willie, that wud be rare.'

'Well, Jean come over here and give me a wee cuddle.'

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In those first months as Jean waited for her baby, Willie learned his trade and was soon both competent and popular. Being well-spoken and mannerly when he wanted to be, he started to see himself as a fully-fledged funeral director.

George Graham and Margaret Ferris began to believe they had found the perfect man for the job. George began to tell himself that soon he would be able to step back and become a gentleman of leisure.

In his new position as an Assistant Funeral Director, Willie soon learned to accept the proffered dram from the chief mourner with the usual 'silver tip' for services rendered, money which he spent on more drink at the first opportunity. Perhaps the desire for alcohol had always been lurking in his nature. Now for the first time he could afford it and it took hold. And Willie had found another diversion which fed his ego.

Brenda McCaskill who spoke with the same Ulster lilt, thought Willie McFetridge, with his ready smile, deep baritone voice and knowing winks was her 'dream man'. Within a few days of his arrival at No. 5, she began to flirt with him whenever they were alone in the office. Not slow to take his opportunities, Willie was soon slipping his hands inside her clothing. Brenda, desperate to avoid another pregnancy at all costs, came to an 'arrangement' with him in which they limited their encounters to fully-clothed mutual masturbation, a practice common in adulterous relationships where the opportunity for fuller bed-based intercourse was often nigh impossible.

From time to time Willie would seek to reform and save up for the future. Those around him would endure a few bad-tempered weeks of abstinence from drink and gambling, pulling himself back to a dull if healthier normality, diverting himself by snaring Brenda in the back close of the tenement where she lived, giving rise to whispers. However, the worm of desire always won through again and he would be off on another bender.

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Week by week, Jean's romantic notion of an orderly and prosperous life with her handsome and well-spoken husband began to fade. The reality of her life came into sharp focus and she saw that Willie was not the kind, chirpy, hard-working and loving man she had taken him to be. When he was 'in a mood', she learned to hold her tongue and tip toe around him to avoid the sullen brute who readily slapped her and leathered her with his belt, as if on a whim.

When Jean's baby girl was born on 30th October 1904, she was called Margaret (Peggy). Tiny, just over 5lbs and only 17" long, the infant had jet black hair like her mother and dark brown eyes like her natural father, Harold Shepherd. As the child was not a boy, Willie took little interest and failed to spot the absence of his Viking genes.

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The Bakery

In the months leading up to her child's birth, Jean found work in a local bakery. She did not serve at the sales counter but behind the scenes cleaning and washing up under the kindly guidance of Walter Binnie. Walter was easy-going, slow-witted and genial, a soft lump of a man who treated her well. He allowed Jean to rest when she was tired, making her pots of tea, always served with treacle scones, one of his specialities. Jean had been smoking cigarettes on and off since she was eleven. Walter, a heavy smoker, encouraged her with free cigarettes and soon Jean became dependent on the buzz from the strong Capstan Navy Cut he smoked.

Willie, whose secret 'romance' with Brenda was in full bloom, had not shown any interest in his wife for weeks. He was now a member of the Thornliebank Flute Band where his brother John was the bandmaster and had recruited Willie as his bass drummer. Practice sessions were two nights a week and often ended with Willie and other band members heading for one of the many pubs for which Pollokshaws was famous. Frequently, Willie would return to Jean sozzled, sometimes ready for an argument which might easily lead to a slapping.

To Jean the bakery was an oasis of calm and friendship, a place where she was accepted for herself and could talk freely without fear of saying a wrong word.

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When Jean arrived at the bakery, she was sixteen, her real age. Walter may have been about forty, he was never sure. His wife could have told him he had been married to her for twenty-two years, so he may have been older.

Tall and originally similar in build to Willie McFetridge but filled out from years of snacking his own products, Walter had the same golden hair and Viking blue eyes but a round 'baw-face' and a small snub-nose. During his early years, Walter had been brought up by his unmarried mother. His father, who had absconded before Walter was born, was rumoured to be living somewhere in Govanhill with a rich widow woman. Maybe when he was seven, although his recollection was vague, Walter's mother died of 'consumption' (tuberculosis). Out of a sense of duty for her errant son, Walter had been brought up by his paternal grandmother and a spinster aunt, Myra Hogg.

In her prime, Myra had been an energetic and able woman who had seen an opportunity to create a local bakery. Myra had persuaded Edward Farrell, a local businessman from her church, to put up funds to build it. The Farrells had stakes in many local businesses.

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Aged about nine, Walter started working in the bakery. When his Aunt Myra died Walter was about twenty or so and Henry Farrell (who had succeeded his father) tried to diddle Walter out of his share of the business. Walter, not a bright or assertive young man, may well have acquiesced to Henry's demand that Walter make his mark on the papers he presented to him, granting him a sum of £10 for his aunt's share of the business.

Walter was rescued from his predicament by Wilma Wallace, a small shrewish woman then already thirty but who looked older because her once blonde hair was already almost white. Wilma had been a friend of Myra Hogg and a regular customer at the bakery. She had long admired Walter for his strapping good looks and amenable nature. Sharp-tongued Wilma stepped into the debate in Walter's defence, claiming she was family, a forty-second cousin, (which was a spur of the moment invention). Unlike Walter, Wilma could read and count. Aware the Farrells were staunch Catholics and pillars of St Mary's, Wilma sought the help of the local priest.

An acrimonious wrangle was refereed by Father Liam Murphy at which Henry and Wilma argued while Walter remained silent. Eventually the matter was resolved. Walter would receive a sum of £70 and a guarantee of his position as head baker for a period of ten years on a wage of £2 per week, a very good wage in those days. On this basis the papers were signed. Henry Farrell, who was a poor loser and determined to be free of Wilma and her waspish tongue, would soon seek a buyer for the bakery business. Leaving the meeting, Wilma took charge of Walter's money 'for safe-keeping'.

Seeing her opportunity, Wilma courted Walter and they were married a month later.

Previously she had struggled, renting a cramped room from an older widow who whined constantly at the comings and goings of Wilma's clients with their tailoring repairs and alterations. Now financially secure for the first time in her life, Wilma set herself up for a life of relative luxury by securing the rental of a comfortable two room and kitchen cottage with a small indoor toilet and hot water from a large kitchen range.

Like the dye-workers houses this cottage was a mews property, accessed from a close which served a row of two-story tenements at 52 Pollok Street, near the Town Hall. At the first opportunity Wilma had gas installed for lighting and cooking. In her new accommodation she expanded her home-based business as a seamstress. Using Walter's pay-off money as her own, she purchased a pedal-drive Singer sewing machine. It was the latest Model 15K, Scottish-built, manufactured in Clydebank. This marvel had an oscillating shuttle mechanism with 'quiet gears' to reduce vibrations and noise, giving smoother, quieter working with increased sewing speed and shuttle capacity. It was the first of its kind in Pollokshaws and word spread of the high-quality, good-value garments Mrs Wilma Binnie now had on offer.

In her new life as mistress of her domain, she dominated Walter, training him to her ways. Walter, who was a heavy snorer and was required to rise early to start his day at

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the bakery, slept in a recess bed in the kitchen, behind a curtain of heavy brocade. Conjugal relations were doled out by Wilma on a whim, seldom more than once a month, always as a reward for Walter's good behaviour or some special gift she craved and which he must provide in return for access to her bed. In keeping with the teachings of her church they used *coitus interruptus* in which, when she sensed Walter was about to climax, she pushed him away and covered his penis with a towel to catch the semen. Although to others, Wilma implied the reason they did not have children was 'God's Will', Wilma Binnie had no desire to face the rigours and pain of childbirth.

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It did not take Jean long to discover her new boss was interested in her. Whenever they were alone she could feel Walter's eyes watching her. Sensing he wanted to make a move, she began to offer smiles and small touches of encouragement.

Walter Binnie, Jean decided, was the kind of man she should have married. Once the notion occurred, it took hold of her although she had no idea where it might lead.

One afternoon, when the others had gone home after the front shop had closed, Walter and Jean were left alone in the bakery to the rear. She made her first move. Jean was nearly eight months pregnant and heavy with her child but she had been working faster than usual to complete her tasks and to make sure she was hot and sweaty. She needed to bathe, wash her hair, she told Walter, smiling coyly, adding her house was too cold, her supply of hot water too little.

Seeing the possibilities, Walter suggested she use the store cupboard offering to fill a large galvanised tub they used for pre-soaking oven trays before Jean scrubbed them clean with her wire-wool scouring pad. The store room was dim and warm, smelling of a mixture of jams and spices added to certain buns.

She had expected Walter to make a move immediately, but he did not do so that day or the next. Unspoken, both Walter and Jean knew this arrangement must remain a secret and must be done at the end of the working day when the front shop was closed for the day and the back door locked.

Jean still had almost half of her bottle of Lavender Essence remaining from a Christmas 'minding' Mrs Williamson had given her during her time at *Morningside*. She added it to the bathing water to help entice him to her. On the third day, just after she had towelled herself, Willie knocked quietly on the door to ask if she was finished, could he remove the tub of dirty water. Jean opened the door, leaving her loose-fitting, wrap-around maternity dress partially open, with enough flesh available to give him a good eyeful, posing boldly, as if for Harold Shepherd. As Walter entered, averting his eyes, Jean pushed the door closed behind him, trapping him as she leered at him.

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During her photographic and late-night bedding sessions with Harold Shepherd, Jean had become accustomed to gentleness and foreplay. Sex with Willie had always been a rougher, quicker affair, centred on his pleasure, not hers, insisting on mounting her immediately, ignoring her protests, especially when he was inebriated.

It was a small thing, Walter's first move. Before he bent down to lift the tub, he reached across and touched her face with his flour-covered hand, to tidy a wisp of hair behind her ear. Still unsure what he wanted, she responded with a shy smile then on impulse, reached up and touched his lips with hers. Whispering, Walter told Jean she looked lovely, like a Madonna. At this prompt, grinning, she let her dress fall open, revealing her swollen breasts and stomach and the tangle of damp black hair at her pubes.

Walter stepped back, unsure of himself but unable to tear his eyes away from her nakedness. Jean reached forward and undid his trousers, making it clear what she wanted, role-playing, as she had been taught by Harold. As she pulled down his underpants, Jean was taken aback by the huge size of his penis, almost half as big again as her husband's.

Walter stepped forwards, stooped, held her by her shoulders and kissed her gently.

Desperate to be wanted, to be valued, Jean circled her arms around his neck and pulled him down hard, returning his kiss with a passion which consumed her.

Their encounter lasted about half-an-hour during which he caressed her breasts, kissing and sucking at them, his right hand exploring, probing, rubbing, making her groan, whimper and shudder with longing, as Harold had done to ready her for penetration.

On that first occasion they stopped short of full intercourse. Jean was willing, urging him to enter her but Walter was worried he might hurt her. Instead, she offered hand-relief which he accepted gratefully. Jean had been tutored in this act by Harold Shepherd and was expert at extending the pleasure. However, on this first occasion Walter came in a quick rush, splashing her, as Harold had liked to do.

After they had finished, tidied themselves, he stuffed a full packet of cigarettes into her pinny pocket. Later, she discovered the packet also contained an unexpected 10/- note which confirmed to her way of thinking that he had planned what had happened because he loved her.

The next day when Jean arrived and began washing up, she exchanged secret smiles with Walter, both glancing towards the store cupboard, waiting for the other bakers and counter girls to leave.

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During the next few weeks on the run-up to the birth of her child, inevitably, the store room was where they ended their working day, enjoying quite interludes of gentle sex, giving and receiving re-assurances they were wanted, needed and valued by someone.

Had Jean McFetridge and Walter Binnie not already been married to another, they might have made a true and loving couple.

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Within a month of Peggy's birth, and despite the vociferous protests of Mrs Izzy McClusky the local mid-wife, Jean was back at work. Izzy told Jean she had lost too much blood and had 'weakened her womb'. She wanted mother and child to remain abed for a further three weeks.

Driven partly by financial necessity, Jean rejected her mid-wife's advice. Her nest egg from Harold's sessions was gone and her weekly housekeeping from Willie had been reduced to seven shillings because she was working at the bakery. He often skipped weeks if he was out of funds due to gambling and drinking, both of which were taking hold of him fiercely.

Remaining at home Jean knew she was vulnerable to advances from the rent collector Abe Reuther. Over the weeks prior to the birth of Peggy she had fallen behind with the rent. Small, slightly built and with a club foot, Abe had never married and was well-known as a sex pest. He had propositioned Jean, offering to nullify her debts in exchange for hand relief, even once suggesting she provide oral sex.

At the bakery Jean knew Walter would provide her with cigarettes; she was craving for nicotine, having smoked only three since the birth. But mainly Jean was keen to avoid Reuther. Although he knew where she worked, Abe had never dared to call at the bakery.

During Jean's first morning back at work, Walter disappeared briefly, returning with a pram for Peggy. It was second-hand from Wilma's sister, he explained, and had been used for her four children but was still in reasonable condition. Later in the day Wilma called at the bakery with a layette of baby clothes she had made for Peggy, every item in blue, decorated with elaborate machined-embroidery. Based on local gossip put about by Willie McFetridge, Wilma had assumed the infant would be a boy. Giving layettes like this was a common practice for Wilma who confided to everyone she had always hoped for children, implying in the telling the failure was due to Walter, adding that now she was through the 'curse' (menopause), all that sort of 'nonsense' was behind her.

Although Wilma still did alterations and repairs, with her fancy Singer sewing machine she had expanded into the more rewarding market for curtains and new clothes, making wedding dresses, both from scratch and by re-modelling second-hand dresses into new-look versions. She had also established a reputation for bespoke 'special occasion'

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children's clothing, such as long white dresses and smart little soldier suits for Confirmations and First Communions. It was said Wilma Binnie could size a person with a single glance and never needed to take measurements.

With two good incomes and no children or dependents, the Binnies were well off compared to their neighbours. Generally kind-hearted provided she got her own way and 'due respect', Wilma was welcoming and accommodating. If she had a fault it was she was mean with cash money: every farthing was a prisoner.

When Peggy became a little older, around eighteen months, her energetic and inquisitive behaviour (climbing up onto the baking table and fiddling with knobs on the ovens) was becoming a disruptive influence. Wilma, who had taken a shine to Peggy, offered to look after the toddler in her home.

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This move established a pattern in the McFetridge household in which Jean roused Willie and fed him whatever was available for breakfast. She then heated a second kettle of water for him to strip-wash and shave while she scuttled along Pollok Street with Peggy strapped into her pram to knock quietly at Wilma's window.

Wilma, who would have been lying awake most of the night reading, would have already had an early breakfast-in-bed, this meal prepared and served by Walter before he left to start in the bakery at four o'clock. In her routine, Wilma would have dozed off and Jean often had to tap the window several times to rouse her child-minder. Eventually, when the door was opened by Wilma, she would be in her nightclothes, bleary-eyed, her hair in curlers and not yet 'presentable' without her make-up.

In the main, Wilma treated the toddler well, but she was also fickle. When Peggy was particularly naughty, Wilma would lock the toddler in her linen cupboard for up to an hour at a time. Peggy soon learned this cupboard was a refuge from Wilma's constant inane chatter; curling herself into a ball, the child would sing songs and tell herself stories until she fell asleep.

One thing which Wilma soon learned was good for distracting Peggy when she became obstreperous, was to read to her from a book or a magazine, preferably one with lots of pictures in it. By the time she was four years old, Peggy had mastered the basics of reading and had started to write and count. She had a sweet voice and could sing songs from memory, word perfect, even long complicated songs with many verses. Although Wilma claimed the credit, the truth was the child was exceptionally bright, taking after her natural father, Harold Shepherd.

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Ten months after Peggy arrived, Jean had given birth to a still-born child, a boy who was buried unnamed. A year later another boy was born who was baptised Gordon William McFetridge after Willie's grandfather, buried back home in Enniskillen. Gordon, who suffered breathing difficulties from birth and would not feed, survived only seven weeks. Eight months after Gordon William's death, another still-born boy was born, buried unnamed. Then, as if by a miracle, fifteen months later Willie McFetridge got his wish when a large, healthy, golden-haired boy arrived. He was called Gordon John, after Willie's great-grandfather back home. At last Willie had a boy to carry on his name and arranged for Gordon John McFetridge to be baptised in the vestry by the local Church of Scotland minister, a man who was in the same Freemason's Lodge.

What would only become apparent later was baby Gordon had suffered oxygen starvation during his long and difficult delivery, a fact which would manifest itself in below normal intelligence compensated by a loving, easy-going nature and the sweetest smile of any child in the district.

Throughout this time Jean had continued to work in the bakery as Walter's skivvy. The new owner, a man called Bradford who was busily buying up local bakeries to add to his growing empire, refused to allow Jean to bring baby Gordon with her to work. Wilma was at first keen to look after Gordon, however, although the child seldom cried or complained, during his first few months he was colicky and prone to vomiting. After a week she refused to have him in her home, although she was happy to continue looking after Peggy who was now proving to be a useful helpmate, fetching and carrying, tidying and learning how to sew up outfits for her two dollies from left-over scraps of material. Desperate to get back to work before someone took her job, and perhaps steal 'her' Walter, Jean asked around to see if anyone would be willing to wet-nurse her baby boy. Understandably, no one wished to take responsibility for any child of Willie McFetridge, a man known for his violent behaviour.

Jean's dilemma was resolved by Miss Agnes Fowler.

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Gifted

By word of mouth the story of the cleverness of four-year old Peggy McFetridge had spread around the neighbourhood.

At the Salvation Army Citadel, Edna Williamson had long before whispered to her friends Agnes Fowler and Lexie Walker the details of the couples' dismissal from *Morningside*. The other circumstances of the McFetridge's common-law marriage were public knowledge. Jean was known to be in debt to many of the local shop-keepers, especially to the kind-hearted but gossipy Moyna Murray, the owner of an 'a-things' shop which sold tobacco and newspapers.

Everyone suspected Jean was paying off her rent collector by offering sexual services, a matter never openly discussed because it was an approach commonplace among desperate women in Jean's predicament.

Agnes knew although Willie was good at his job and could turn on the charm, he was prone to 'off days' when he was hung-over, causing disruption by lateness or non-appearance, requiring Mr George to be called from *Rosemount* to substitute for him. Everyone had learned Willie McFetridge was a violent bully of a man who liked to get his own way, in everything. While most ordinary people were polite to the tall, well-made man with the quick hands and feet, they were also wary of him. His only close acquaintances were men like himself, the heavy drinkers from the Thornliebank Flute Band and his cronies from the Freemason's Lodge.

Had George Graham been physically braver, he might have sacked Willie and looked for a more amenable, more reliable man. Over the first year or so in post, Willie's two assistants, the men who did the heavy lifting and dressed in grey overalls, came and went on a regular basis, until the only ones who would work under Willie were as drink-sodden as himself, twin brothers called Jimmy and Johnny Feeley, men who also played in the Thornliebank Flute Band.

To check for herself, Agnes waylaid Peggy while she was on her way to her Auntie Wilma's. The spinster grilled the four-year-old for over an hour, asked her to read several passages from her Bible, gave her a few mental arithmetic questions to answer. Agnes was duly impressed. Peggy McFetridge was indeed a genius compared to other children of her age in Agnes's Sunday school classes. That night Agnes prayed for many hours until she came up with a plan. She would take Willie McFetridge head on and ask to be allowed to nurture the girl, try to direct her life, save her as she herself had been saved by Ellen and Eric Mackintosh.

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Willie, well used to dealing with posh, well-heeled ladies, was almost sober on the day of the encounter and was desperate to find a source of cash to get a drink. What Agnes did not know was he was about to leave to make a pick-up, to collect a corpse from a house in nearby Pollokshields and transport it back to Pollok Street for embalming. This was necessary because the funeral would not take place for a few weeks as relatives had to travel from abroad. Crucially, 'pick-ups' seldom generated the proffered dram on which Willie often relied to assuage his hangover. Perhaps it was this urgent need which skewed their discussion away from Miss Fowler's carefully rehearsed script.

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When Agnes Fowler spotted Willie McFetridge, he was sitting up on the driving seat of the ornate two-horse hearse outside 5 Pollok Street.

She called up to him, 'Mr McFetridge, may I have a quiet word with you, please?'

Willie knew a fair bit about Miss Fowler, a well-known local busy-body, part of the anti-drink lobby orchestrated by the Salvation Army. He also knew there was a link of some sort between her and his employer, George Graham. Willie could tell the Fowler woman despised him from the way she had glanced at him with disgusted looks over the years, turning her head away when they passed at close quarters. Miss Fowler was also known for her generosity to those in need, supporting widows and elderly people living on their own with regular hand-outs, delivering foodstuffs carried in her large shiny, brown leather shopping bag. He had heard it said that she was a fanatic, spouting her religious twaddle at anyone who would listen.

However, sensing an opportunity, Willie decided to adopt his poshest voice and offered a smile which he hoped would pass muster.

'Aye, of course, Miss Fowler, when would you like to have this *quiet word*?'

'Now, if you are free. Perhaps we could repair indoors, ask Mrs Ferris if we might use her office.'

'Aye, right then. Hold on please, I'll just hobble these girls and put on their nose-bags. Go on inside, why don't you. I'll be with you in two minutes.'

By the time he entered, Margaret Ferris had provided a pot of tea for two and a plate of the fancy biscuits normally served to the bereaved while they completed the formalities of consigning their departed to the hereafter.

Agnes was ensconced in her former seat behind the large highly-polished desk in the room which had been her place of business for nigh on twenty years. Close too, she realised just how much McFetridge had filled out over the four years he had been working for George Graham. His eyes were bloodshot and his breath reeked of tobacco and stale alcohol. At least he was smartly dress and well-shaven. She knew that his

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uniforms, shirts, cravats, gloves, top hats and shoes were looked after by Brenda McCaskill, items normally stored overnight in the funeral office cupboard. Margaret had complained of skid marks inside his breeks which the laundry service had said needed special extra treatment to remove. Despite this, he was still a handsome man and, as he flopped into the seat opposite, she saw his smirk flash and disappear to be replaced with a dull business face used when he was on duty.

'Tea, Mr McFetridge?'

'No. Would there be a wee dram, perhaps?'

'Certainly not! Now, Mr McFetridge, to the matter in hand. Your daughter Margaret, Peggy, she is a very clever child as I'm sure you will have noticed?'

'Aye, go on?'

'Well, I would like to sponsor her, accelerate her education. The child is gifted. Trust me, I know about children and their abilities from my Sunday school classes.'

'Aye, she is. Aye, and far too smart for her own good. But she's not for sale. The wean will do fine well without having religion stuffed into her by posh folks that've never had to scrape their way by all their lives. I'll not have charity from the likes of you, never.'

'Please, Mr McFetridge. You misunderstand me. I have the best interests of Margaret at heart. I merely wish your permission to coach her ahead of her starting school. My friend Miss Walker at the new Sir John Maxwell's school is willing to take her for an hour a day gratis, to coach Peggy with a view to her sitting the entrance examination for "Pollokshields Ladies' School".³ They take the occasional bursary child from poorer homes and I would arrange everything, uniforms and transport. Indeed, Margaret, could easily walk. It's not so far, you know, just a mile away in Pollokshields. Surely you can see this is greatly to her advantage. . . .

'No! Never! Are you deaf? She's not for sale.'

'But dear Mr McFetridge, please, can't you see what a great opportunity it would be for your daughter, for your family.'

'How for my family? To me this sounds like another of your do-gooding meddling interferences. How would it benefit my family?'

'Well, *of course* you would have extra expenses, for nicer clothes, for books and the like. There would be extra-curricular activities to be enjoyed, to make sure she fitted-in with the other girls. I would be prepared to offset these costs.'

'Oh aye. So how does this throw anything *my way*, eh?'

'Well, actually I hadn't thought. Ah, emm. Ah, I had assumed you would be pleased to see your daughter progress. But wait, Mr McFetridge. Perhaps Mrs McFetridge could help me around the house with light duties, now she's no longer at the bakery.'

'So, what were you thinking?'

'Well, honestly, I hadn't really. . . .'

'Right then, here's the deal. A quid a week for Jean's help and not a penny less. Aye, and you pay it to me, not to her, she can't be trusted not to smoke it all away. Aye, and you

³ After WW1 this would become Craigholme School for Girls.

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pay for all the other stuff, like you said. Aye, and what about my wee boy, Wee Gordy? Will he get to go to a fancy school too, when he's the age for it?'

'Well, Mr McFetridge, if Gordon is of the same nature, if he also proves to be as bright as Margaret, why yes, I suppose in all fairness, he too would be helped, when the time comes.'

'Right, you have a deal. But I'll need a quid in advance, as a sort of guarantee.'

'Well, eh, Mr McFetridge, I would prefer. . . .'

'That's the bloody deal, are you deaf? Take it or leave it. If you're so keen on helping my weans, you'll have to pay for the pleasure of it.'

'Very well, Mr McFetridge. We have a deal. Here is your pound. I shall call on Mrs McFetridge directly and make arrangements, shall I?'

With the money in his pocket, Willie was on his feet, leaning across the table, spitting the words in her face.

'Aye, if you want. Whatever, I'll take my leave of you. I've work waiting to be done, unlike those who can sit about on their fat arses, praying for others. Aye, and one last thing. No more lording it over me, right? You'll offer me the time of day from now on or the deal's off. Aye, and I'll expect the quid in my hand every Saturday morning first thing when I bang on your door so make sure you have it and your there when I call, right? Miss a week and the deal's off?'

'Very well, Mr McFetridge, there is no need to hector me. We understand each other perfectly.'

The door slammed behind him. Agnes Fowler was shaking. Her face was red with anger and fear and she began to sob. Margaret Ferris crept into the room and put her arm around her friend's shoulder and offered a clean handkerchief from the pile kept nearby for grieving relatives.

'There, there, Agnes, don't let him get the better of you. I was listening behind the door and you did well. He is a terrible frightening man. His poor wife and children are the ones to pray for. As the Bible tells us, the Holy Spirit will protect and succour those who do good. You'll see, it will all work out for the best. Maybe he'll come round. He can be very nice, when he wants to be, you know. He is a very good Funeral Director, most of the time.'

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Stepping Up

From that summer a new routine was established for Jean and her two children. Although she knew Willie was in receipt of a generous payment for her services, as expected Jean saw none of the money. She soon learned not to make any reference to her work for Miss Fowler as this might result in her getting another slapping, or worse.

However, on the positive side, Miss Fowler's housekeeping duties were easily dealt with during a quick hour or so each morning, allowing Jean to continue with Walter at the bakery.

Typically, having seen Willie out the door after his breakfast and ablutions, Jean waited ten minutes until she was sure he would be up at the stables seeing to the horses. With the coast clear, she sent Peggy to Miss Fowler who gave the child breakfast then listened to her read a simple daily Bible passage. Prayers were followed by homework, writing and arithmetic tasks set the previous afternoon by Miss Alexandra (Lexie) Walker. As a reward for good performance, 'Margaret' was allowed a small corner of fudge and an extra glass of milk.

(Peggy was always called Margaret by Agnes and Lexie and she in turn must always call them Miss Fowler and Miss Walker).

This first session which lasted about three-quarters of an hour, was followed by longer, more earnest prayers which led to another treat, a session on the small house harmonium. Sitting on Agnes's knees, Peggy pressed the keys with her tiny fingers, picking out Christian songs and hymns while Agnes's feet pumped the foot bellows. Within a few weeks Peggy's genes took hold and she was playing by ear, singing along faithfully to the tunes, in her strong, sweet soprano voice, her long fingers moving from key to key, playing without Agnes's hands to guide her.

Meanwhile Jean, having fed and changed Gordon and tucked him in for a nap, set about her own domestic tasks. After the strain of birthing Gordon, (who was delivered at nearly eight pounds and just under two feet long with a huge round head), Jean's body was worn out, her stomach hanging low, soft and pulpy to the touch, her face now sunken. Her black hair once vibrant and shining was now dull, lank with a few rogue greys already showing. Although only twenty years old, if passed in the street, huddled in her shawl, she might have been taken for a woman who was decades older.

Prior to leaving her single-end to go to Miss Fowler's, Jean always smoked two cigarettes in quick succession then cleaned her teeth with the brush and dental paste which Miss Fowler had provided. She was not allowed to smoke in Miss Fowler's house, a trial which

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set her nerves jangling. By around nine-thirty she arrived at the top floor flat and put Gordon into the cot which Miss Fowler had provided, already in place near the kitchen range. Draped on the cot was a change of clothing for the infant.

(Miss Fowler was now running an auxiliary children's outfitters' and free laundry service for the McFetridge children. A laundry bag was collected every afternoon when the clothes from the day before were returned fresh and ironed.)

Over a pot of tea and slices of toast with jam, Jean and Miss Fowler discussed the schedule of domestic tasks for the day while keeping watch over Peggy who strip-washed her brother, changed his nappy and dressed him in his fresh clothes before feeding him a bottle of warmed milk, expertly burping him over her shoulder. It was clear from the outset the girl was a 'natural mother' and the adults soon learned to trust her implicitly.

Later, Peggy amused Gordon, singing to him and telling him made-up stories, while Jean, desperate to escape to have a nicotine top-up, flew about the two room and kitchen flat doing whatever chores had been agreed. This housework was done under the close supervision of Agnes who quickly learned Jean would readily skimp on a task if she got the chance. By around eleven o'clock Jean was 'released' with a 'secret shilling' in her purse, an amount increased to two shillings on a Saturday. Free, Jean raced downstairs already inhaling the craved-for smoke, heading to the bakery where she worked until closing time.

Over the next few months, supported by Miss Fowler and Walter, Jean gradually pulled herself back to a semblance of her previous self.

By this stage in her marriage, Jean had begun to suspect the reason for her miscarriages and weakling live births was because her eggs and Willie's sperm were incompatible. From her son's appearance it was clear to Jean he was Walter's child. Afraid of birthing another huge baby like Gordon, Jean no longer encouraged penetration, limiting Walter to hand-relief only. At home, Jean now dreaded Willie's rough intercourse because, apart from the pain, it always caused 'after-bleeding'.

As might be expected, Jean Mulvaney was soon again pregnant, a child which she knew must be Willie's. As before, the foetus miscarried after a few months, establishing a pattern which would continue in the years to come.

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As Agnes Fowler had rightly guessed, her ex-gratia payments to Jean were vital, becoming her main source of income. These daily shillings arose in part from an empathy with Jean's situation, given with genuine heartfelt generosity. But they were also designed to preserve the status quo, establish financial dominance so to ensure the

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spinster's access to Margaret and Gordon, whom Agnes had begun to think of as her children cum grandchildren.

However, what Jean kept to herself and Agnes could not know nor guess was that Jean no longer received regular housekeeping monies from her alcohol and gambling addicted 'husband'. This situation was fluid. Sometimes Willie would 'gather himself' and pay Jean housekeeping money and behave almost normally for a few weeks before going on another bender. During her lean periods, Jean was reduced to going through Willie's pockets when he was asleep, to steal whatever she felt she could take without arousing suspicion. Willie for his part, when desperate, might grab her purse from her and remove its contents. To counter this, for safekeeping, Jean now carried the bulk of what she received from Agnes, her bakery earnings and the 'kindness money' from Walter, in a small cotton bag she kept hidden inside her blouse, dangling from a cord around her neck. Her purse, which she kept in her pinny pocket, only ever contained small change, copper coins and perhaps a threepenny bit. Her purse never held any silver coins or the notes she might possess however briefly, as she stumbled from one 'tick' crisis to the next, trying to pay off whichever debt seemed most pressing.

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The Citadel

To an independent observer, Agnes Fowler's extra payments and gifts of food to Jean might also be considered as bribes. This was a description which Agnes would not have admitted but which lurked uncomfortably in the back of her mind: they were given to ensure Jean's cooperation in the further subterfuge which occurred on Sunday mornings.

Whenever possible, Jean would smuggle Peggy out of the single-end while Willie slept off his booze from the preceding Saturday night. When Peggy skipped up the stairs at around seven o'clock in the morning to knock on Miss Fowler's door, the child was already bubbling with excitement. The door was opened at once by her 'Auntie Agnes'. As she crossed the threshold, Peggy became once again 'Margaret', striving to 'speak properly'. Also present was Lexie Walker, also to be called 'Auntie Lexie' in private and Miss Walker in public.

Miss Walker lived about a mile away in a smart red sandstone terraced house in the posher suburb of Auldhouse where she lived with her mother. On occasions when Margaret was taken to visit her two aunts in Auldhouse, Lexie's mother Gladys was referred to as 'Auntie Gladys'. Gladys's main pastime was to make 'nice' dresses for girls. This was done as a hobby cum Christian duty. Most of Gladys Walker's clothes were donated to a charity which sent them with other similar items to poor children in Africa. As depicted in lantern slide shows, these recipient girls and their parents were seen smiling happily and nearly naked in the tropical heat of their native lands: they must have been puzzled at the idea of their daughters wearing ankle-length dresses in pastel hues decorated with hundreds of tiny ribbon bows. Peggy, however, thought they were stunning.

On arrival at Auntie Agnes's top floor flat on Sunday mornings, after a short session of welcoming prayers, Margaret would be carefully and thoroughly bathed by her aunts, who checked her for head lice while scrutinising her tiny body for bruising or signs of illness, such as rickets, ringworm or the tell-tale symptoms of scarlet fever or diphtheria. There was nothing lewd or untoward in their behaviour, merely a desire to be sure their ward was in good health. To their relief, there were no signs of beatings or physical maltreatment and now she was being well-fed by Agnes, the child was in rude good health. Had they been able to gather evidence of physical maltreatment, they were not sure what steps they would take. But, once started, this close examination became part of their weekly routine. After her bath and inspection and now dressed in pyjamas, Margaret would be given a full breakfast, always preceded by long prayers of thanksgiving and supplication.

Sweet-smelling and as clean as a new pin, Margaret was given freshly-laundered Sunday clothes. Now smartly dressed, sporting three ribbon bows in her long pigtail and wearing

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a small black felt hat, a short cape and long white gloves just like her 'aunties', the tiny Margaret was paraded triumphantly between the two elderly and rotund ladies, holding their hands as the 'family' made its way to the new Salvation Army Citadel in Bengal Street.⁴

For Peggy, these Sunday outings with her two 'aunties' were a paradise experience which, crucially, imprinted a strong sense of 'rightness' on her child's mind, setting the course of her life and work in years to come.

On these Sunday sorties they would see other worshipers like themselves making their way to many churches of different denominations, most dressed in their finery. The least well-dressed made their way to St Mary's, a thriving Roman Catholic Church which also had a new school, St Conval's, a school which had also benefited from the largesse of Sir John Maxwell of Pollok.

During the worship elements of the Salvation Army service, and before and after the Sunday school classes, Margaret stood on display, raised on a small wooden stool beside Miss Fowler seated at the harmonium, the child deftly turning the pages of the hymnary for Auntie Agnes while singing along in her clear sweet soprano voice. By design, Miss Fowler's adopted niece was clearly the starlet of the show.

In what soon became a regular item after the final prayers and to reinforce the message of abstinence, the Reader would recite the words of Romans 6:13 from the King James Version of the Bible.

Do not yield to temptation.

It is no sin to be tempted, the sin lies in yielding.

While the sin exists only in Satan's solicitation, it is the devil's sin, not ours.

When we yield, we make the devil's sin our own: then we enter into temptation.

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Satan himself cannot force you to sin:

Till he wins over your will, he cannot bring you into subjection.

You may be tempted; but yield not to temptation.

To reinforce this message of the faith and fortitude by which all Christians should lead their lives, Agnes and Margaret would then lead the departing hymn, sung as the worshipers filed out of the hall, a favourite written by Horatio R Palmer called:

Yield not to temptation

⁴ This building was almost new, erected by subscription and donation, located directly adjacent the Sir John Maxwell School, an impressive red-sandstone building, built a few years earlier to replace the previous Industrial School, an establishment which had existed on the same site for many decades educating the workforce needed to support the growing industrialisation of the Pollokshaws and Auldhouse area.

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*Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin;
Each vict'ry will help you some other to win;
Fight manfully onward, dark passions subdue;
Look ever to Jesus, He will carry you through.*

Refrain:

*Ask the Saviour to help you,
Comfort, strengthen, and keep you;
He is willing to aid you,
He will carry you through.*

*Shun evil companions, bad language disdain,
God's name hold in rev'rence, nor take it in vain;
Be thoughtful and earnest, kind-hearted and true;
Look ever to Jesus, He will carry you through.*

*To him that o'ercometh, God giveth a crown,
Through faith we will conquer, though often cast down;
He who is our Saviour, our strength will renew;
Look ever to Jesus, He will carry you through.*

By one o'clock the trio were back in Miss Walker's top floor flat when the process was reversed: Margaret's fancy clothes were packed away until the following week. In pyjamas again, the child was encouraged to eat as full a luncheon as she could manage while the ladies ate and chatted to her, telling her gospel stories and reminding her at every turn never to be afraid of anything but always to pray to Jesus, who would immediately intervene to rescue her through the Power of the Holy Spirit.

If anyone recognised Peggy McFetridge from the dye-workers houses in this Sunday morning setting at The Salvation Army Citadel, they were not malicious nor brave enough to carry the news to her father. Consequently, this subterfuge persisted undetected for years to come.

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During the ensuing years as events unfolded, like many women around her in similar circumstances, Jean Mulvaney would continue to find herself in an almost constant state of pregnancy. Although the usual pattern would be an early miscarriage, several survived to become painful and debilitating fully-formed still births.

None but Peggy and Gordon survived, which in her lowest moments, Jean saw as a blessing. At times, she blamed herself for spurning the prophetic advice from Mrs Izzy McClusky.

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At other times she became convinced she was 'damaged inside', not just by Willie's violent sex but blows received when he was in one of his drunken rages, particularly his vicious kicks aimed at her lower abdomen.

Although Jean's daily vocabulary was sprinkled with Catholic catchphrases, she had never been religious and had seldom prayed in earnest, but she gave thanks daily that Willie seemed oblivious to the evidence of his eyes. This would have told him his soft natured, slow-witted *Wee Gordy* was not his own, but the love-child of Walter Binnie, sharing the same distinctive 'baw-face', a boy who, by the age of puberty would possess a huge penis, like his natural father.

In the constant turbulent change taking place in the growing village of Pollokshaws, Walter and Wilma Binnie and Willie McFetridge inhabited entirely different worlds; although they knew of each other by name and reputation, they had never met.

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A Better Plan

Although Margaret McFetridge would not actually be five until the 30th October 1909, in April of that year Lexie Walker and Agnes Fowler crafted a carefully hand-written letter to Miss Jessie Murdoch, the founder of the "Pollokshields Ladies' School". In this epistle, they set out fulsome details of the genius girl in their care. By return post a complicated and impressive application form was received. This required authorised copies of birth certificates for both parents and their child to be sent with a copy of the marriage certificate, details of the parents' schooling, their qualifications and professions. Letters of commendation from the ministers and solicitors of both families must be provided. In addition, a letter must be sent by Miss Walker's bank manager confirming she was able to afford the fees involved and pay for Margaret to participate fully in the extra-curricular activities essential to the ethos of the school.

Evidently, the masterplan concocted by Miss Fowler and Miss Walker could not be pursued. After many nights of heartfelt prayer, Agnes and Lexie hatched an alternative plan.

An application was made to Shawlands School⁵. This was the establishment where Miss Walker had worked for ten years before winning promotion to Head of Infants at Sir John Maxwell's School. The Shawland's Head Teacher (Mr Matthew Bullock) was a close friend of Miss Walker and they served together on several missionary society committees. Margaret McFetridge was immediately accepted on her mentor's recommendation and was scheduled to start in August 1909, three months before her fifth birthday.

God had answered their prayers, they told each other. With all things considered, the wiser choice was Shawlands School. With their continuing support, Margaret would still get a very good education without the great expense and potential social difficulties to be surmounted at Pollokshields Ladies' School.

Further, they convinced themselves, the money saved could be used to better effect by sending the child for piano lessons. Accordingly, they enrolled Margaret with Mrs Tina Blair at *Merrylee*, Agnes's landlady from almost three decades earlier who was now the principal pianist to the Pollokshaws Gospel Hall. Tina Blair apologised, explaining her list was full but that she hoped to have a space for Margaret later in the year, possibly in November.

⁵ Like Sir John Maxwell's, Shawlands' was also local authority (free) school but located in a much more upmarket residential area, free of factories and surrounded by stone villas and terraced houses occupied by middle and upper-class families.

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In the event Margaret was able to start in late August when George Graham Junior was excluded from her lessons for blaspheming in Tina's hearing. George Junior had no interest in learning the piano, he told his father later.

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Classmates

In August 1909, on her first day at Shawlands School, Margaret was seated beside a boy called Bert. This was not an accident. Their class teacher, Miss Elizabeth (Beth) Campbell, placed them directly in front of her where she could observe them. Beth Campbell and Lexie Walker had been friends for years, meeting most Saturdays at *Dalziel's Emporium* where they treated each other in turns to high tea while catching up on gossip. Beth was fully aware of Margaret McFetridge's background, her many talents and how lovingly she nurtured her baby brother Gordon.

Beth lived with her brother and disable sister-in-law in a terraced house back to back with *Rosemount* where she had a free run of the upper floors. Beth's private sitting room was a converted bedroom with good views to the south over Pollok Estate and beyond to Arran and the Clyde Coast on clear sunny days. From this room Beth had often seen George Graham junior bully his sibling Albert (Bert), punching him, pushing him over then kicking him, sneaky acts of violence carried out when George thought no one was looking.

Apart from being the youngest children in the class, the two waifs were also the smallest. Bert's full name was Albert MacLennan Graham. It was soon evident he was a quiet, timid boy, polite and well-spoken. When he could be coaxed to smile, his face was transformed into that of an angel, his dark brown eyes shining brightly from a small narrow face, a near image of his mother at the same age. Like Margaret, Bert was polite, considerate and very quick to learn.

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For Margaret, her school day started early (often around six o'clock) when she skipped up to the top floor of No 7 Pollok Street to knock quietly on Miss Walker's door before slipping her hand through the letter box to retrieve the key hanging behind the door. Inside, she went directly to the kitchen where she lit the gas under the kettle and raked the fire (which had been banked up overnight). Before adding coals, she toasted a single slice of bread with a toasting fork, spread butter and marmalade then made a small pot of tea to complete the pre-set breakfast tray which she carried through to Miss Walker's bedroom, calling ahead, quietly, "Good Morning, Auntie Agnes, first breakfast is ready." Agnes, always slow to rouse herself, would sit up, smile, and wait until she was alone before slipping in her false teeth (these were stored overnight under her pillows, wrapped in a handkerchief).

While Margaret waited for her mentor to eat her first breakfast, visit the toilet, dress and gather her thoughts, Margaret would read the Bible passage marked for her on a slip

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of paper and think of the questions which Miss Walker might ask. Later, after a short grilling and a single longish prayer, Miss Walker would make them a proper breakfast of porridge followed by bacon and eggs while Margaret made more toast, one slice for herself, three for Miss Walker. It was then Margaret's turn to use the toilet, wash herself, brush her hair and teeth and then dress herself in her school uniform. When she had passed inspection, she packed her luncheon tin and small flask of milk into her school satchel and opened her small purse (always empty when presented in this ritual) to receive four ha'pennies to be used for tram fares and 'emergencies' which might include a visit to the sweet shop after school. The final act before departure was a standing prayer then a kiss on her forehead before Miss Walker said, "God Bless Us All" which Margaret echoed back to her as she skipped downstairs.

Unless it was raining heavily, Margaret ran to school, saving her daily cash allowance for 'real emergencies' which usually involved buying necessities for Gordon when her mother's purse was empty.

While Margaret was at school, continuing their previously established routine, Jean arrived at Miss Walker's flat at around nine-thirty with Gordon in her arms. With the growing infant contained in his cot, Jean did her chores under Miss Walker's eagle eye. The final act before she 'escaped' to the bakery was to wash and change Gordon. The child would have to wait until Margaret returned from school to get a fresh nappy, (the bending and lifting required for this was now beyond Agnes Walker's capabilities). Apart from the usual grumbling caused by teething and the occasional cold, Gordon proved to be a placid child. Under this regime, well-fed, warmly dressed, cooed at and tickled by his adoptive auntie, Gordon thrived and grew rapidly, soon becoming a toddler, a child easily amused and distracted when required. However, it was soon clear he was not bright and quick to learn like his sister.

To anyone who knew Walter Binnie, (which Miss Walker did not, she had never seen the man), it might have been evident who Gordon's real father was. Although Peggy continued to visit her Auntie Wilma, Jean was careful not to allow Gordon to go with her, in case Wilma made the connection.

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In the normal course of events Bert and Margaret would have soon progressed in the hierarchy of Beth Campbell's class to claim their deserved places in the back row with the brightest children. In every activity they were outstandingly better than the other children. However, Beth kept them in the front row, close to her, mainly because it allowed her to keep them busy giving them extra and more difficult tasks than she gave the others, but also because years of experience had taught her that shy, clever children were often bullied, intimidated by their peers into underperforming to fit-in with the others.

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The matter was discussed openly in the Staff Room and it was agreed that the two tiny waifs were delightful and well-suited to each other. And, it was noticed, when seated with Margaret or in her company, Bert Graham's stammer was absent. It was only when alone or in the company of others that it returned. It was also noticed on most days the children arrived and departed together. Bert had been seen waiting on Pollokshaws Road, at the corner of the street which led to his home, watching for Margaret as she ran to meet him. When walking home in good weather they were often seen dawdling at this same corner, as if reluctant to part.

Wisely, Beth and the head teacher did not disclose to their colleagues the huge discrepancy in the actual home lives of the two little friends. Because Margaret was well-spoken and smartly dressed, it was assumed her parents were fairly well-to-do.

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Piano Lessons

The highlight of Margaret's week was Wednesday afternoons when she went to Mrs Blair's house after school for her weekly piano lesson. During their first week at school, she made this side-trip in the company of Bert and learned to her surprise he lived directly opposite her teacher, in the huge mansion called *Rosemount*.

'Is that really your house, Bert? All of it?'

'Yes.'

'For just you and your brother?'

'Yes. Mummy and Daddy live there too, and Auntie. And Miss Netherton, our housekeeper who lives with us except on Sundays when she stays with her sister-in-law in Pollokshaws. Oh, yes, and a very old lady called Wilson, but she can't do anything for herself now and just sits in her chair all day. I used to think she was Miss Netherton's mummy but she's not. I think she used to be our housekeeper from years and years ago when Auntie was married to a man called Old Vic. I'm not sure, I think Wilson might have been Vic's sister or cousin.'

'Does 'Wilson' have a first name?'

'No, not that I know of. She's deaf now and nearly blind. George says the sooner she dies the better.'

'Why does he say that?'

'Because she does poos and pees in her knickers and Miss Netherton has to clean her up. It really stinks the place, so they keep her locked in her room, for her own good.'

'Bert, is your Mummy beautiful?'

'I suppose so. Most of the time she stays in her room. She cries a lot. George says it's because I'm a disappointment to her because she wanted a girl, not another boy. He says he heard Auntie saying to Mummy I was a big mistake and I should never have been born. He says some day he is going to kill me and make Mummy happy.'

At this revelation, Bert began to sob and Margaret cuddled him, pulled out her hankie, wiping away his tears, treating him as if he were Gordon.

'Bert, please don't cry. Jesus won't let it happen. I'll pray for you and He'll send his Holy Spirit to protect you.'

She fished into her pocket and pulled out a tract, one of the many she had accumulated during her Sunday School classes.

The tract was entitled:

Exodus 10:11, "Go now ye that are men, and serve the Lord"

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It contained an abbreviated re-hash of an evangelical sermon from a YMCA Meeting in Pennsylvania, USA, dated 1858. The tract concluded with a re-printing of the hymn by George Duffield Jnr (words) and George James Webb (music), the hymn which had been used to rally young men to the service of Christ.

'Bert, close your eyes and we'll pray.'

But Margaret did not pray in the conventional sense. Instead she sang the song to George, holding his hands in hers, mimicking what she had seen the Reader do at The Citadel when someone came forward to confess their sins and ask for forgiveness.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
Ye soldiers of the cross!
Lift high his royal banner.
It must not suffer loss.
From vict'ry unto vict'ry
His army he shall lead
Till every foe is vanquished,
And Christ is Lord indeed.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus!
The trumpet call obey;
Forth to the mighty conflict
In this his glorious day.
Ye that are men now serve him
Against unnumbered foes;
Let courage rise with danger,
And strength to strength oppose.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus!
Stand in his strength alone;
The arm of flesh will fail you,
Ye dare not trust your own.
Put on salvation armour,
And watching unto prayer,
Where duty calls or danger,
Be never wanting there.

Stand up, stand up for Jesus!
The strife will not be long;
This day the noise of battle,
The next the victor's song.
To him that over-cometh,
A crown of life shall be,

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He with the King of Glory
Shall reign eternally.

'Bert, put this in your pocket and try to read it later. Don't tell anyone you have it. I've got to go but I'll see you tomorrow, along there at the corner. I'll try to be early and we can talk about Jesus properly then. God Bless Us All! Bye-Bye.'

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Bert asked his father to be allowed to attend piano classes and Miss Blair scheduled him back to back with Margaret's. The boy revealed quickly he too had a talent for music and since he had access to a piano at home, he soon caught up. Encouraged by Miss Blair they sang gospels songs and soon Bert also knew all the words and could sing along. Within a year they were playing simple two-handed duets.

As the years rolled by, they progressed together at each six-month interval to the next higher grade in their music exams. Although Bert was graded as "highly proficient", Margaret was graded as "exceptional". This, Mrs Blair told everyone, was due to her incredibly long fingers and the strength and dexterity of her (disproportionately) large hands.

Unlike Margaret who continued as a regular attender at The Citadel with her 'aunties', Bert was not permitted to attend church other than an occasional outing to St Mary's. Such trips were made in the company of his aunt, Mrs Marianna Wardley, their short journeys made in a motor taxi, summoned by telephone.

Over their first five years of primary school education, Margaret and Bert's schooldays friendship blossomed into a deep filial love. To a casual observer they could have been brother and sister, maybe even twins: both had dark hair and brown eyes set in small tulip-like faces, both slightly built with the same dainty frames and long artistic fingers.

On completion of P2 both children were moved directly to P4 and later from the end of P5 directly to P7. At each such promotion, the Head Teacher Matthew Bullock reviewed their work and test results and personally interviewed them, alone and together. All parties agreed they would easily cope and on completion of P7 it was clear they were ready (academically) for secondary school even though they were not yet eleven years old.

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(What would become known as the Great War was beginning. Men were being recruited to join the British Expeditionary Force setting sail for France and Belgium to resist the might of the German army.)

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In their new world of Shawlands Senior Secondary School, Margaret and Bert would no longer be able to cling together for mutual support, except at play times and during their journeys to and from school. Although the school was co-educational, most classes were segregated to keep boys and girls apart on the basis they might otherwise 'distract' each other.

Despite protests made on her behalf by Beth Campbell, Margaret was not 'placed' (streamed) for Science, or Mathematics (which included algebra, geometry and trigonometry). She was also excluded from studying the Classics, Latin, French and Italian, subjects reserved for boys and selected girls only, those whose parents were professional people.

The ethos of the school was that girls should concentrate on home-making and useful arts which might include Drawing and Painting or participation in the School Orchestra for those who showed promise. Accordingly, Margaret's curriculum included Arithmetic (not Mathematics), English with extra Poetry, History (mainly the period up to 1850 but not modern history), Geography with the emphasis on the British Isles (but not Europe and the Empire), Physical Education including Scottish Country Dancing and lots of Girls' Hockey.

As a result, the two friends were separated during lessons. The exception was during the first few months when they played at Friday afternoon orchestra rehearsals. They were given flutes and managed to get seats side by side in the woodwind section.

Unfortunately, Mr Maurice Solomon (Head of Music) who took these classes was a very elderly gentleman who was almost deaf. Maurice often lost control of the thread of what was being practiced and his rehearsals regularly descended into a chaotic cacophony. This disruption was led by an older boy called Eric Green (known by all as "Ginger" Green because of his carrot-red hair).

On the run-up to Christmas the Headmaster decided to 'suspend' orchestra rehearsals in favour of a girls' only music and movement class involving basic ballet, taught by a rather portly visiting lady instructor who came with her ancient mother in tow as her pianist.

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A Brother in Christ

Bert Graham's journey to the Throne of Grace was at first hampered by his home life. From around the time he went to school and first met Margaret McFetridge, he had been aware his family was 'not quite right'. This was a phrase he had overheard Miss Netherton and Mrs Blair use to describe his mother when they had thought he was not listening. He also knew his aunt was often tipsy, sometimes so tipsy she would fall asleep while smoking, once setting her dress alight, causing a great panic.

In November 1914, just after his eleventh birthday, during the period before Christmas, he sneaked out one Sunday afternoon and ran down the hill to the Pollokshaws Gospel Hall to meet Margaret and attend his first ever Sunday School meeting. He already knew all the songs and hymns from his Wednesdays at Mrs Blair's. And there she was, thumping her piano, smiling across at him.

Three Sundays later, one week before Christmas he went forward hand in hand with Margaret and gave his life to Jesus. He was one of three to do so. The other two were girls from Sir John Maxwell's School, poorly dressed, both with runny noses. To welcome each other to the Lord's Table, the three converts were encouraged to shake hands and embrace each other as Brothers and Sisters in Christ. It was the first time Bert had ever been in such close contact with very poor people.

Later, as he walked up the hill with Margaret to the corner of his street, she pointed out the stables where her father worked and revealed to him for the first time the true circumstances of her life.

'Bert, I want to tell you my secret. You know my name is Margaret McFetridge. Do you know my father is William McFetridge, and he works for your father, at *G Graham, Funeral Director?*'

'Your father is Willie? The man who drives the hearse? He's your father?'

'Yes.'

'But, Margaret, you don't speak like him. He curses and swears all the time. You speak like me. How is that?'

'Because God sent Miss Fowler and Miss Walker to rescue me. I'm allowed to call them Auntie Agnes and Auntie Lexie although they're not real aunts. They pay for my nice clothes and all my school things. You see, Bert, my family is very poor, we live in a hovel. It's almost as bad as the poor people in Africa. It's just one room with no toilet. We must go outside to use the water closet in the back court. Gordon and me, we try not to use it and wait so we can use Miss Fowler's toilet. She lives in a really nice two room and kitchen just above your father's funeral parlour. I think she owns part of the building. I'm not

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sure but I think she might be a partner with your father, in his business. Anyway, she is nice to me and Gordon.'

'Who is Gordon?'

'He's my wee brother. He's only six. He can't read properly yet. He has asthma, which makes him wheezy and because our place is cold and damp all the time, he gets attacks and can't breathe properly. Miss Fowler says lack of oxygen has affected his brain, making him a bit simple. He goes to the same school as Mina Black and Fanny Taggart, those two girls who went forward with us today.'

'But Margaret, you didn't tell me you had a wee brother, why not?'

'Miss Fowler said I should keep my home circumstances a secret, to prevent people from making fun of me and in case word got back to my father. You see, my father can be 'unpredictable'. That's the word Miss Fowler and Miss Walker use. Everyone is frightened of Willie McFetridge, even the police constable steers clear of him when he's drunk.'

'I know. I heard my Daddy tell another man your father is not a nice person. Actually, Daddy used a swear word to describe him. He didn't know I was listening. Like Willie, Daddy swears quite a lot, when he thinks George and I are not there. And George swears as well, when he calls me bad names. I heard Daddy tell this man your father is a bully and a drunk and stupid with it, going to gambling places and losing his money. Is it true he hits your mother?'

'Yes, but only when he's drunk. Sometimes Dadda can be quite nice. Sometimes he buys us sweets, for Gordon and me, when he wins money from betting. But yes, he is a very sinful man. We pray for him all the time, Miss Fowler and Miss Walker and me. Will you pray for him too, Bert, please?'

'Yes, I will. But Margaret, does he hit you too, your father?'

'Only once, when I was cheeky and said he was a sinful man, right to his face. He slapped me, knocked me to the ground. I was lucky because he was drunk and I pulled away and it wasn't all that sore, not really. Then he was sorry and started crying, cuddling me. He smells horrible, really horrible. But he's never hit me again. Only Mamma. She's the one he hits when she won't be nice to him.'

'Why won't she be nice to him?'

'Because she doesn't want any more babies.'

'Oh that. Yes, George says Mummy doesn't want any more babies from Daddy either. He says nowadays they just cuddle without being really nice to each other.'

'Bert, I know I shouldn't ask this, but do your parents drink a lot. I heard Miss Netherton telling Mrs Blair they 'drink like fish'.'

'Yes, Auntie and Mummy both drink all the time. They say to me, "Don't you dare look at me like that child, it's my only pleasure." Mummy and Auntie drink wine called sherry. One time I took a sip and it burned my tongue. Daddy drinks too. He prefers whisky, which tastes even more horrible. Miss Netherton caught me doing it and made me promise I would never again drink alcohol in any of its forms. It's the 'Devils Brew', she called it. Did you know she is a Rechabite, which means she has foresworn alcohol? One day Mummy was very drunk and fell down the stair. We had to get the Doctor to come to the house and put a bandage on her arm.'

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'Oh Bert, it so true what Auntie Agnes says, "alcohol is the scourge of our modern society". We must look to Jesus to save us. Bert, I'll pray for your family and please, will you pray for mine. I've made a prayer list for you. Will you make one for me, please?'

From the day of his conversion Bert Graham began a secret life in which he sought to conceal his allegiance to Jesus Christ, just as Margaret did within her own immediate household.

However, now that they were Brother and Sister in Christ, the children were no longer alone. They were on an evangelical missionary journey together, sharing almost every thought, using each other as sounding boards. Just as Bert became party to the daily ups and downs of the McFetridge family, so Margaret learned of the intrigues and misdemeanours which twisted the lives of the Wardley-Graham household. As she listened, Margaret learned of the deviousness and cruelty with which George treated Bert in private, while pretending to the adults he was trying to help his brother. At least George was now absent for long tracts of the year boarding at Fettes College in Edinburgh. Despite his waywardness, both children prayed for him that soon, brother George too might find Salvation in Jesus Christ.

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During his primary years, Bert's stammer had gradually diminished but now, in his new circumstances without Margaret by his side, it soon returned. In the playground and in the corridors during class changeovers, Ginger Green and others like him made fun of Bert, mimicking his speech, making his life almost unbearable. During the Christmas break, this situation was exacerbated when George Junior returned from Fettes' for the vacation and began to systematically abuse his twin brother, punching and goading him to fight back, and to "act like a man".

Bert suffered a minor breakdown and locked himself in his room, refusing to eat, saying he wanted to die. After several counselling sessions by the family doctor, it was agreed that home schooling would be the best approach for the weakling twin.

In January, after the Christmas holiday when his brother George went back to Fettes', Albert MacLennan Graham was withdrawn from Shawlands Senior Secondary School and the hunt began to find a suitable tutor.

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Miss Eloise Fischer

Eloise Fischer boldly claimed she had once taught 'Royals' (name-dropping freely in the process). This was in the past, before her enforced move to *Glasgow* to care for her aged aunt, a woman who lived in Newlands, in a grand house which Eloise hoped to inherit.

At her interview Miss Fischer was introduced to her potential charge and at once claimed she would cure Bert of his stammer. It was this and her air of superiority which clinched her appointment. *George Graham Snr* liked the idea of being able to boast about the 'Royals' connection.

A tall, strongly built woman in her late forties, Miss Eloise arrived daily at 9.00 am on her bicycle and schooled *George* in rudimentary Mathematics. Although she would not admit it, her understanding of Algebra, Trigonometry and Geometry was weak. She was stronger in English including the Romantic Poets, in whom she wallowed. Her version of History was spotted with anecdotes from reading romantic novels by Sir Walter Scott and her obsession with Shakespeare. For Geography she used a compendium produced by "Encyclopaedia Britannica" with a strong emphasis on the Dominion of Canada, this because she had a pen-friend, a girl from her long-ago boarding school who now lived in Winnipeg.

This rather narrow and idiosyncratic education was supplemented by bicycle trips to the Pollok Estate where she introduced Bert to Botany. This was done by sketching the shapes of trees and flowers and by learning the names of the various rhododendron bushes and trees for which the park was renowned. During her reign as Bert's tutor at *Rosemount*, the tall, burly woman with the small, slim boy became well-known at the Estate and although they often strayed from the public into the private areas reserved for the Maxwell family, they were considered harmless and were accepted by the gardeners.

Each day at 3.00 pm precisely, Miss Fischer mounted her bicycle and swished off to Kilmarnock Road to the Shawlands Cooperative to shop for food and necessities to feed herself and her aunt and pay a visit to her libraries. (She was a member of three libraries.)

For Bert, this rigidly fixed routine proved to be productive. Within three months his stammer was reduced to an almost unnoticeable hesitation. Although his discourses with others were almost always in the company of Miss Fischer, and usually with older men and women, he learned to contribute. Eloise was a garrulous and often contentious conversationalist. Her topics were well-informed from voracious reading of newspapers and magazines at her local library reading room. The *Scientific Monthly* and the *National*

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Geographic were favourites from which she prepared herself rigorously before raising a topic in conversation. Bert was encouraged to join this library and mimic her behaviour. He soon found his mentor was open to debate as if he were her equal. From this he learned how to deal with the cut and thrust of argument in a way which would stand him in good stead in later years.

What might have seemed to the outside world as a cloistered, suffocating regimen proved to be good for the teenager and as he passed into puberty, he developed a quiet toughness and self-confidence which would probably not have arisen had he been forced to continue in the rough and tumble of conventional schooling.

From February 1915 until November 1918, this routine was maintained six days per week without interruption for holidays except Christmas day and the Easter weekend, these breaks taken at the insistence of George Graham Senior. Miss Fischer was an agnostic, she had proudly stated on her curriculum vitae and was unbending in the belief that God did not exist, and so considered weekends to be unnecessary interruptions in the education of her charge. Two weeks after the Armistice was signed, Eloise declared her job was done and resigned.

In recognition of what Eloise described to George Senior as "her excellent work with his son", she demanded a gratuity of £50 and a glowing reference which she had prepared herself for his signature. Undeclared, her aunt was in rapid decline, one of the earliest victims of the killer virus which would become known as Spanish Flu.

This parting did not mark the end of their contact. Miss Fischer and Bert Graham had learned to trust and respect each other, even though they held different views on many subjects. Miss Fischer's aunt now had a telephone and it was agreed that Bert would call Miss Fischer from time to time. She was now a friend who had learned most things about him except his ongoing friendship with Margaret McFetridge, maintained by their Wednesday meetings at Miss Blair's piano lessons and by clandestine meetings when they met to walk and talk in the grounds of the Pollok Estate, a place that Bert now knew better than most.

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Gigolo

When Beth Campbell welcomed Bert Graham into her Infant class at Shawlands School and placed him in the front row beside Margaret McFetridge, she already knew quite a bit about his twin brother George.

This information came from a friend from her college days who worked at the High School for Boys, where George had started seven months earlier. As Beth knew from her bedroom window, seeing him bully his twin, what she learned from her friend did not surprise her.

Bigger and stronger than his classmates, George looked much older than his age. Beth learned he was soon leading a small gang of like-minded thugs at the Boys' High, a group which was in constant trouble for picking on weaker children, bullying them, generating complaints from parents.

Unofficially, the Staff Room at the High School for Boys generally agreed that George Wardley Graham was 'mentally unstable'.

It was a relief to everyone when he left as an eight-year-old to take up a residential place at Fettes College in Edinburgh, to receive an education which George Senior felt was more appropriate for his son and heir.

At Fettes' his career as a bully continued but George Junior was learning to conceal his warped tyranny. Very soon he was spotted as an aggressive rugby forward. Aged newly twelve he was promoted to the Firsts, one of the youngest ever to achieve this accolade.

By a minor miracle and the payment of several hefty 'fines', (these paid directly to the Fettes' Masters' Wine Account at Cockburn's of Leith), George Junior's peculiar and disruptive behaviour was tolerated.

Finally, aged thirteen he was expelled after he was caught in the act of bugging an eleven-year-old boy. (Other rumours regarding George and the Matron were quashed, classified as 'preposterous'.)

The whole episode was hushed up at the expense of a payment to the victim's father, a man who was going through a bad patch financially and willing to trade silence for three years advance payment of his son's fees.

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It was the Spring of 1917. Although not yet fourteen, the burly George Junior with a foppish goatee beard, waxed moustache and a deep bass voice, could have easily passed for eighteen.

Despite his recent troubles, George Junior was brimming with self-confidence, his strong, sportsman body coursing with testosterone.

After a long heart to heart discussion with his father, George Junior decided to have a go at being a salesman, as his father had once been. The young man had listened to his father's stories and decided in secret he too would join the Freemasons. George had always looked older than his years. By pretending to be twenty-one and forging his father's signature as his sponsor, he had joined a newly established Masonic Lodge in Kinning Park who were actively recruiting for members.

As George Junior had expected, deploying the Mason's handshake, sporting his Masonic ring and dropping into conversation their coded catchphrases proved useful.

After a few false starts with other enterprises, through his Masonic contacts, George Junior had secured a position selling motor cars from a fancy showroom on Pollokshaws Road near Eglinton Toll. Selling cars was a role young George was moderately good at, normally meeting his target of selling two cars a month. Now, for the first time in his life he settled to regular hours and tried to fit in with his colleagues, men too old to be sent to war who treated him with good-natured indulgence.

Mid-way through his second year as a car salesman he snared a willing divorcee. Mrs Katherine Vincent was a moderately attractive woman in her late thirties. During the sales process George took her for several spins, once as far as Oban where they stayed overnight, sharing a hotel room as "Mr and Mrs Smith". The next day, back in Glasgow, he clinched the sale and to celebrate, they dined in the gourmet restaurant of the Sherbrooke Hotel in Pollokshields, a short drive from her large villa.

Following in the footsteps of his father, the young George had read the signs correctly and after a short period of courting her, he moved in as her chauffeur and night companion. After a trial period of two months in this arrangement, George resigned from his sales job and the couple went off on an extended car tour of Britain, staying in the best hotels.

There was no talk of marriage. However, in his new role as a gigolo and from his 'apprenticeship' selling expensive motor cars, he knew there was a ready supply of older women amenable to rewarding suitable young men willing to respond to their whims.

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MacLennan & Company

Albert MacLennan Graham boarded an electric tram at High Shawlands in the company of his father.

It was Monday 25th November 1918.

Bert, fourteen, his voice a baritone/tenor, like his twin, looked older. He had been shaving daily for over a year and had a neat, military-style pencil moustache.

Although still handsome, George the father, had a distinct paunch and his teeth were noticeably stained by pipe tobacco and coffee.

The pair were heading for Union Street in Glasgow City Centre to the offices of *MacLennan & Co, Ship Brokers Ltd* (normally shortened to *MacLennan's* or *MacLennan & Co*) where Bert was to be installed as a junior clerk, courtesy of Lachlan MacLennan the Managing Director and principal shareholder of this long-established and well-respected enterprise.

Lachlan MacLennan was fifty-eight when his nephew arrived to make a start. Aware that the young man was reputed to be clever, Lachlan kept a close eye on his young recruit during his first weeks in post. Clever people were often wayward and he had heard rumours of the twin, *George*.

Lachlan need not have worried. Under the influence of Margaret, Bert Graham had become a born-again Christian and kept his Bible prominently displayed on his desk. Lachlan had long been a stalwart of the United Reformed Church near his home in Kirklee, in Glasgow's West End. He was relieved to see his nephew did not smoke nor join in the ribald comments made sotto voce by the other young men around him. (These were remarks which Lachlan mostly let pass but occasionally he scolded them by rapping the internal window of his office, adding the wave of a scolding finger.)

Lachlan had been eighteen when he married Isobel Frobisher. Despite great passion during their early years, they had remained childless. As he looked at Bert, he wondered if perhaps this young man had the mettle and acumen to take over from him and lead the business forward. He closed his eyes and offered a prayer of thanksgiving coupled with a request for guidance. How he wished he still had Isobel to act as his sounding board. The last five years had been lonely without her. At least she had not suffered as his mother had. Isobel's breast cancer had taken her in weeks; his mother had lingered for nearly two years.

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The MacLennan family had been involved in shipping for over a century and had gradually created a niche in which they chartered ships rather than owned them. These ships were then crewed by men whom Lachlan and his team recruited and trained, deploying them to operate on a world-wide basis. On occasion they also raised funds on behalf of shipbuilders and ship owners, usually as part of a consortium which wished to renew their fleets, maintain their profile.

The young men who applied to *MacLennan & Co* for apprenticeships were always taken on trial for their first year to see if they were suited, before they were placed in proper training. Generally, such youngsters would require a letter of reference from their headmaster and preferably, also from their minister or priest. Applications were received throughout the year, always acknowledged promptly with a letter explaining selection and first interviews would take place in mid-August with a view to the final selection of successful candidates as potential apprentices by October.

As the most junior member of the office staff it fell to Bert Graham to manage the administration of this process. The first stage was to sift the incoming letters to weed out those who did not have the right profile and reject them quickly. Those who would progress to 'selection' were advised to await a further letter to be issued later, around mid-July. In this process, since he was under training himself, Bert was supervised by Mr Fraser Traynor, a man who had been at school with Lachlan and was a member of the same church.

On Bert's first day, he received three applications from young men one of which was from an Eric Green from an address in Minard Road, Shawlands. From the details provided, it was clear to Bert this was his nemesis 'Ginger' Green from Shawlands Secondary. Bert knew from Margaret that Ginger Green had continued his reign of terror and had been in constant trouble throughout his school career. He had also been put back one year for truancy.

However, on paper, if what he had written was to be believed, Eric Green was the only one from the three applications who met the criteria which Fraser Traynor had set down for him. Bert prepared two rejection letters and a 'pending' letter to be sent to Ginger Green. He then took the three letters to Fraser Traynor for checking and signing.

'Right, young Mr Graham, what have we here?'

'Two who do not seem to be what we are looking for and one who appears to meet the criteria although there is something odd about the letter of support from the deputy headmaster.'

'Ah, let me see. Mmm, yes. Three spelling errors. Not what I would have expected. Well, Mr Graham, what do you think?'

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'Mr Traynor, actually, I think I know this man Green. If he is the same person I knew when I was briefly at Shawlands Secondary, I think he might prove to be disruptive.'

'Oh, please explain the circumstances.'

Bert gave a synoptic version of the events which led to his withdrawal from Shawlands School and his subsequent home schooling by Miss Fischer.

'So, Mr Graham, you think our Mr Green might be up to no good, do you?'

'Possibly. However, this may not be from the boy I knew as Ginger Green. I suppose there could be two Eric Greens, it's quite a common name.'

'What do you suggest we do about it?'

'I could leave a little early today and go to the school on my way home to Mr McCallum, who is the deputy head teacher. I've prepared a simple letter of introduction for you to sign, if you agree. I would take this application and ask at the school office if I might speak with Mr McCallum. I have a friend at the school and she told me once Mr McCallum is a very decent man.'

'Yes, he is a very decent man who just happens to be my brother-in-law. I also know he would be appalled if he had issued a letter containing even one spelling error, far less three. And, since I know his writing, I can assure you this is not his signature. Ronald is left-handed and despite every attempt to beat it out of him as a child, he persisted, and so his writing slopes backwards. This is a very poor attempt at forgery. Well done, Bert. I must say you have a good head on your shoulders. We shall send our Ginger Green a rejection letter. Leave that forgery with me, I'll see it gets to Ronald. He can deal with it as he sees fit.'

A week later Fraser Traynor advised Bert that Ginger Green had been expelled from the school and his aunt, who had worked in the office as a clerkess, had been sacked after she admitted stealing school headed paper. She confessed she had written over a dozen similar letters on behalf of her nephew. The boy had come to live with her when her sister had died. His father had been killed during the Great War.

Over the next two years Bert Graham was promoted twice. When Fraser Traynor retired and went back to live on the family croft on Tiree, Bert was given his small office and the title, Chief Clerk (Administration), the youngest man ever to hold the post at MacLennan's.

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Mrs Celia Netherton

During her years at Shawlands Secondary, Peggy McFetridge put the skills she had learned from 'Auntie' Wilma Binnie to good use. Through the ladies at the Citadel, she was introduced to Mrs Celia Netherton, sister-in-law of Miss Netherton the housekeeper at Rosemount. Celia Netherton owned a ladies' dress shop on Kilmarnock Road, close to Shawlands Cross, near to the school.

Encouraged by Miss Fowler and Miss Walker, who were patrons of Celia Netherton, Margaret, newly twelve years old, went to the shop to ask if they needed a seamstress to work part-time after school. This approach was made at a good time (November 1916) on the run-up to Christmas. In the previous Spring, two of Celia's younger ladies had moved to higher-paid jobs working in the factory in Pollokshaws making military uniforms and since then Celia had struggled to find replacements with the correct skills.

After a week's unpaid trial, Peggy was taken on, working after school until seven o'clock on Tuesdays and Thursdays and all day on Saturday. Part of her payment would be in kind and she would be allowed to make herself one plain dress at the end of each quarter and an additional fancier one for her birthday, not due until October of the following year.

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Mr John Netherton, Celia's husband, had been a merchant seaman. In June 1902, he failed to return from a trip to South Africa. As such delays were not uncommon, Celia waited and prayed for his safe return. In mid-July she wrote a brief note to MacLennan's, asking for information. A week later, a return letter from Fraser Traynor advised John's ship had been delayed by illness amongst the crew. A telegraph had advised the ship had now left Port Elizabeth in South Africa. What had not been communicated was that John had been left ashore for hospital treatment for malaria. When the ship duly docked in Southampton Celia was updated on John's situation by Fraser Traynor. With a change of crew, the ship made a return trip to Port Elizabeth. A further letter from MacLennan's then informed Celia that Mr Netherton was poorly but recovering. In December another letter, edged in black and signed by Lachlan MacLennan, advised John had relapsed and died and his body had been buried there.

A week later, Lachlan called at her home to deliver a cheque which included John Netherton's wages and an ex-gratia bereavement payment of £100. During their discussion, Celia told him of her desire to strike out on her own an open a dress shop. Lachlan volunteered to stand as guarantor for her with the bank, the building owner and his factor. *Netherton's Boutique Ensembles* was launched in May 1903 with Isobel MacLennan and her friends as first patrons. Over her first year in business, helped by

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Isobel, Celia had attracted a circle of well-heeled ladies as patrons, ladies who liked to dress in quality clothes fashioned in a conservative style. Since then the business had thrived.

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When Peggy started at *Netherton's*, one of the first garments she worked on was for a regular client, Mrs Shepherd of *Morningside* in Newlands.

Verity, now in her mid-sixties, had filled out to around sixteen stones which, because she was 5' 8" tall, she carried reasonably well. However, Verity was now much slower on her feet and in her speech, having discovered the comfort of a nightly libation of South African sherry taken as a 'tonic' to help her sleep. This, she claimed, had been recommended by her personal physician, the same man who advocated cigarettes as 'helpful' in relieving stress. (Verity was now smoking around fifty a day and her consumption of 'tonic wine' had risen to one and a half bottles a day).

On the day of the first fitting for her new dress, Verity arrived by motor taxi. It was a Saturday and she had earlier been at a church bazaar to raise money for poor children. Verity had it fixed in her mind these waifs were in Kenya, which surprised the organisers who were collecting for children in the Punjab. In any event, as the visiting dignitary from the *Evangelical Mission Committee*, Verity was there to draw the tombola tickets and congratulate the winners. This she did with benign nods of her large and inappropriate Easter bonnet while dispensing her repeated phrase of "**And Jolly well done, you!**", delivered in her plummy *Morningside* accent.

Celia had been expecting Mrs Shepherd and raced to open the door for her. On Saturdays, the regular girls stopped at 1.00 pm and so it was just Peggy and Celia on duty.

'Oh, Mrs Shepherd, do come in. Please, take a seat over here. Now, would you care for a cup of tea?'

'No thank you very much, Mistress Netherton, I do not. I am simply awash with tea.'

'Oh no, please, Mrs Shepherd, no smoking. It's so detrimental to our stock, you see.'

'What did you say? Oh Gawd, do you still persist with your silly 'no smoking' rule?'

'Yes, we must. Our insurers insist. Peggy, dear, please bring Mrs Shepherd's dress and prepare the fitting room, there's a good girl.'

Verity Shepherd glanced across as Peggy came through from the workshop carrying the dress in her arms, heading for the curtained area.

'Are you well, Mrs Shepherd?' asked Celia. 'You look as if you've seen a ghost.'

'Eh, yes, yes. Just a slight gip of indigestion. The child,' Verity hissed, 'what's her name?'

'Peggy.'

'Her *full* name!'

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'Margaret McFetridge.'

'Yes. Of course, of course. How old is she?'

'Twelve, she's a part-timer. She's very gifted, the best seamstress I've ever had. And she sings like an angel and plays the piano too, for the Band of Hope at the Gospel Hall in Pollokshaws.'

'Well, of course she does. That must be where I saw her. Yes, yes. Perhaps I will have that cup of tea.'

Later, as she was leaving, Verity slipped a coin into Peggy's hand. 'Thank you, Peggy, my dear. I'll see you next week for the final fitting. Bye-Bye, everyone. Bye-Bye.'

As the great lady departed in her taxi, Peggy exploded with joy.

'Look, Mrs Netherton. It's a half-crown!' As she dropped it through the slot of the "Staff Box" (all gratuities were shared), Peggy added, 'She seems to like me, I think.'

'Well I'll be knocked down by a feather! That's the first time Mrs Shepherd has ever given a tip to anyone. For all the years she's been coming here it's the first time we've even seen her smile. Yes, Peggy, she most definitely likes you. I wonder why? She says she saw you at the Gospel Hall.'

'Did she? I don't remember seeing her before today. Maybe it was one of the Lantern Lights shows? I was probably in the kitchen, making the tea. Did you see her diamond rings? I've never seen so many rings on anyone before. She must be very, very rich.'

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When Margaret McFetridge left school on 30th October 1918, aged 14, she became a full-time employee at *Netherton's Boutique Ensembles*. Celia Netherton broke her own rules and paid Peggy five shillings a week more than the others, a secret deal which Peggy must not share with anyone. It was a good bargain - Peggy McFetridge was twice as quick as her workmates and like Wilma Binnie seemed to have a 'measuring eye' which meant she could get her garments right first time, saving both time and material.

Celia's clients also learned quickly how good Peggy McFetridge was and some of the more assertive ladies now demanded that their dresses be made for them by "Peggy, the small dark-haired lass with the lovely singing voice".

As a regular employee, Peggy was now free to leave at 1.00 pm on Saturdays and, by arrangement, would be met by her mother who was waiting nearby to take the lion's share of her daughter's wage. As Peggy knew well, being party to most of the embarrassing detail, Jean needed Peggy's wages to pay-off her debts, buy food, pay the rent, coal and gas and to fuel her addiction for nicotine. Willie no longer contributed anything to the family budget: he too had built up debts with those who had been foolish enough to give him credit.

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Pilgrims' Progress

In parallel, with Bert Graham at *MacLennan's* and Peggy/Margaret McFetridge at *Netherton's*, the two young Christians grew over the ensuing years, learning the ways of commerce in their own spheres, progressing and becoming adept and hard-working, maturing physically.

By the autumn of 1924, Bert was twenty and Peggy nineteen. Both had stopped growing, Bert at 5' 5" and Peggy at 5' 3". To the casual observer, they could have been brother and sister, perhaps even twins.

Margaret's reliance on Miss Fowler and Miss Walker slowly diminished but their friendship continued. Indeed, the roles had slowly reversed. Both spinsters were now in their early seventies and were relying increasingly on Margaret and Gordon who had become almost surrogate children. Both youngsters spent less and less time in the single-end and more time at Agnes's flat where they could enjoy good food, a warm fireside, use the toilet, bathe properly. Most importantly for Margaret, it was here she could store her growing wardrobe of nicer clothes.

Jean also benefited, retaining her morning job as Agnes's house cleaner and earning her secret shilling before moving on to the bakery. Willie still came knocking sharply on Miss Fowler's door every Saturday with his hand held out to receive Jeans' wage of £1. The irony of this was that at almost the same time Jean was meeting her daughter near *Netherton's* to relieve Peggy of the major part of her wage. After a wrangle, it was agreed Peggy could keep 2/- from her wage as 'pocket money'.

What Peggy kept secret from her mother was her bi-annual share from *Netherton's* Staff Box, dispensed at Glasgow Fair in July and on Christmas Eve. Such amounts might be as much as £5, money which Peggy was hoarding for her wedding to Bert, an event which they had discussed during their secret trysts in Pollok Estate.

Although their lives were now dominated by work and work colleagues, Bert and Margaret still met several times a week. The piano lessons had stopped when Mrs Blair decided to sell *Merrylee* and move to a rented tenement flat in Deanston Drive in Lower Shawlands. This new, smaller home was in the close next to her sister and brother-in-law.

On Wednesday evenings the two youngsters met for Bible Study and Prayer with the group at the Gospel Hall where they also helped with the Band of Hope outreach on Friday evenings and the afternoon Sunday School. On Sunday mornings they worshiped at the Citadel. By choice, they had not yet become full members of the Salvation Army and so were not allowed to play in the band.

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On rare occasions they went to the pictures (cinema) usually to *The Hampden*⁶ in Govanhill, but only if the film was considered 'worthy' by the Elders of the Gospel Hall. It was in this cinema their romance began. They were watching a film called *Orphans of the Storm*⁷. During the last scene Margaret's hand strayed across to take hold of Bert's as if seeking comfort. Bert took it in both of his and squeezed.

Margaret leaned into him and whispered, 'Bert, I love you.'

Later, before they parted at Bert's corner, they checked all round before leaning into each other, kissing lightly before chiming their catchphrase:

"God Bless Us All!"

It might have been expected this romance would accelerate, become more physical; but this was not what happened. Neither youngster was innocent of the mechanics surrounding intercourse nor its consequences. This knowledge, coupled with their religious convictions kept them chaste, although not entirely so.

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At home she was Peggy (never Margaret). From a child, Peggy had been increasingly aware of what her mother suffered during intercourse and had lived through the pain of her mother's miscarriages and cot-death babies. In their cramped single-end, her bed lay inches away from her parents on the far side of the thin wooden-framed dividing wall. This bed was a narrow three-quarter width in size, a bed she had shared with Gordon since he was a toddler. If her brother wakened while her parents' sex act was in progress, it was her duty to quieten him. As he grew older, Gordon also learned to pretend to be asleep, as Jean had coached them to act. They must never, ever, call out or look: to do so might earn them a beating from their father.

This bed-sharing had other consequences. On occasion her brother would suffer a night-time asthma attack and it was Peggy's job to get him through it. Gordon was also a regular bed-wetter. Although it had been hoped he would 'grow out of it', as suggested by Mrs McClusky the mid-wife, he was still wet four or five times a week and was obliged to sleep naked wearing a large towel nappy fastened with an oversized safety pin.

Physically, Gordon had matured early. Although he was four years her junior, by age twelve he was nearly six feet tall, well-endowed with a wiry bush of dark brown pubic

⁶ The Hampden in Westmorland Street was a modern cinema opened in 1920 with a huge capacity of 1,000. Its seats were claimed to be 'bug resistant'. Many older picture halls were often dubbed 'flea pits'.

⁷ This was a complex and gushy story of two sisters caught up in the French Revolution. In the melodramatic conclusion, Henriette was on her way to the guillotine to be beheaded during the Reign of Terror, when she was reunited with her blind sister Louise and a new aristocrat lover.

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hair and a very long, thick penis. When he thought Peggy was asleep, he began experimenting, undoing his towel and masturbating vigorously to completion while she clung to the edge of the thin mattress to prevent herself from rolling into him. On one occasion he had tried to molest her. Peggy had surprised herself with the venom and accuracy of her punch which had caused him to groan loudly. The next day, when they were alone, Peggy had scolded Gordon fiercely and there had been no recurrence.

Peggy, however, was not entirely chaste in her thought life and from age thirteen she regularly succumbed to the urge to masturbate. This always occurred during the early hours of the morning when the snoring and regular breathing of the other three occupants of the small room assured her they were fast asleep. During these quiet spells, she allowed her hands to explore her breasts and between her thighs, to discover the wonderful release which could be brought about by careful, slow manipulation of that part of her vagina she had studied several times in a book on human anatomy. This had been done anonymously, she hoped, by consulting a series of well-thumbed pages during repeated visits to the reference section of the Mitchell Library.

As might be expected of a young Christian woman, these episodes of nocturnal self-pleasuring were normally resisted by prayer. When she fell from grace it was almost always in the days leading up to her periods when episodes of desire flushed through her like a river in spate.

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Bert Graham had been aware of his parents' unusual behaviour since he was about four years old. It was late at night and something had wakened him. Following the sound of voices, he wandered downstairs and found his mother naked, on her knees in front of his father whose trousers were down around his ankles. Delilah had turned, giggled in her strange way and said:

"Don't worry, sweetie pie, I'm just eating your Daddy's carrot. Now off you go back to bed, Bertie. There's a good boy. Shoo!"

The following day he had told his brother George who delighted in telling Bert:

"If you ever spy on Mummy and Daddy again, they'll send you away to a home for orphans and then they'll get a girl, so I can have a sister."

Down through the years George had told Bert tales of what he had seen his parents do, including playing "doggies" and "bum-riding" which George said Mummy begged Daddy to do because that way she couldn't get babies.

When older, George, who was always keen to shock, had once given Bert a live demonstration of the delights of what he called "wanking himself off". He had also shown

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Bert his secret hoard of postcards of women baring their breasts and bottoms and in the weeks which followed the masturbation demonstration these nude images haunted Bert's dreams.

Bert immediately identified George's behaviour as an attack by Satan who was trying to win him back from Christ. Unable to tell anyone about it, he wisely carried his burden to his Saviour in prayer. Gradually re-assurance returned and the potency of these lurid images faded.

However, several months before his thirteenth birthday loomed, Bert noticed changes in his body. Like George, he too now had a thick bush of black pubic hair and suffered from sudden and unexplained but enjoyable erections.

One day, while in Pollok Estate with Miss Fischer, they saw a male dog mount a female. There were no owners about and the dogs appeared to be strays. It may have been this was an opportunity which Miss Fischer had been hoping for because after they had watched the act to completion, she delved into her handbag to retrieve a small book, wrapped in a brown paper sleeve. She slipped it into his jacket pocket with the advice:

'Bertie, you are a growing lad. If you haven't had urges, you soon will have. Don't let them worry you. They are completely natural. We all have them. It's the human condition. Even I have them. The trick is not to suppress them but to enjoy them. But please, Bertie, do so in the privacy of your bed, under the cover with the lights out. Do not become an exhibitionist like your brother who has already displayed himself to me, inviting me to "jump aboard for free".'

Over the weeks to come, Miss Fischer would enquire how much progress he had made, suggesting he might like to try when he was having a bath, adding, "frigging myself in the bath is one of the delights of my life."

Bert studied the book under his bedcovers by the light of his bicycle torch. Called *Discover your Manhood*, it was a step by step guide of how the penis and testicles worked and explained what he would experience as a novice masturbator, warning him not to be disappointed if his first efforts did not meet with success.

"Your time will come," the slim book promised.

Bert began to pull and tug at his penis and testicles as he had seen George do. It worked. He became bigger. Switching off the torch and placing it with the book under his pillow, he recalled the images of the nude women. Then, after a long, hard 'wank', he produced the promised semen with blood coursing through his body, making him dizzy, euphoric. It was the most wonderful sensation he had ever experienced. Defiantly, Bert refused to accept the feelings of guilt which came as his hormones subsided.

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The book had promised if he waited about half an hour, the experience could be revisited. During the next two hours he masturbated three times, each time becoming more accomplished. Now his images were of Miss Fischer and Miss Netherton, both women with large breasts and wide bottoms, spiced with the long-ago scene of his naked mother 'eating his father's carrot', re-imagined with Margaret's face on her shoulders.

During his first months of passion, Bert allowed himself to be tempted into another sin. George had boasted he had regularly watched Miss Netherton bathe on Friday evenings. This weekly event took place in the family bathroom, just along the corridor from Bert's bedroom. According to George, Amy Netherton often stood naked while drying her hair and rubbing skin cream into her breasts. This could be viewed by kneeling outside the bathroom door and looking through the keyhole.

Hot water for bath filling had always been in short supply at *Rosemount*. In part this was because the central heating system serving the hot water storage cylinder was sluggish and partly because the cylinder was undersized for the demands of Delilah who took at least three baths every day. Fortunately, the bathroom was well served by a huge radiator and was always very warm, even in the depths of winter.

In recent months the problem had been solved by the fitting of a gas-fired 'geyser' (hot water boiler). This was mounted on a bracket at high level in the corner over the bath and provided a moderate flow of reasonably hot water. Although unattractive and often unreliable, when it worked it was a boon. When the water level reached the overflow, the hot water flow could be adjusted to provide a continuous dribble to keep the water acceptably warm, allowing a long, relaxing bath.

One Friday, when George was away at Fettes', giving Bert a clear field, he yielded to temptation. The whole voyeuristic experience lasted nearly an hour. Bert watched from almost the first moment as Amy sat naked on the toilet seat, her legs wide, her eyes closed, at first peeing then rubbing herself intimately until she groaned softly. Standing, she wiped her private part with a damp cloth. As the bath filled, she clipped her toenails into the toilet pan, an act which displayed her large bottom and pink anus.

Steam filled the room. Leaning across the bath she swirled in flakes to make the water soapy. This gave Bert a full view of her large breasts and enormous nipples. The scent of lavender seeped under the door into the corridor.

Once in the bath, Amy lay back almost out of sight with only her head and neck showing. Her eyes were closed. Water dribbled down from the geyser, keeping the bath water warm. For a frustrating eternity all Bert could hear was a gentle splashing and swishing. He guessed from Miss Fischer's revelation what their housekeeper was doing and watched her face, trying to spot when she climaxed.

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Amy rose to dry herself slowly and carefully then apply talc to her bush and cream to her nipples; the climax of the show played out exactly as George had predicted. Bert watched right up to the point where she shrugged her perfumed body into her dressing gown, gathered her clothes and toilet bag then fiddled her large feet into her slippers.

Only then did Bert rise from his knees, scuttle back to his room and dive under the covers to rerun the entire sequence many times over.

The next morning he skipped breakfast and spent nearly an hour in earnest prayer begging his Saviour's forgiveness, hot tears running down his cheeks. Despite this earnest pledge, Bert repeated his peeping tom behaviour a dozen or more times before eventually tiring of it. By this stage, the physical side of his romance with Peggy had moved forward.

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Following their first kiss after the *Orphans of the Storm*, the two young Christians fell into a new routine. This was weather dependent. On dry evenings, at least twice and sometimes three times a week, they met at an agreed spot in the woods at Pollok Estate, where they were very well concealed in a dense thicket of rhododendrons. Here they would go through a pantomime act of holding hands while facing each other with their eyes closed, whispering earnest prayers to each other, attempting to stave off what they both knew was inevitable.

By tacit agreement Bert would lead and pray for a few minutes, aping the style and content of the Elders at the Gospel Hall. Accordingly, Bert's first prayers focussed on 'big issues', items which dominated the news, problems they had prayed for in the Wednesday evening Bible Study sessions. Every prayer from each of them always ended with the words:

". . . . Loving Heavenly Father, these things we ask in Jesus' Precious Name and in the Power of the Holy Ghost."

Bert would then squeeze Margaret's hands and together they would say: "Amen".

This first prayer was followed by a few minutes silence before Margaret began her responding prayer. Her style was more direct, more down to earth, reciting a long litany of people she knew personally, usually starting with Bert, his family and his household. This part was slightly stilted because, although these were people she had glimpsed from a distance, she had never spoken to them. The exception was Miss Amelia Netherton whom she knew from the Citadel although the girl was always careful never to reveal the true nature of her relationship with Bert. Peggy's list would always include Miss Fowler, Miss Walker, Gordon, her mother, her father and Mrs Celia Netherton and her work colleagues.

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Very occasionally a woman called Mrs Shepherd would be added, a lady who dropped in to check on new fashions and always asked to see Peggy, pressing a half-crown coin into her palm as she left to mount her motor taxi. Bert had questioned Peggy about this behaviour but neither of them could think why such a rich woman had taken a shine to Peggy.

Then, as if playing out a Shakespearean play, Bert would respond with a further prayer, covering mainly the same people from *Rosemount*, adding his 'Uncle' Lachlan and Mr Fraser Traynor. On occasions, one or two selected colleagues from *MacLellan's* were added.

In all, these prayers lasted about an hour during which, in theory, they kept their eyes closed and their minds focussed on matters spiritual.

The reality was different. Bert and Margaret may or may not have been familiar with the concept of 'foreplay' and would never had dreamt what they were engaged in was a version of it. Had anyone been able to observe them, they would have seen their eyelids flicker open to gaze at the face so near, to watch lips or an Adam's apple move, see small breasts heave in a silent sigh or a head shake at the mention of repeated sin in a parent or colleague. Nor were the lovers holding hands passively. Both were squeezing and caressing. When the prayers finally ended, as if by some mystical process, Bert and Margaret had moved closer and closer until their lips were almost touching.

With their prayer tribute paid in full, they fell into a silence. It was always Margaret who broke it with her quiet affirmation:

"Bert Graham, I love you."

"Peggy McFetridge, I love you."

These declarations were followed by a pecked kiss, the start of a familiar routine which, to remain safe, must be disciplined and never escalate. All details had been discussed and agreed before they had allowed themselves to stray over the line from complete chastity. Only when they were married, would they enjoy the full fruits of love. They had agreed to this 'agreement' in principle but had no concrete plans or timescale. This understanding was the basis for what was about to happen.

Their first platonic dry peck was followed quickly by another, a more passionate kiss which released the floodgates. Bert's hands deftly unbuttoned her coat and then her blouse, slipping up inside her brassiere, moving slowly, gently caressing, teasing, until he sensed he should drop his head to suck and nibble.

In these moments Peggy knew she must not allow him to go downstairs or she would lose control and want more. After weeks of resisting his pleas of "just to touch it, no more" she had solved his dilemma, after a fashion.

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As she felt herself 'leap', she sobbed and reached down, rubbing his penis through his trouser. His organ was 'vague' to the touch because it was padded inside a large handkerchief to prevent a repeat of the embarrassing wet stain which had happened on the first occasion. Six months into their new intimacy, it often took several minutes of rubbing to bring him to his release.

This new form of intimacy was a process which both young Christians grew to enjoy. Although they did not discuss it openly, they were both convinced it was a subterfuge which God would not disapprove or punish.

Over time Peggy learned in the days before her period was due, as Bert writhed under her touch, this false sex ejaculation often caused her own near simultaneous climax.

Later, back home in the reality of her cramped dingy bed with Gordon by her side wearing his night nappy, Peggy waited until she was sure the three others were asleep and then revisited her moments of intimacy with Bert to create imaginary love scenes in which they would be free to enjoy proper sex, in a warm bed, in a nice place of their own.

Meanwhile, two miles away in Upper Shawlands, Bert was enjoying similar self-administered fantasy sex although his partners varied between Peggy, Amy Netherton, Eloise Fischer and a younger prettier version of his mother who willingly came to his bedside to kneel and 'eat his carrot'.

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Celestial Clockwork

The second half of 1925 gave rise to circumstances which would affect Bert and Margaret profoundly. However, the series of events started earlier.

In January, Marianna caught a cold and suffered another bout of prolonged coughing. This was a regular ailment and she tholed it for a few days. When Dr Fordyce was called, he examined her phlegm, saw the blood, sounded her chest and, against her wishes, Marianna was removed to the Victoria Infirmary where her condition worsened. Tests indicated both lungs were badly affected by cancer and she was given oxygen and copious doses of laudanum.

In her drugged sleep she became quite talkative conversing with the spectres of her first husband (the original George Graham) and her second husband, Old Vic Wardley.

Six days later she was dead and at her prior request was buried above them in the same grave.

A week after the funeral, Miss Nettie Wilson slept away in her sleep. A birthday card hidden inside her Bible revealed she was Marianna's unmarried mother.

The household at *Rosemount* now comprised Deliah, Bert and Miss Netherton and, from time to time, Deliah's husband George, when he wasn't cohabiting with one or other of his wide circle of widows. Having established himself as a 'kept man', the young George no longer visited.

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Peggy would be twenty-one in six months' time. They had celebrated Bert's coming of age on the 15th March by telling their closest friends they had become 'engaged to be married'. All were sworn to secrecy. By agreement they would not make the matter public or inform their families until they were settled, which, to Bert and Peggy meant having a house of their own to live in. To this end there would be no engagement ring, only a simple wedding band when the time came.

Without exception everyone who learned the news viewed them as 'a most suitable couple', despite the differences in their backgrounds.

However, George Graham Senior soon caught wind of the rumours and had sternly warned his son he would be deleted entirely from his Will if he did not mend his ways and find a

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more suitable bride. George had no wish to be related to the foul-mouthed Willie McFetridge.

Bert kept this chastisement to himself and, although it was a nagging disappointment, he remained steadfast in his love for Peggy and continued as before saving diligently, adding her occasional contributions to his bank account, praying for guidance and trusting his Lord to make their lives fulfilled in His own good time.

In his rant, her husband George did not reveal his wife Delilah Graham was still the legal owner of the various businesses from which he drew an income but did not own, thanks to the clever wording devised decades earlier by Mary Scullion-McConnell. For her part, Delilah Graham, despite her weak mental state and almost constant inebriation, had managed to avoid signing control to her husband, no matter how hard he tried to persuade her. In one of her more lucid moments which followed a highly distasteful encounter with her elder twin son George, Delilah, without informing her husband, had redrafted her Will in a surprising way, a fact that would soon be revealed by a strange twist of events.

Despite his bluster, George the father's threat to Bert was merely so much hot air.

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As the year of 1925 unfolded, events unseen were causing levers to move and cogs to whirl, some slowly, quietly, others rapidly, noisily and dramatically. To a casual observer it might have seemed they did so of their own volition. Nonetheless, the effect was to chime the bell of consequence loudly, both at Rosemount in High Shawlands, and in the squalid single-end two miles away behind Miss Fowler's building at 7 Pollok Road.

Had they been able to watch events unfold from a higher plane, those who had followed the lives of the two young Christians for whom this bell would toll loudest would have said the young people were innocent bystanders. Some, those who clung firmly to the credo of "Let God's Will be done", would have gone further: these people would have asserted Bert and Margaret/Peggy would have been powerless to influence what was about to happen in their lives.

Later, when the future had segwayed into the past, yet others, those who admired and loved the young people deeply would quote, (with perfect hindsight), the words from Romans 8:28:

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

The first lever pulled approximately 3,300 miles away, in an enormous mansion house located on a prestigious country spread of 10,000 acres, 100 miles upstate from the teeming metropolis of New York City.

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The Hermitage

In the Spring of 1925, the twenty-one-year old George Wardley Graham, (self-styled as George Jnr following the American fashion), had found a woman of wealth who insisted he marry her rather than merely serve as her temporary male escort.

Newly twenty-one, George could easily have passed for thirty or even thirty-five. Dressed as a fop, a dandy, deporting himself in a manner designed to catch the eye of lonely women, he now smoked expensive cigars and drank only the finest wines and cognacs. He was well-known on the *Mauretania* where he regularly made crossings to pick up a new provider to fuel his expensive lifestyle.

Viviana Brabsley had been on a shopping trip to London and during the return journey on the *Mauretania* she met George Jnr. On the night of their first encounter, she was mourning the twentieth anniversary of the tragic death of her father. In her damaged mind, she was still reliving her love affair with Rod Brabsley, calling his vision to her bed every night, talking to him, hearing him reply, supplying the reassurance she was still loved.

Since Miss Viviana Brabsley was travelling alone in the largest, most luxurious suite on the ship, George closed his eyes to her appearance, ignored her bad breath and focused on her wealth.

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Viviana's father, (the late Rod Brabsley), had been born in St Petersburg where his father served in his city's world-renowned *Hermitage Museum*, soon to become the cultural jewel of the fledgling Bolshevik Russian state. At that juncture, Rod's name was Barodo Brobonowski. Following a family tradition, Barodo worked as a jeweller and horologist, repairing expensive clocks and watches. During the rumblings and disruption which preceded the revolution, business had suffered. The family were no longer 'comfortable'. The flat they lived in was in danger of being sub-divided to allow peasants to share. Barodo was plotting his escape from the coming tyranny.

His father had been appointed to service the various clocks in the museum's collection and from a child Barodo had been a frequent visitor at *The Hermitage*. When the opportunity he had been waiting for came up, the young man took it.

Aged twenty-two Rod fled to North America in a Swedish fishing boat, landing first at Nova Scotia, in Canada. In his possession was a stolen tiara of fine gold filigree studded with diamonds and precious stones. For two years he laid low, calling himself simply Barry,

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learning English and working for a man called John Brabsley, originally from York, England. Barry learned his employer once had a brother who had moved his family to Vancouver but had died in a house fire. Days old, their infant son Roderick had also died in the inferno.

When he felt confident he was not being pursued by the Russian authorities, Barodo made his way to Chicago. Here he traded the distinctive tiara for anonymous cash in the amount of \$35,000 (USD). Free of the evidence, he moved to Dallas, Texas, changed his name to Roderick (Rod) Brabsley. Claiming he was from Vancouver, the only child of English parents, now sadly dead, he applied for US citizenship and got a passport.

Rod began to follow the American dream. Three years later his business partner had decided to end his life by blowing his brains out with a pistol no one knew he had owned. Following some dubious legal paper-shuffling, Brabsley now held outright title to his first block of oil and coal assets worth around \$3 million (USD).

Using a technique called 'piggy-backing', (this was highly illegal and risked imprisonment), Brabsley raised cash on these assets, mortgaging them several times over to different lenders. He then placed his money in high risk stocks. After seven years of riding the dragon, he cashed up and put the bulk of his wealth into gold, industrial diamonds and antique jewellery. At this stage, he was worth around \$100 million (USD) making him one of the wealthiest men in the USA. However, Rod Brabsley was still unknown, shunned by the American aristocracy, the 'old money' landed families. Rod was now thirty-five. Physically or in his manner, Brabsley was not an impressive or handsome man but he knew this did not matter. With his wealth, he could have virtually any available woman he desired and some who were already taken.

His catchphrase was: "Wealth has intrinsic beauty", this taken from a Russian proverb.

To celebrate his genius, Brabsley embarked on a plan he had been hatching for many years. After a series of aggressive buy-outs, he accumulated a huge block of agricultural land overlooking Lake Saratoga in the northern part of New York state, close to the border with Canada. He then began work on a forty-room mansion he named *The Hermitage*.

The development project was devised and managed by Galbraith, Cochrane & Templeton, a firm of solicitors and land agents from Saratoga Springs.

Through this firm he came across a brilliant young lawyer called Andreas Vass, a tall, partially-sighted man with a palsied arm. Until this point Vass's progress had been blighted by his disabilities. However, it was not these impediments which had made Vass a social outcast. Vass had a passion for young men. Brabsley also had a passion, his was for young women, the younger the better. From Saratoga Springs, both men Both travelled regularly to their respective special brothels of New York City to satisfy their

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longings and often met on the stage coaches which plied their business between the metropolis and Saratoga Springs.

On one such trip they were trapped thirty miles from Saratoga Springs by a violent snow-storm. In the tavern where they sheltered for five days while the storm abated, they shared secrets on both sides. After a protracted negotiation, Vass took charge of day to day operations on *The Hermitage Estate*, ruling the servants and tenants with a stern (sometimes vicious) discipline.

From an office in an outbuilding designed and constructed to his specification, Vass also administered Brabsley's now perfectly legal investment interests. Using a working risk capital sum capped at \$10 million (USD) to buy and sell stocks, the pair continued to amass further wealth. By converting their 'surpluses' into cash, they bought safe assets which now included a growing collection of expensive watches and clocks which Rod restored and serviced, throwing his mind back to his earlier years in St Petersburg.

In the grandly furnished apartment above this office, Andreas was at last free to indulge his proclivities under the protection and freedom which living inside Brabsley's fiefdom afforded.

As 'his eyes' and his enforcer, Vass employed an older man called Paddy Smart who had been kicked-out of the New York Police Department after he was caught in a sting operation⁸. Paddy had been running a booze racket to break the prohibition laws using police vehicles to transport the contraband. It was a Mafia 'business' with Paddy as their front man, the pay-off man who 'fixed' things with his police colleagues when required.

His 'escape' was organised by his Mafia contacts who had directed him to find and 'woo' Vass at *The Hermitage*. Vass was one of their clients, a regular at a Mafia run 'men only' brothel hotel in New York.

In his new role as Vass's assistant Paddy had moved upmarket and was now dealing in narcotics using his new position both as a cover for smuggling drugs across the border from Canada and to supply his new employer. During his frenetic years playing the New York Stock Market, Brabsley had also developed a liking for narcotics as well as alcohol.

His preferred tippie was expensive French Cognac infused with a teaspoonsful of high grade cocaine.

Until he had established himself at *The Hermitage*, Rod Brabsley had concealed his paedophilia. Now with his 'protection' in place, he got Vass to provide him with a string of

⁸ From January 1920 for thirteen years the USA was technically 'dry'; living through thirteen years of prohibition. Being relatively close to the Canadian border, it was easy for Paddy Smart to work his contacts and satisfy local demand, using *The Hermitage* as a convenient base.

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girls, some as young as ten, dressing them as dolls, claiming they were his nieces, daring his neighbours and casual acquaintances to object. Brabsley had no proper friends.

In the Mexican City of Chihuahua, he 'married' a fourteen-year-old beauty and brought her back to be his wife at *The Hermitage*. When she was sixteen, he sent her home to her family with a generous pay-off and two small sons to comfort her.

A month later, in the Mexican City of Durango he found a replacement 'bride', another small, slim beauty, this time a thirteen-year-old. After three sons, she had eventually provided what he craved, a girl child whom he named Viviana. When Viviana was two years old, her mother was nineteen and no longer fresh and Brabsley sent her home to her family in Durango with her sons and a pay-off sufficient to see her through the rest of her life.

From that first night alone with Viviana, Rod Brabsley obsessed on his infant daughter, adoring, almost worshipping her, spoiling her and molesting her in equal measure. She slept in his bed, they swam naked together in his indoor swimming pool. Later, from about the age of eight, father and daughter travelled throughout America and Canada to enjoy long holidays at expensive resort hotels.

In her early teens Viviana was slim, dark-skinned with jet black hair and dark brown eyes, almost as beautiful as her mother had been. Knowing now she was different, she began to question her life, to rebel. To tame her, Brabsley introduced her to drugs and alcohol and she became addicted, dependant.

In New York, Chicago, Miami, San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego, father and daughter shopped in the best stores, buying her clothes (all bespoke, hand-made), hats, shoes, undergarments, (especially undergarments, made to strange designs garnered from Rod's memories of when he was a child), and hundreds of pieces of jewellery, unique items, made according to Rod's design and under his close supervision.

Viviana was his Princess and Queen and Brabsley was her Prince and King.

As Viviana grew older she beefed up under the influence of Rod's genes and excessive alcohol consumption. Aged eighteen she was 5' 2" and tipping the scales at two hundred and twenty pounds (more than fifteen stones), making her almost spherical in appearance. Although his Queen was still fresh-faced and bubbly (mostly due to drugs) Brabsley began to lose interest and turned to Vass to supply him with substitutes for his bed.

Increasingly ignored and left to her own company, Viviana started to experiment, snaring young men who worked on the vast estate. One day Rod caught Viviana dressed in one of her 'baby' outfits, kneeling on her bed being bum-ridden by a boy wearing one of Rod's favourite 'King' outfits. This well-endowed teenage boy worked in the stables, a lad who tended her string of ponies.

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That night the boy disappeared. Some hoped he had absconded, many suspected he had been murdered by Paddy Smart then dropped into the lake bound with chain, a rumour which Vass encouraged as a warning to others who worked on the estate.

The next day Rod Brabsley left *The Hermitage* for the last time. Two months later he was killed in a spectacular train crash in India, where he was on honeymoon with his new wife, another Mexican beauty, this one aged only twelve. The people who had seen them dining, dancing and laughing together had assumed the child was his grand-daughter.

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A Family Affair

In defence of Rod Brabsley, a psychotherapist would have pointed out Barodo was reliving a time when he had been the only boy child in a family of nine older girls. His sisters had treated him as a doll, tickled, cuddled, fondled him. Although the smallest and daintiest of the girls, his sister Vania was the most dominant of the siblings. Five years her brother's senior, she decided she would adopt Barodo as her 'baby', establishing a routine in which she took him, aged three, to sleep in her bed each night. In such a large family, this was at first seen as helpful to her mother. This situation was soon accepted as normal and lasted for more than a decade.

When Vania reached puberty, she taught Barodo to perform sex acts on her.

Later, when Barodo showed signs of becoming a man, he was consigned to a bed of his own. By this stage, Vania and Barodo had become adept at concealing their special feelings, covering them up by constantly squabbling when in the company of other family members. Undetected, brother and sister met in hidden corners to kiss, cuddle, caress and whisper their love for each other. In due course their relationship became fully incestuous, a secret which lasted undetected for several years.

Vania became pregnant. Their behaviour was uncovered. Her father was particularly distraught because the tiny, doll-faced Vania was his special favourite after Barodo and both had let him down. After tears and harsh words, they were both sworn to chastity. The foetus aborted at five months. To prevent recurrence, Vania was banished, married off with a pittance of a dowry to a distant older relative, a farmer who lived far away in the country.

However, by this stage, it was too late for Barodo. His obsession for love-making with pre-pubescent girls and the urge to replicate his years with Vania had been burned deep into his psyche.

During his 'open' years as a paedophile supported by Andreas Vass, the overriding characteristic of these encounters between Rod and Viviana was close to a pantomime act. Rod was a gentle lover whose needs were as much psychological as physical. What happened behind locked doors on the upper floors of *The Hermitage* with Viviana and her predecessors never once involved pain, overt abuse or punishment.

As Viviana passed through puberty, Barodo had taught her to perform sex acts with him, replicating his own experience with Vania. When Viviana became pregnant age thirteen, Vass arranged an abortion and for her to be sterilised. This was all done very privately

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in New York but, as with all best kept secrets, it was soon widely known that Viviana could not have children

By contrast what was happening nearby, in the upstairs apartment above the offices of Andreas Vass was of quite a different character. Vass was a full-blown sadomasochist who required the giving and receiving of pain as a purge prior to enjoying anal sex both as a giver and receiver.

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Grief

When the tragic news of Rod Brabsley's demise eventually reached *The Hermitage*, the word got around quickly. The multi-millionairess Viviana Brabsley was pursued by dozens of young hopefuls, sons of American blue-blood families down on their luck and willing to dilute their genes to snare a wealthy young woman no matter how odd she was.

Vass set up a vetting procedure. The process was twofold, involving a 'cash in advance' "introduction fee" and a signature which ensured Andreas remained in effective control of *The Hermitage* estate. This document was entitled, "A Personal Memorandum of Understanding between Andreas Vass, Esquire and *The Suitor* (name to be inserted)".

By agreement, the existence of this document must be kept from Galbraith, Cochrane and Templeton who were in overall control of the legal documents under which Viviana Brabsley had inherited her vast wealth.

During the early months of her mourning, Viviana dismissed these men out of hand. None fitted the memory of her dear lost "Prince and King", images which she conjured into a quasi-reality under the influence of intoxicants. In this world of grief and loss, Rod Brabsley would appear to her, suitably garbed in one of his bizarre outfits, to play hide and seek before enticing her to bed where, as her hands became his, they caressed her body to a slow climax as her perfect lover, her Prince and King.

Despite the rumours of madness which circulated, still a stream of willing suiters came from all parts of the USA and Canada, attracted by the great prize, hoping to woo her. Some balked at Vass's terms and left without making their pitch but the majority accepted his offer. Most were young, handsome, naive and judged by Vass as 'highly suitable'. Others were older, divorced, wiser, more cynical and calculating men who were experienced in the arts of seduction and who had heard of Viviana's father-figure obsession. All eventually retreated to tell their own versions of the bizarre existence in which the heiress at *The Hermitage* lived out her life in splendour and luxury.

Each in his turn discovered she lived in a fantasy world. For much of the time she could be charming, gushing, over-affectionate then seconds later she would swing to become bitchy and demanding. Gaining access to her boudoir was usually not a great difficulty but it was then the real problems arose. Viviana expected them to know, without instruction, what she needed. When they did not provide it, they were ejected often under threat of death.

What they could not know was in private, during the intimacies of their foreplay and lovemaking, Viviana had always called her father 'Milyy Chick' (Russian for Sweet Boy). In

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his turn, he called his daughter 'Shaya Sestra' (Good Sister). In these roles they had played 'games': both dressing in children's clothing, Viviana as big sister, Rod as her baby.

In Rod's favourite game they indulged in a make-believe version of hide and seek which might last for hours. When 'caught' the penalty for the loser was a fake spanking and gentle scolding with fake tears. During the reconciliation, there was cuddling, undressing, bathing together then perfuming with lavender talcum powder before taking to bed. The conclusion of their making-up involved genital caressing and tugging with preparatory oral sex to get Rod ready for the long, drawn-out version of gentle, teasing sex with Viviana sitting astride her 'pony'.

Although the word tantric was not in their nomenclature, this described what they were seeking. These sessions could last many hours from first dressing up to completion when they would fall asleep in a gentle embrace under the covers with Viviana's head lying on her father's chest, her hand holding his penis.

Despite his chosen name of "Rod", by the time of his death in India, Brabsley had become almost impotent, debilitated by alcohol, heavy smoking, the intake of narcotics and other illegal substances.

His declining 'tantric' performances with his daughter during their last few years together at *The Hermitage* had been 'supported' by using an aphrodisiac called Spanish Fly, supplied on demand by Paddy Smart.

During her extended grieving period Viviana's memory of her father's lined and aging face, his heavy, podgy naked body and lack of virility began to fade. In her increasingly confused mind, Rod Brabsley became a younger man, a gentle Adonis who adored her, heaped praise on her.

Had she known of George Graham Jnr at this stage, she might have actively sought him because in appearance George offered a fair match to the younger Rod Brabsley she conjured up when she was alone in bed and desperate for kind words and cuddles, all of which George Jnr was now adept at from his experiences with his many, many ladies who paid for his services.

Sadly for Viviana, in the decade to follow before she would meet him, she would have many other trials to face alone.

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By age twenty-five, Viviana was addicted to narcotics and to ice cream which she ate by the gallon. She soared to nudging at three hundred pounds, (almost twenty-two stones). Her face was still attractive, but her teeth were badly stained by wine and nicotine and her breath was vile.

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She was also dangerous. With no one to truly love her as her father had once done, Viviana was trapped in a lonely self-world. Dominated by whims, she developed a God Complex, increasingly demanding instant obedience. To enforce this paranoia, she carried a fully-loaded pistol in her lock-fast handbag beside her various pills and pungent cigarettes which she needed to calm her nerves. On occasion, even when alone and hallucinating, she would randomly discharge this weapon at her ghosts until the chamber was empty.

To the astonishment of those who crept around after her, one day she rallied.

Although she did not give up her addictions, she reigned them in, lost weight, began to take walks in the gardens and even took rides on a large docile Clydesdale.

Undiagnosed, and therefore unknown to anyone, her brain tumour was in remission and had shrunk considerably, easing the pressure in her head, restoring a modicum of rational behaviour. Over a six-month period she lost weight and was now one hundred and sixty pounds (just under twelve stones).

Vass tried again and this time the heiress accepted the advances of a handsome young blade but only on condition he change his name to "Mr Rod Brabsley". The marriage contract was 'controlled' by both Vass and Cochrane, Galbraith and Templeton to ensure Miss Viviana's wealth was protected.

In a strange but revealing and ultimately helpful side document drafted by Viviana herself, Henry Williamson the Third of Virginia must also agree to act out the pantomime of *Good Sister* and *Sweet Boy*, play hide and seek and accept and give gentle spankings and the whole rigmarole she needed to fulfil her dream.

The brain tumour flared and started to grow again, but slowly. Soon her need to be punished progressed and the spankings demanded from *Sweet Boy* became more energetic. Viviana was starting down the road of self-inflicted punishment for her long-ago 'sin' when she had snared the young men to her bed to spite her father.

To the surprise of many, this odd marriage lasted three years until she decided he was no longer suitable as her *Sweet Boy*. For months she withdrew to her suite of rooms where he was no longer welcome. Here she lived in a state of constant intoxication, relying on fantasy and self-pleasuring.

Confused, mentally exhausted and unable to sustain his upbeat performance, Henry Williamson opened negotiations hoping for a lucrative divorce. In a stupid move, he invited a former girlfriend (an out of work actress briefed to pretend she was his sister), to join him at *The Hermitage* to satisfy his nocturnal needs and restore a sense of normality.

The eventual divorce was messy and costly requiring the sustained intervention of Galbraith, Cochrane & Templeton who uncovered the role Andreas Vass was playing in

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recruiting these suiters and took steps to try to prevent his further interference in order to protect their most valued client.

It took two further years for another, slightly older man to accept the challenge and become another 'Mr Rod Brabsley' and *Sweet Boy* to her *Good Sister*. This marriage rumbled on for several years until the man had had enough and cashed-in his chips.

He was replaced by a man who was also addicted to 'special medicines' and highly fragrant cigarettes. This marriage, (more about 'talking and sharing' than sex), had lasted only six months until one afternoon, both high, they began to argue about whose turn it was to "hide". To win the argument, she discharged her pistol in his direction, hitting him in the lower arm and upper thigh (while aiming at his reproductive organs, she later confessed). In her hallucination, she later claimed, she had seen this unfortunate man having sex with her chamber maid.

Despite his injuries, his settlement was curtailed by the watertight pre-nuptial agreement he had signed with Galbraith, Cochrane & Templeton.

When Viviana eventually met *George Graham Jnr*, she had been without a male companion to comfort her and boost her ego for nearly a year.

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Mauritania

After the crossing to New York and now aware of the extent of her remaining wealth, (a mere \$93 million (USD), she claimed⁹), George Jnr had no hesitation in accepting her 'offer' of marriage and, steeling himself for a battle, travelled with her to *The Hermitage*, officially engaged but not yet married to Miss Viviana Brabsley.

George Jnr knew from his father's war stories of the arguments which had followed an early or indeed any death, that the remains of an estate, no matter how meagre, were almost always fought over by the survivors. A quickie marriage by the ship's Captain or by a public official in New York would not suffice.

Based on this, he knew that he needed this marriage to be fully endorsed by her family (she claimed she was an orphan) and underwritten by 'a full legal agreement' if he was to win the ultimate prize of full inheritance when his wife came to her end. Given her hedonistic lifestyle, he believed her demise would not be too far in the future.

Settled at *The Hermitage* as her companion and lover, George Jnr set his face to 'smile' and knuckled down to endure and persist until he won the agreement he was seeking.

Her legal team from Galbraith, Cochrane and Templeton stubbornly resisted but after a dozen or so sessions of legal arguments, and worn-out by the debacles caused by her previous marriages, they finally decided that the Scotsman was a 'reasonable and rational man'.

After a three month wrangle, George Wardley Graham Jnr and Miss Viviana Brabsley of *The Hermitage* finally got their signatures on the agreement her fiancé had insisted upon and the papers were signed and notarised by Judge Terence Malloy at the Saratoga Springs Courthouse.

Underlying the whole negotiation was the fearful knowledge that to resist Miss Viviana too forcefully risked being shot at with her pistol. In the end their protests failed to deflect Viviana Brabsley from her belief she was adorable and perfect in every way, happy to accept it as true when her intended declared his undying love, telling her at every opportunity that she was "adorable, sexy, irresistible".

⁹ Regarding the true value of her estate, Viviana had never fully understood the accounts which she had signed off each year.

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In her heighten state of self-adoration fuelled by her intoxicants, she only needed to smile at the reflection of her flabby, fifteen stone bulk in any of her many mirrors for confirmation that she was a Princess and Queen to George Jnr's Prince and King.

Despite the apparent mis-match, it transpired that behind the closed doors of her several bedrooms, they were very suited to each other. (At this early stage in their married live, he was as yet unaware that she often carried a large and fully-loaded automatic pistol.) Like George Jnr, Viviana had 'issues' which revolved around peculiar and voracious sexual desires and alcohol. She was also dependent on 'special medicines'. Unknown to George Jnr his wife also had a deep-seated God-complex paranoia.

Several months after yet another grandiose wedding ceremony, *The Hermitage* had settled to its new normality although to old hands it seemed somehow even more bizarre. For several weeks on end, the honeymoon couple lived upstairs alone with food left outside a locked door, their orders filled according to a note left pinned to the door.

However, to an experienced observer with a medical psychiatric training, it might have seemed more logical.

In the precursor to his marriage, as if in training, George had travelled as a passenger on the *Mauretania* close to eighty times. To avoid being categorised as 'undesirable', he had been wise enough to be discreet and to tip generously. This was always done from his onboard account, never direct cash, a commodity which he found difficult to hold onto, due to his periodic obsession with Black Jack in the onboard casino.

On this basis George Jnr had been 'tolerated' by the ship's management as a necessary freelancer in the service of certain lady passengers travelling in First Class and willing to pay for his attentions. Apart from agreeing to settle the accounts for his accommodation, bar bills and tips, George Jnr also obliged his patrons to gift him a generous cash sum in advance.

In his plan to snare his ladies, these supplementary amounts, (required to pay for his gambling), were always extracted during an early sex romp session with the promise it was to cover services during the entire voyage, a negotiation he re-opened from time to time if his client was particularly 'needy' or demanded 'special acts' which may include anal or oral sex or the application of a dildo in various combinations. By his fourth or fifth voyage, he was no longer shocked or surprised by these 'special requests'.

Most of his ladies preferred to come to George Jnr's cabin for post lunch or early evening sessions before dining with their friends, thus preserving their status as 'respectable'. Not all were widows or singletons; some (perhaps a second or third wife) might have older, less virile husbands.

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During his eighteen-month spell on the *Mauritania*, George Jnr had accumulated a wealth of experience and so the unusual demands placed on him by Viviana did not seem as odd as they might to novices. Many an older lady had wished him to become her 'baby'. Some took to dressing him in a towel as if it was a nappy, he sucking on her thumb while she cuddled him and he fondled her, as if innocently. At other times he had been directed to undress then stand in the bath to be sponged, caressed, patted dry, then powdered before being ordered to bed with his 'new mother' to suck on her tired old teats before closing his eyes and rising to the challenge of satisfying her carnal lusts.

And of course, back at *Rosemount* as a growing youngster, George had spied on his parents' odd behaviour many times, imprinting it as 'normal'.

During several rounds of negotiations with her lawyers, when he was shown Viviana's document, George Jnr eventually agreed to change his name to Rod Brabsley and play *Sweet Boy* to her *Good Sister*. Despite great pressure and side-offers, the young Scotsman held out and refused to sign the other elements of the pre-nuptial agreement which would have limited his ability to control his expected inheritance.

Eventually, the lawyers at *Saratoga Springs* (who between themselves reckoned Viviana would soon be dead) agreed that George Jnr would probably prove to be an 'easier' client to deal with than the capricious Miss Viviana.

Immediately the papers were certified and his position secured, George Jnr reneged on the name change in his normal daily life. Except in Viviana's company, (when he answered to "Rod", "Papa" and *Sweet Boy*, at her whim, to everyone else he was still George Wardley Graham Jnr. In private they reckoned should the young Scotsman outlast his new wife, he would stand to inherit her fortune, an amount certified as \$124 million (USD) at the time of signing the legal documents.

Undetected, during his extended reign as Manager at *The Hermitage Estate* when he had been close to an increasingly drug-damaged Rod Brabsley (original), Vass had filched, in a long series of minor frauds, around \$5 million (USD) in stocks and shares, certificates which he had reassigned to himself by sleight of hand. He might have risked stealing more had he believed he would outlive the heiress but he suspected, Viviana with a strong set of genes like her father would probably outlive him.

With the entry onto the stage of George Jnr and with Vass suffering severe problems of lack of feeling in his limbs, (caused by undiagnosed diabetes) he sensed his own demise was near.

In effect, Vass gave in, withdrew for his side role in the negotiations, too weary to fight on and confident that his serial embezzlements were undetected, began forming plans for his escape.

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With the marriage documents signed and certified, George Jnr set his face to a broader 'smile' and prepared himself for the long haul. As he played out his role as her principal companion, Viviana reminded George of his Aunt Marianna and his mother, Delilah.

By the time of their nuptials, a grand affair on the lawns of *The Hermitage*, he had learned to play Viviana to best effect, encouraging and cajoling her until she eventually tipped over into a comatose sleep. This achieved, George Jnr would then creep away and find a maid from the staff willing to satisfy his needs in return for a suitable cash reward. Like his father before him, George Jnr was now enjoying a rewarding double life.

Full of himself, George Jnr wrote to his father explaining his fortunate situation, inviting him to come over to *The Hermitage* for a holiday.

The letter, (which arrived on Tuesday 8th June, was post-marked Saratoga Springs, May 30, 1925), was addressed:

*George MacLennan Graham Snr., Esquire.
Rosemount.
High Shawlands.
Glasgow.
Great Britain.*

Since his wayward son had moved out of the family home to live with the divorcee in Pollokshields, the teenager had sent only three vague, "wish you were here" style postcards depicting the *Mauritania*. Eventually, George Snr had concluded his firstborn was a member of the crew, perhaps working in the restaurant as a waiter.

In disbelief, George Snr read and re-read the letter several times:

Could it be his errant son stood to inherit such vast wealth?

The enclosed wedding photograph of the 'happy couple' had been carefully soft-focussed to flatter Viviana. However, it could not disguise her bulk (she was now almost spherical, a white, frilly balloon in her wedding dress, half a head shorter than her new husband who seemed somehow taller, (George was wearing Cuban-heeled boots, an affectation he had adopted during his journeys on the *Mauritania*).

George (who at once began to call himself George Snr) decided to act and to do so quickly. One interpretation of this letter, the one which George Snr chose to take from it, was that his son needed his father's support.

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Using the booking service at Overseas Travel Ltd at Broomielaw, George Snr arranged his passage to New York.

On replacing the telephone, he lifted it again and called his bank instructing they make the necessary payment to Overseas Travel Ltd by issue of a bank draft before close of business, to be delivered by an emergency courier. The booking agent at Overseas Travel Ltd had warned Mr Graham if he did not do this, his booking might be 'lost'.

While speaking to the bank manager, he also arranged for substantial cash sums to be readied for collection: (he would call in person soon, he advised.)

Later that day, working back of house at Overseas Travel Ltd, Mr Eric Green, the administrative support clerk, at once recognised the name "Graham" and associated it with the rich boy from school who had lived somewhere in High Shawlands. In particular, Ginger Green noted the travel was for "One Way Only". When the bank draft arrived, he noted it was 'open' which meant, in theory, it could be cashed by anyone.

At first Ginger Green proceeded as normal and issued the tickets ordered viz:

"*Mauretania*. Thursday 18th June, 1925: One-Way Ticket for a Superior Outside Cabin, En-Suite plus Wednesday 17th June, 1925, One-Way Overnight Sleeper, First Class, Glasgow to Southampton with complimentary motor taxi (address appended)."

The next day, Ginger issued the tickets and sent them by courier to *Rosemount*. When he received the signed receipt, he shredded it, then cancelled the tickets with an entry to the ledger, claiming the traveller had rejected them due to a change in his circumstances.

As Ginger was doing this, his aunt was on a train to Kilmarnock where she converted the bank draft to cash in the amount of £61-15/-¹⁰.

It was a ploy the Greens had used several times before for emigrant travellers heading to America but never for a First Class traveller. Sadly for Ginger, his aunt decided she had done enough for her twisted nephew and with her nest egg tucked inside her knickers caught the next train heading south to disembark at Dumfries where her dead husband's unmarried sister lived.

Ginger was on his own. Two days later, when he accepted he had been abandoned, Ginger packed his bags and left the house at Minard Road for the final time with a case filled with his clothes and another with items of value which he pawned for a total of £3. He then waited near Kilmarnock Road until he hitched a lift on a lorry on the first stage of

¹⁰ Worth approximately £3000 cash at current (2018) rates.

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his odyssey which would end a month later in Soho, London where he got a job working as a clerk for the local council who accepted his forged Scottish qualifications.

Ginger Green was at the start of a new career. When he retired many years later, he was the assistant manager of the cleansing department, in charge of the barges which plied the River Thames collecting industrial waste for central sorting and disposal.

By this stage he was married to an older woman who had been his landlady and whose brother ran the family scrap metal business. *Ginger* was providing him with a steady supply of lead, copper, tin and other valuable metals which he was appropriating from the council tips.

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Power of Attorney

Two days after the letter of invitation had arrived at Rosemount, a meeting was arranged for 2:00 pm on Friday, 12th June, to be held in the Boardroom of *MacLennan & Co.*

After explaining in fulsome detail George Jnr's new grand situation in life, George Snr made his pitch. Unaware a letter had been received from *The Hermitage*, this news came as a surprise to Bert.

'Lachlan, I need you to release Bert to look after my businesses. As you know Marianna does not keep well. Will you do it?'

'Well, I suppose we will just have to manage. What do you say Bert?'

'Yes, Uncle Lachlan, but perhaps if we ask Mr Fraser Traynor to come back to work part-time, I could do both jobs. Mrs Ferris has a cousin who has come down from Inverness. I know Daniel Bremner quite well from church. At present he's working on the railways at Polmadie as a marshal but he has a weak back and is looking for something less physically demanding. He used to work for his father in a small coal yard, taking orders and organising deliveries. He's well-spoken and has a pleasant, outgoing manner. He lives one down from Miss Fowler, so he would be on continuous call, as it were. We could put a telephone extension line up to his house for out of hours calls. I'm sure Mrs Ferris and I could train him to do the duties as her assistant and as required. Bremner and I could share the role. And Willie McFetridge's son Gordon is out of school now. He's been helping his father in the stables and with removals on a jobbing basis. Gordy's a bit slow but he's keen, very biddable, and as strong as an ox.'

George Snr blew out his cheeks, grimaced and clasped his hands over his paunch, nodding, chewing on an antacid tablet. (His years of drinking and nights of glad-handing at various Lodges, often on an empty stomach, were taking their toll and he was prone to bouts of flatulence and sporadic episodes of diarrhoea). All George wanted was to be away, get the business settled. And he had an appointment with a Mrs Fiona Martin, a widow of three months standing who had called him just as he was leaving for the meeting, suggesting he drop by after her day girl had gone home, to help her choose the right pattern for her bedroom from the swatches she had borrowed from the curtain shop. George Snr had been down this track before. Fiona Martin was a tactile woman and when he had last seen her a month earlier, she had insisted he sit side by side with him and had 'rested' her right hand on his thigh while sobbing delicately into her handkerchief, bemoaning her lonely, lonely existence.

George said: 'Yes, yes. You seem to have the nub of it Bert, but don't get carried away. I have a good-going business and I don't need you spoiling it.'

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Lachlan intervened: 'Of course not, George. Bert is a level-headed young man. And if he needs any advice, I'll be happy to help. How long would this arrangement be in place?'

George replied, blustering: 'Eh, eh. Six months. Maybe more, maybe less. George Jnr says there are opportunities galore for men of business, men with poise, with capital, with energy. I thought I'd use his connections, sniff around, you know the sort of thing. And I've looked up the Registry and there's a Freemason's Lodge in Saratoga Springs and now I'm a Grand Master, well, that should mean something, yes?'

'Six months or more? Well George, I don't think we can leave this arrangement merely on a verbal basis only, if you plan to be away for as long as that. You need to vest Power of Attorney in someone, in case of unforeseen circumstances. Do you have a Power of Attorney in place?'

'Eh, eh, no. McConnell's have mentioned it a few times but, well, I've been too busy, you know how it is.'

'But George, it needs to be done. Without it we could be hide-bound. May I suggest my cousin? Donald has an office downstairs. As well as being our Company Secretary, he has a separate legal practice. I could give him a ring down, see if he can get this organised. He helped me review my Power of Attorney document only a few weeks ago. It's a very straight-forward document, a *pro forma*. You merely insert the name or names of the nominated persons, get their agreement and then all parties sign the document. The original is lodged with the Court in Edinburgh and copies are issued to each of the signatories. What do you say?'

'Eh, eh. So, this is a long-stop arrangement, yes? What I mean is, I'll still be in charge?'

'Yes, of course! Presumably we shall always be able to communicate with you by letter or even telegram, should a matter be urgent. You know, to make sure we obtain your agreement with anything out of the ordinary we might have to deal with. That is how it would work, in the event you remain in good health. Are you in good health, George? This trip is not a journey too far? You're looking a bit tired, you know.'

'No, no. I'm in very good health, thank you. Just the usual tummy gip from time to time but, yes, thanks, I'm fine.'

'Good, good. So, George, provided you are alive and *compos mentis*, the nominated persons cannot act without your agreement. But think of it George, what if your ship should sink like the *Titanic* or you have an accident or catch an illness and need to be hospitalised such that you are not in control of your faculties. It does happen, unfortunately, as it did with my uncle. Do you remember? He had a stroke and lost the power of speech and sight. It took years of wrangling to get his affairs sorted out. Donald was at his wits end and then finally, the matter was resolved, by the Grace of God.'

'How did it get resolved?'

'Poor Uncle Archie was taken by the angels almost ten years to the day after his stroke. But then the *real* trouble started. Although he had drafted his own Will and it appeared to be straightforward, he had failed to get it certified and registered which meant he was intestate. That took a further five years to resolve. Didn't the same thing happen with your father?'

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'Eh, eh. Yes. It was so unfair, everything went to my eldest brother even though father had always told me I would get half. But at least he let our mother stay on in her house after he moved in with his family.'

'So, George, you do have a Will in place?'

'Eh, eh. Well, no, actually. No, not yet.'

'George, George, come now. We must get Donald up here at once. *Carpe diem* and *tempus fugit*, eh? A perfect maelstrom. If we act now, today, I'm sure we can get this done before you leave for Southampton. It's tight, but if anyone can do it, Donald is your man.'

'Eh, eh. Well, I suppose so. Lachlan, is there a telephone free. I need to make a personal call. I had a meeting arranged for four o'clock which I'll need to defer. Will I be free of this by four-thirty, do you think?'

'Better say five o'clock, to be on the safe side.'

'Damn. I have a Lodge meeting at seven. Still, I should be free by around nine-thirty, so it might be retrievable. That telephone?'

'Language, George, language. Now, through here, George. Use my telephone. Yes, go ahead and call. Now, Bert, run down and get Mr Donald. Explain the situation, ask him to come at once.'

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During the second hour of the drafting of these documents, an impartial observer might have noticed George Snr was not following the twists and turns of the arguments which Donald Lyle weaved against his objections. The question which had knocked George Snr off guard was from the lawyer:

'Mr Graham, are you able to assure me your ownership of this portfolio you have kindly listed for us is entirely under your control and that you own these assets personally, without let or hindrance, free of entailments such as mortgages, joint-ownership with second or third parties, such, as for example, Mrs Marianna Wardley or your wife Mrs Delilah Dolan Graham?'

A long hesitation followed during which George Snr considered whether to try to bluster his way past the ownership reality. He had long ago wearied of trying to get his wife to sign her assets over to him or even to consider joint ownership. Over the years he had filched nearly £2000 into a savings account but this remained the total of the actual wealth under his direct control and not subject to the scrutiny of *McConnell's*.

'Eh, eh, well. ...'

After a long silence while George considered what to do, he said: Well, eh, eh, there is an ongoing situation regarding ownership. Frustratingly, the entirety of our portfolio is held in a Trust for my wife. It was arranged through *McConnell's* by her natural father, when he was in his final months. My wife and I have discussed this situation many times over the years. It can give rise to difficulties, as you might imagine. However, I do have

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a certified mandate from McConnell's empowering me to act to 'manage the assets prudentially'. In the past this activity was supervised by Martin McConnell but now he has retired, the duty has passed to his daughter, Miss Philomena McConnell, who now runs his practice.'

Donald Lyle interjected: 'Philomena McConnell! I went through Law at Glasgow with Philly. A charming lady, don't you agree?'

'Yes, at times, I suppose, but she can be rather awkward too.'

'So, has your wife organised a Power of Attorney.'

'Eh, eh. No, not that I am aware of. But I do have the mandate to run the portfolio. It does not cover other, eh, eh, personal matters. I had thought at one time Delilah might benefit from a stay in a clinic but sadly, she is totally against this.'

'Tell me, Mr Graham, for the sake of absolute clarity, does your wife have a Will extant? Clearly this has a direct bearing on our discussions. And, since we understand she suffers from a debilitating ailment, the terms of this Will are of primary importance, if it exists.'

'Yes, there is a Will.'

'This Will of your wife's, I take it you and your sons are the main beneficiaries?'

'No, actually. Not me, I have never been part of it. Just Bert here. Originally it was both George Jnr and Albert, but something happened to make her alter it. Lilah will not tell me nor will Philly. Marianna claims to know nothing. Perhaps you know, Bert? Do you?'

'No, father, I do not. Actually, mother has told me nothing of this Will.'

The upshot of George Snr's discussions with Donald Lyle and Lachlan MacLennan and Bert was a detailed written agreement which expanded on the principal points:

- In the unlikely event George MacLennan Graham (GMG) was to die while he was overseas, his Estate would be inherited by his son, Albert MacLennan Graham (AMG). (Donald and Lachlan had pointed out that George Jnr now had no need of additional wealth whereas Bert would become responsible for the care of his mother.)
- During the absence of GMG on business in North America, the operation of his wife's business portfolio would be temporarily transferred to his son. (Philomena was telephoned by Donald regarding this with all parties listening to their conversation after which it was agreed Philly and Donald would re-draft the mandate in favour of AMG).
- After a long harangue from Lachlan during which the Bible was quoted¹¹ at George, it was eventually agreed that Bert would receive a salary of £20 per month to cover the cost of motor taxis or horse cabs and telephone calls. It was also acknowledged AMG would employ those persons he saw fit to assist him and in

¹¹ Luke 10:7 And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. Timothy 5:18 For the scripture saith, thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, the labourer is worthy of his reward.

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order he might continue to operate the businesses smoothly. This activity would be supervised by Lachlan Lyle MacLennan (LLM) for a nominal fee of £1 per month. AMG and LLM also undertook to provide a full and detailed accounting of their stewardship for the period of GMG's absence.

- Similarly, should GMG become incapacitated during his sojourn overseas, AMG and LLM would continue to operate GMG's business portfolio on the same basis. Should however GMG's incapacity extend to more than one year from the date of the commencement of said incapacity, then AMG and LLM would have a freer hand to make disposals and purchases as necessary to enhance and grow AMG's mother's business portfolio as required under the natural law of prudential management to best preserve the value and resilience of said business portfolio.

It was almost six-thirty when George Snr eventually 'escaped' and took a motor taxi directly to his Lodge meeting. Earlier, during his telephone call before the meeting, he had learned Mrs Fiona Martin was not available later. Friday evenings were taken. It was when her Bridge girls came around for drinks. Nor was she available until next Friday afternoon - by which date George Graham intended to be aboard the *Mauritania*.

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Shortly after George Snr left on his trip to *The Hermitage*, Marianna's hacking cough worsened. Her doctor, (himself a heavy smoker with an equally fruity cough), gifted her a packet of menthol-infused cigarettes containing extra strong tobacco. (These cigarettes had been machine-rolled for him by his tobacconist, a man who served with him on the local authority public health committee.) Later that day Marianna telephoned and placed an order for fifty packs of twenty and began to chain smoke.

Within two weeks she was coughing up blood and had lost her appetite for food. She took to her room with a stash of sherry bottles. A week later she expired in the night during a fit of heavy coughing. The post-mortem revealed she had died of an aneurism and that her voice box, upper bronchi and liver were badly affected by cancer.

Delilah had lost the 'mother' with whom she had developed a love-hate dependency since losing her father. Without George Snr to distract her, Delilah's behaviour became even more bizarre and she took to walking around naked or nearly naked, banging open doors to rooms, cupboards and wardrobes, calling for George and Marianna to come out of hiding.

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The Land of the Free

The trouble for George Snr started on the evening of Wednesday 17th June. By 9.00pm his expected complimentary motor taxi had not arrived. It had been raining since mid-afternoon and none were available from any of the firms he telephoned.

Bert ran to the stables and brought the gig. At the station the porter checked his ticket and rushed George Snr to the First-Class section where his ticket was rejected. After remonstrating and making use of his Masonic handshake, he was permitted to board on condition he pay the Conductor cash for a seat.

The overnight train was filled to overflowing and the foppish George Snr with his fancy new travel valise was relegated to a second-class compartment with five drunken Irishmen who had landed at the Broomielaw from the Belfast ferry in the late afternoon. Initially the men were friendly enough, proffering their beer bottles to George. Listening, he pieced together their story. They had been drinking steadily since leaving Sligo at dawn, heading for London to start work on a new spur tunnel for the Underground. George stared out into the semi-darkness and driving rain and tried to ignore them.

Led by one weedy man with a squint, the men started to poke fun at George Snr, deriding his posh accent, spilling beer on him, making him stink. One man recognised his Masonic ring and tie-pin and the abuse got serious. When George tried to leave, his assailants blocked the door to the corridor and pulled down the internal blinds. George MacLennan Graham was trapped, fearing for his life. His stomach was churning: inadvertently George Snr released wind, causing further ribald comment.

As the train raced through Pollokshaws East station, (a few hundred yards from Rosemount which he had left two hours earlier), his bowler was chucked out of the carriage window. A week later, bashed, soggy and beyond redemption it was handed-in to Mrs Ferris at the funeral parlour. (The expensive bowler had been monogrammed with his full name by Lock & Co of London.)

The Conductor tapped at the carriage door, intending to check tickets to be invited to 'eff off' by a quintet of angry voices. (The Sligo men were travelling on third class tickets and had commandeered the second-class carriage by force, slinging out an elderly couple.) The Conductor was struggling to keep control of several other rowdy groups. Wisely, he decided to leave the Sligo men alone.

As the train raced through the gloaming towards Kilmarnock, the taunting continued, including 'friendly' face slaps, shoulder punches and ear tweaking. George shouted for help: his pleas earned him a bloody nose. His face, goatee beard and clothes were now

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stained with blood. Holding a handkerchief to his nose, he curled into a defensive ball and vowed never again to travel by train unless in safety of First-Class.

Labouring up to Beattock Summit, the train slowed. The external carriage door was thrown open and the contents of his travel valise were thrown out, item by item to be followed by the case itself. George was now dishevelled, smelling of drink, his face and clothing bloodied, his luggage lost. Grimly he clung to his small attaché case, which contained his new passport, Masonic King James Bible, key items of regalia, a stash of money and his Bank of Scotland cheque book.

By Carlisle four of the men were so drunk they fell asleep. The remaining man, (the one with the squint, seated directly opposite George Snr), produced a flick-knife which he brandished, repeatedly opening and closing it, leering and muttering under his breath. This man had a bottle of potcheen which he kept stuffed by his side, sipping from it every so often. George was not brave enough to try to escape.

When the train stopped at Birmingham in the early hours of the morning to take on coal and water, the potcheen drinker roused his mates. As a final indignity, the potcheen drinker put his blade at George's throat while he urinated on him, directly in the crotch. This act was too much for George's sphincter muscles and he defecated into his underwear.

The men disembarked, laughing and singing, moving off down the train, heading for third class where they hoped to find a group they had met on the ferry, men from Donegal who might still have drink left.

When George Snr arrived at the dockside at Southampton his ordeal was a long way from being over. The *Mauretania* was due to sail in an hour. On the remainder of the journey from Birmingham, George had cleaned himself up as best he could but he did not look or smell like a first-class traveller. His name was absent from the passenger manifest. The Assistant Purser noted Mr Graham had no luggage save his attaché case.

Perhaps, had he been thinking straight, George might have delayed his journey in order to regroup and reorganise his travel arrangements but foolishly he pressed on. After a hassle during which he was poked repeatedly in the back by an elderly man with a hearing trumpet, George was side-lined into a room on the dockside to discuss his situation with the Chief Purser. The man checked George's passport and as he listened to his tale of woe, noted the cut of his suit, recognised it was top quality, noticed his Grand Master's regalia and decided to accept George's story. Clearly there had been an administrative error somewhere along the line. Money changed hands and George was given the best of the remaining rooms available, a shared room in third class.

After a visit to the onboard clothing store to replenish his wardrobe, he took a hot bath in the communal Third Class bathrooms, paying the attendant for an full hour. Although

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his equilibrium was partly restored, his stomach was still churning and his bowels loose and he decided to avoid the communal dining area and head for bed.

In the shared cabin there was evidence of the man with whom he was assigned to share but this person did not appear until about five hours into the journey by which time the *Mauretania* was well out into the deep rollers of the North Atlantic. Clearly a storm was brewing but George's only previous seafaring had been aboard the day pleasure steamers around the relatively sheltered waters of the Firth of Clyde.

Just as his travel companion returned, George Snr, already in his new pyjamas and dressing gown and slippers, was about to make a late trip to the ablutions to try to clear his bowels and bladder for a final time before turning in for the night.

Gushing, perfumed and fluttering his eyes in expectation, Tobias Manson (just call me 'Toby', everyone does) advised he was heading for Washington where his sister lived. Toby advised George Snr with a limp handshake that he was 'a hands-on sales representative' specialising in men's personal items such as razors, shaving brushes, perfumed soaps, nail scissors, files and the like. His display was not for sale, he advised but could take an order. As he spoke he was undressing, quickly reduced to lilac underpants which could not hide an expectant bulge. Tobias was a thin man, smooth muscled with hairless legs (he shaved them daily, he said).

"Hurry, back Georgie Porgy and we can have some fun. I have a bottle of nice sweet sherry to share."

On his return to the cabin George Snr found Toby seated on his bed staring at a vanity mirror plucking his eyebrows, with a garish death mask make-up with dark purple lips, his nails (both fingers and toes) painted a bright blue. The lilac underpants had been replaced with a well-padded scarlet bra and he was wearing a strip thong which failed to contain his fulsome genitals and bush, also dyed scarlet to match his wig of scarlet ringlets.

'What do think, Georgy Porgy? Will I do? This bed or mine?'

It took George nearly an hour to convince the now tearful Tobias Manson he was not interested in sex, not even a 'free trial night' or even a quick, free, 'sucking off'.

Perhaps it was a mercy the crossing was uncharacteristically rough, relentlessly pitching and rolling the ship, this caused by persistent crosswinds. During the remaining hours of that first night George succumbed to sea-sickness and was soon staggering back and forth to the ablutions.

On the second night he was alone in the cabin. (Tobias was now enjoying a much nicer ensuite cabin with a strangely masculine woman of Russian origin who smoke cigars.) To add to his misery, George contracted a tummy bug. The virus had been lurking on the ship for

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months, mainly confined to the lower decks where the third-class accommodation was located. Now, with sea-sickness debilitating most passengers, the virus took hold and the entire ship was infected.

When the *Mauretania* docked in New York it was met by a fleet of ambulances and taxis touting business, offering to transport disembarking passengers to 'first class medical treatment centres'.

George Jnr had sent a swish Cadillac from *The Hermitage* to collect his father. It waited outside the Immigration and Customs Office adjacent the gangway which served the disembarking first-class passengers. When the first surge diminished to a trickle, the Cadillac chauffeur checked with the Assistant Purser to be advised no person by the name of George Graham Snr had travelled First Class. (Indeed George was not on any manifest: the payment to the Chief Purser had been 'unofficial'.)

Staggering down the third-class gangway through the Immigration and Customs area reserved for lesser passengers, George Snr was grilled. When he gave *The Hermitage* as the address where he would be resident, the official whistled under his breath and processed him as 'legit'.

Exiting the premises into the Land of the Free, he was immediately spotted as a 'mark' and bushwhacked by an unlicensed cabbie who took him on a ride out to the sticks where he was charged \$50 (USD) for the pleasure of being dropped at "The Oasis in the Desert", a seedy family hotel with fetid rooms and uncertain plumbing.

It took a week for George Snr to get his telegram pleas to *The Hermitage* recognised as legitimate. When Paddy Smart arrived from *The Hermitage* with a private ambulance to rescue him, George Snr had lost nearly two stones in weight. Crucially his attaché case had gone, (stolen by another resident at *The Oasis* while George had been delirious).

George Snr no longer had a passport, it had been in his attaché case with all his other personal possessions. Also gone were letters of introduction from the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce to the British Embassy in Washington, business papers proving him to be a *bona fide* man of property and business and his three-page hand written and a rather overblown resume of expertise and experience.

Crucially, also taken with the attaché case was his reserve of £500 (Sterling) in notes zipped inside a hidden compartment.

His remaining connection to his previous, ordered life was his wallet, (which had contained £300 (Sterling) when he left *Rosemount*). This amount had been mysteriously diminished to less than £50 equivalent in Sterling notes and USD greenbacks.

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Exhausted, buffeted by unaccustomed misfortune, George MacLennan Graham was no longer the self-assured man with an eye for an opportunity and a ready smile for a likely lady. He did not recognise he was severely dehydrated, making him disorientated, fearful, playing further havoc with his stomach nerves. Because of his watery diarrhoea, he was wary of eating and drinking, behaviour which reinforced the vicious cycle of dehydration.

As George huddled in the back of the luxury ambulance heading to *The Hermitage*, his life-long dream of becoming a landed gentleman akin to his 'friend and masonic brother' John Stirling Maxwell (Baronet) of Pollok Estate had faded and was no longer his driving imperative. His new focus was entirely how to survive through the next hour without letting himself down by soiling himself and making a mess of the fancy pale blue upholstery.

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House of Cards

George Jnr hardly recognised his father but saw at once he needed proper medical help. A doctor and ambulance were summonsed. After inspection, George Snr was at once relocated to a private clinic in Saratoga Springs where he was placed in isolation and pampered. The initial prognosis was he would be up and about within a week.

Three weeks later, following repeated microbiological testing of his urine, faeces and saliva, George Snr was declared to be free of the virus. However, he was extremely weak, unable to speak for more than a few minutes at a time, clearly failing. He had been treated with an expensive new drug and his diarrhoea was now less watery, more paste like: worryingly it now had significant traces of blood in it. Samples were sent to the Mayo Clinic at Rochester, Minnesota. The report recommended the patient be sent for further tests. Bowel cancer was identified as a possibility.

George Jnr travelled in the Cadillac while his father travelled, under sedation, in a private ambulance tended by a doctor and two male nurses. Speed was restricted on medical grounds. The 1800-mile trip took three days.

Various strategies and treatments were authorised. Expense was no object.

By chance or divine intent, a nurse called Esme (Esmerelda) Ramirez was assigned to his treatment team. Brought up from an infant in a San Diego orphanage where she acquired typing and bookkeeping skills, she had moved to Los Angeles when she was fourteen to work in an office. Here she roomed with a nurse and heard of the better pay and opportunities for advancement.

At twenty-nine years old Esme was dark-haired with charcoal eyes. Slim and shapely, Esme had used her quick mind and attractive body to good effect to land a post at the Mayo Clinic. Choosing the single life meant she was free to schmooze, flirt, and if required, bed targeted men who could help her climb the hierarchy.

(Newly promoted) Senior Nurse Ramirez's original discipline had been psychiatry. Like many in her field with ready access to powerful drugs, she had been tempted by the medications she dispensed. After a few years of experimentation, her drugs of choice were morphine derivatives (mainly Codeine tablets) and an experimental drug called LC17¹². This fluid, bitter to the taste, was best taken in a fruit juice liquor. (LC17 was based on a deliriant concocted from *psilocybe semilanceata*, common name - the Liberty Cap mushroom).

¹² An early version of LSD.

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As the test results poured in, filling George Snr's bulging patient dossier, Esme checked the payment records and marvelled at the soaring costs and noted her patient was from *The Hermitage*, a place which she had read about in a magazine. She observed George Jnr during his brief visits to his father, watching him arrive and depart alone, with no wife or female companion. (Viviana preferred to remain at home but insisted her new husband make his visits short and bring her a present when he returned.) In George Jnr, Esme saw a fresh-faced, foppish and personable young man she thought of as innocent. She decided to try to befriend him and found she was pushing at an open door.

With his bowel cancer now established, it was expected George Snr would last around two months or less. At Esme's instigation, George Jnr demanded his father should be sent home to die at *The Hermitage*.

Normally the Mayo would have preferred to retain patients 'in clinic' for medical reasons::

- for the patient's comfort and well-being;
- ongoing research (the patient as a self-funding guinea pig);
- and to exploit opportunities of charging for lucrative 'hotel and ancillary services'.

Although the Mayo was a registered charity, the ethos was decidedly commercial.

After a polite and professional wrangle, a generous lump sum care package was agreed. A small care team led by Senior Nurse Ramirez would be sent to *The Hermitage* with George Snr to ease their patient comfortably through his exit to the hereafter. (The term 'end-of-life palliative care' was newly in vogue at the Mayo.)

Like most new arrivals Esme was flabbergasted at the wealth on display and decided to make *The Hermitage* her own. By this stage Esme and George Jnr were enjoying late night secret trysts in her bedroom adjacent to the comatose George Snr while upstairs, Viviana slept off her confections of alcohol and narcotics.

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In his secret love life with Esme, George Jnr was reliving a version of the life his father George Snr had 'enjoyed' during his early years of marriage at *Rosemount* when he would slip out and visit one of his harem of bereaved widows.

As a well-endowed pubescent twelve-year-old, George Jnr had often watched his parent's sex games, although by this stage they were intermittent, enjoyed around once a month on average. These sessions were more about lewd talk and drinking, much tamer and briefer than George the child had witnessed in the early years of their marriage.

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One night, when his mother had succumbed to intoxication early and was carried up to bed, the young George had followed his father through dimly lit streets to see him enter a small-semi villa in Auldhouse, near the Pollokshaws Tollhouse.

In the dark shadows, outside a downstairs window, peeping through a gap in the lounge curtains, the boy had watched the entire show, from start to finish, soon with his hand inside his underpants, fondling himself to a wet climax in tandem with the cries of joy from the naked widow leaning over the armrest of her settee being served energetically from behind by his father.

After several further nocturnal sorties, (it was winter, cold and often wet and windy), the teenager became tired of his escapades. Frustratingly, after a long walk through the rain, he would often find the widow's bedroom where the real action was taking place was on an upper level and inaccessible.

It was then he had discovered the regular Friday night delights of watching Miss Netherton at her ablutions, voyeurism and hand relief conducted in relative comfort. It was then he gave up on his late-night excursions, no longer dogging his father to an uncertain reward.

George's downfall occurred one wet Thursday afternoon, shortly after lunch.

His father was out, not expected back until late evening. Bert was at school and would go directly to music lessons. Miss Netherton would not be back until late, or she might stay over at her sister's home, (Celia was suffering from a bad cold and had taken to bed). His Aunt Marianna was out, in town shopping and was booked for a meal and a show to follow.

Bored, the teenager decided on a whim to 'shock' his inebriated mother by recounting what he had discovered of his father's perfidy, partly out of jealousy for what his father was enjoying and partly to show off how much he already knew about their bizarre love life.

In his accounts of his father's serial adultery, he held little back, recalling actual names and addresses from memory or inventing them, even conflating what he had seen, (more or less normal sex), with the more bizarre scenes previously witnessed at *Rosemount*, recounting in graphic detail acts of oral, anal and a peculiar form of 'penis between breasts' sex, the version which seemed to be his mother's favourite bringing squeals of delight when his father's climax squirted up onto her face.

To his surprise, Delilah seemed to be inured to his revelations, staring into the distance, as if what she was hearing was of little import.

The young George, annoyed at her lack of reaction had strayed into a vicious invention and concocted an explicit scene in which his father was depicted in a hectic sex encounter

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with his Aunt Marianna, an act which George claimed had happened in his mother's own bed, while she slept unaware of what was happening.

To this revelation, Delilah's reaction had been unexpectedly violent. She had grabbed a poker and whacked him across his shins, screaming:

"You are lying, you brat! You are a dirty, lying bastard! Get out! I never want you near me again. You were always a liar, a bully and a cheat. Only my little Bertie loves me as a son should. GET OUT!"

It would be George's last conversation with his mother, prompting her to alter her Will to exclude him from inheriting, bestowing everything on Bert, and by sending George a formal advisory note to reinforce his punishment.

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By agreement, while at *The Hermitage*, Esme kept a low profile, taking care to avoid the mistress of the house. The arrangement worked well. During their sex sessions, (Esme found her employer both accomplished and inventive) and thought he would suit her well as a husband. In their quiet periods of recovery, she teased out George's story, at first disbelieving his version of the agreement under which he was obliged to dress up in children's clothing and participate as *Sweet Boy* to Viviana's *Good Sister* playing hide and seek and accept and give gentle spankings when 'FOUND'. George presented this as a boring duty but in truth he had grown to enjoy these extended romps, stopping from time to time to admire again the views over what he soon expected to be his very own domain.

In the daily round, as they waited for George Snr to fade away, upstairs in their private suite of rooms, Viviana and George Jnr were enjoying their hide and seek frolics in parallel with his late night couplings with Esme when Viviana was safely comatose.

On several occasions George Jnr had been on the verge of asking Esme if she would be willing to dress up and give and receive vigorous spankings before indulging in the slow, gentle intercourse which Viviana had trained him to provide. However, he deferred his request, afraid she might refuse, mock him. He did not want to lose her and was beginning to imagine a new more normal life when he was free of Viviana and could take Esme as his new bride.

This line of thought began to dominate his thinking. Perhaps, after his father had departed, he could find a way to keep his Esme on the estate or nearby in a house in Saratoga Springs as his concubine. Would he be able to persuade Vass to help him in this subterfuge, he wondered, investigating various notions in his mind, not yet willing to commit them to Esme in case she demanded more.

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However, as he learned more about Esme Ramirez, he had become more aware of her underlying combative and ambitious nature. This frightened him a little and he veered towards thinking that when his father died, he would let Esme go and find someone else to fill her role.

His inner self shouted: *The last thing I want is another wife.*

With his decision made, he would enjoy Esme while she was here and pay her off when his father died.

In his future as an eligible widower, he would select, enjoy and refresh his choice of lady companions, perhaps younger versions of Esme and most certainly more amenable, less argumentative.

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Five weeks into this arrangement, (on Thursday 19th November 1925, exactly one week before Thanksgiving), it was clear to the Mayo Clinic care team at *The Hermitage*, George Snr was entering the final furlong of his life as a once-upon-a-time gallant stud.

Esme, refining her plan, knew she must act soon to eliminate Viviana and at last she had discovered how this could be done.

The male nurse, an older man called Rubin Monreal was keen to get home to family in Rochester for Thanksgiving and had hinted several times to Esme it might be time to let George Snr 'go' and to 'ease him away' with a morphine overdose. She refused his suggestion but knew she must act soon or let her opportunity go.

By this stage, Esme had learned the *Sweet Boy* and *Good Sister* act was not a fantasy which George Jnr had invented to impress her. She had stood by the door leading to the private apartments, listening to Viviana's discordant piano recital. On average this lasted around five minutes. She knew from George Jnr that she would be naked, that he would be dressed as *Sweet Boy*, sitting beside her on a child's stool, sucking his thumb.

In a bold move defying the unwritten ban by entering and creeping around the upper floor to inspect Viviana's private apartments, Esme had heard the piano recital end and the shrieks of laughter begin. Then, by hiding and listening, she had experienced their noisy version of hide and seek. After a few rounds of watching out the whole 'chase and catch' and spanking performance, Esme learned the heiress's favourite hiding places and saw that George often pretended not to know where Viviana was hiding, barging past noisily while she giggled before relocating to a previous 'secret' hiding place she guessed her lover had already checked.

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On her second intrusion, Esme had narrowly escape discovery when Viviana chose the cupboard she was hiding in. (Fortunately, the tubby heiress was too high on her pills to realise the figure standing stock still in the corner behind her was Esme pretending to be a dressmakers' manikin; as a result Viviana had failed to recognise 'Esme the nurse' she had heard of but had never seen.)

Later, when Esme relived her near miss experience, the plan to murder Viviana with impunity began to take shape. For a few days she mulled it over. Playing out in her mind how to achieve her goal:

- She would need a bright sunny day with little, preferably no wind. This would allow her to easily open a window in advance.
- The fall was around sixty feet onto the grand entrance stairway with its spiked, wrought iron handrails and rampant lions carved from near-white silver granite.
- To steel herself for the act of murder, Esme planned to double her normal dose, by crushing four Codeine tablets to powder into a tooth glass filled with orange syrup and sarsaparilla, before stirring in two teaspoonsful of the bitter-tasting LC 17 concentrate.

On the following day, as Viviana's recital began, Esme downed her own 'helper' libation in one quick gulp and waited, her hands trembling as she loaded her largest syringe and filled it with a mixture of liquid morphine and three teaspoonsful of LC 17, a dose Esme calculated would be sufficient to make the tubby wife amenable yet still able to walk forward to meet her doom.

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An Epistle of Summons

On his first arrival at The Hermitage he had ridden out most days, sometimes for three and four hours at a time, delighting to discover new parts of the estate which he was sure would eventually become his own. Now, with the weather colder and wetter, he had given this up and spent most of his free time on his new hobby, using powerful binoculars to watch wildlife during daylight hours and later, to survey the servants' quarters, particularly the female dormitory, rekindling his teenage hobby of voyeurism.

As Esme was making her final preparations, George Jnr was seated at his writing desk in the grand office which had once belonged to Rod Brabsley. Suffering from another uncharacteristic fit of depression, (he had been drinking since mid-morning, trying to shake off a raging hangover aggravated by toothache (caused by sinusitis, he had been told by a dentist in Saratoga Springs), he was also suffering from a recurrence of the constipation which was a consequence of the little pills (Codeine) which Esme had shared with him over recent weeks.

His depression coupled with feelings of mild panic, were conditions which were new to George Jnr. (He had not noticed they had begun shortly after he had started taking Esme's pills which, apart from binding his gut, was affecting his mind, making him uncharacteristically sad and contemplative.)

Feeling lonely and needing to bolster his self-image, George Jnr decided to write to *Rosemount*, to advise of the impending demise of his father. His letter began with gushing salutations then wandered off into a re-run of his earlier letter to his father describing his good fortune and the vastness of the wealth and splendour he now shared and stood to inherit.

Back at *Rosemount*, George Snr had inadvertently left the original of this letter from his son (minus the wedding photograph), under the blotter of his writing desk. George Jnr's letter had been discovered by Miss Netherton and passed to Bert for his perusal. Initially, both thought the epistle to be a work of fantasy from a brother they both knew was slightly deranged. They agreed their Christian response would be to keep its contents unrevealed. However, not revealed to Miss Netherton or to Peggy, now he had read it, George Jnr's letter confirmed, in part, what Bert had already heard expounded by his father in the Boardroom of *MacLellan & Co*, on the afternoon when he had been asked to act *in loco parentis* for his own father.

Later, still withholding its contents to Peggy, he had studied his twin's letter very closely, eventually concluding what George the twin claimed might actually be true. Now he

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understood why his father had acted so quickly to book himself to travel on the *Mauretania*, departing Thursday 18th June.

George Jnr's letter to Bert covered much of the same ground but in greater detail, describing the many farms which belonged to the estate and "*occupied by tenant farmers keen to doff their caps at me, their new landlord*".

As the letter came to a maudlin close, George Jnr first demanded then pleaded that Bert should come quickly to attend the impending funeral.

"Come, make haste! Come by the fastest mean, come by the Mauretania¹³, a ship I know well. Mention my name and they will pamper you as they did me."

George Jnr, well sozzled when he wrote his epistle to a brother he had always despised, now added the crucial words. Had he intended them as a taunt?

"Bert, my dear little companion of our delicious mother's womb, why not come? Bring your Bible and read our father into the Glory above as he himself would have done for us, had we predeceased him. Come, Bert, and you will see what will someday be yours, all 10,000 acres of it! Here you will own a grand house surrounded by farms swarming with sheep, cows, horses, pigs, and chickens. Truly this is the Promised Land you have so often told me of. Come and call down blessings upon it from above, little preacher. Yes, this will be all yours, dear twin, when I too have shrugged off this fine young body of mine. For I intend to father no heirs who would surely usurp me as all brats do. Better to name a brother as my heir, as I now name you! Now, I suspect that this promise will surprise you, dear little twin! But I know now that in you I have a brother who is pure of heart and mind, a brother who has never sinned, a brother who prays for me and seeks to preserve even my stained soul from the Fires of Hell. Come Bert, my faithful brother and true, and see what shall be yours, one day. Come and come quickly, for I am weary of this ache and need relief and purging."

The letter which had rambled over many pages until this point suddenly closed with the ringing words.

God Bless America.

¹³ The *Mauretania* held her 1909 record of 26.06 knots (48.26 km/h) for 20 years.

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God Bless King George.

God Bless the Graham Twins.

With warmest best wishes to our dear, dear mother who cursed me with her affliction and my aunt who beat me mercilessly with her tongue!

George Wardley Graham Jnr

(also known as Rod Brabsley, and Papa and Sweet Boy)

Almost as an afterthought George Jnr had riffled through his writing desk drawer and fished out a copy of one of the many wedding photographs which had been rejected by Viviana as unsuitable. In this group shot, George Jnr and Viviana had been captured standing in front of the grand porticoed entrance, surrounded by the two hundred or so servants and tenants from estate who had been summons by Vass to attend the wedding feast. Centre stage on the steps directly below them were the principal guests comprising Judge Malloy, Sheriff McMillan, Dr Willetts and Gideon Cochrane (solicitor) with his wife Eliza. Hovering directly behind George and Viviana was the tall, stooped figure of Andreas Vass wearing an incongruous Stetson.

In a theatrical mood, George Jnr then used Rod Brabsley's wax seal to endorse his flamboyant signature. He then used the internal telephone system to summons Vass to come to his study at once and to bring a witness.

A few minutes later, Andreas Vass and Paddy Smart arrived.

'Ah, there you are, dear chaps. This is an urgent letter to my family in Glasgow. Will you please witness it for me under this Great Seal. It's an Epistle of Summons being sent to bring my brother from Glasgow. Albert is a healer, an evangelical who is my father's last hope on Earth, should he arrive on time. If however he is late, as may be the case, Albert will call upon the Angels to carry my father into Glory. Sign it here for me please, dear boys, and have it sent by special courier to Glasgow.'

The two men had become used to George Jnr and his whimsical ways and did exactly as their employer had requested. Privately, they had decided they liked the Scotsman. He was always polite, gentle, slightly effeminate and, so far, reasonably normal. Importantly, the young man seemed happy to pay whatever they asked for the booze, narcotics and marijuana they supplied. If he turned nasty and uncooperative he might meet with a riding accident as others had before him. Or, if he pulled in Galbraith, Cochrane & Templeton from Saratoga Springs, to audit the books as Viviana had done from time to time before she had slipped into dependency, perhaps it would be time to scarper and enjoy a sunny

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retirement in Miami. The plans were in place, the hideaway acquired and the bank accounts set up. However, with George Jnr well on the way to addiction and becoming dependent, they planned to tough it out for a few more years and continue to milk the situation to their advantage.

Their mantra was: *You can never have too many greenbacks.*

As Vass and Smart made their way back from the main house to Vass's office, they heard singing and discordant piano playing drifting down from the top floor private rooms. Blowing hard, they hurried their pace to a faster hobble. Both were elderly, (Paddy was eighty-eight and Andreas seventy-three, both crippled by arthritis which they medicated only with nicotine and the best whiskey they could find.

Wisely, they had both resisted stronger drugs.

Believing they were free of further demands on their time for the remainder of the day, they sent a rider to Saratoga Springs with the letter and settled to enjoy a drink and mull over their plans for a winter break in Miami, if they could get away over Christmas when Viviana usually went to San Diego to escape the worst of the winter freeze.

(The average winter months in Saratoga Springs hovered around freezing Celsius but spells down to zero Fahrenheit (minus 20 Celsius) were not uncommon. At these times, despite its generous oil-fired central heating system, *The Hermitage* could be a bleak place to live.)

The following morning the letter left in a US Mail sack, marked:

URGENT: First Class Mail
(addressee to sign on receipt)

Albert MacLennan Graham Esq
"Rosemount"
High Shawlands,
Glasgow,
Great Britain.

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Flying High

From a toddler Viviana had been groomed by her father as a child protégé, a player who would one day become a concert pianist. Dozens of 'useless' teachers had come to *The Heritage* full of promises that the child would flourish under their tutelage. By age twelve, Viviana had acquired a small repertoire of tunes, one of which was "Oh Susanna", which she sang using the substitute words her father had taught her.

A smoker and drinker for over two decades, Viviana's once sweet child's voice was now a cracked falsetto:

*Oh! Susanna, do not cry for me;
I come from Saratoga, sittin' on ma Papa's knee.*

*Yes, I come from Saratoga, sittin' on ma Papa's knee.
An' I'm goin' to Saratoga, my true love for to see.*

*Oh! Susanna, do not cry for me;
I come from Saratoga, sittin' on ma Papa's knee.*

*Yes, I come from Saratoga, sittin' on ma Papa's knee.
An' I'm goin' to Saratoga, my true love for to see.*

Once upon a time there had been other, more progressive stanzas, but these were long forgotten. If trapped in the mood, the heiress might tinkle out these lines for up to an hour, stopping only to slurp another drink or smoke a scented cigarette.

This 'music', whenever it was played day or night, had become the signal for the servants who tended Viviana's private apartments to retreat to the lower part of the house out of range of Viviana and her hide and seek sex games, thereby avoiding the danger from her pistol if things did not go her way.

On hearing his wife playing, George slipped down two of Esme's pills (Codeine) and slurped the remains of his large brandy, shook his head to clear it, let out a loud rip of fetid wind from his rear end and headed off to "play", glad of this distraction from his depression.

Esme too had learned the weird music which meant she could roam around the apartments reserved for Viviana and George Jnr provided she took great care to avoid them.

Emboldened by her double strength dose of the helper mixture, the nurse was confident because their hide and seek routine was always accompanied with shouts and

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exclamations and ecstatic screeches when one or other party was discovered with a cry of "FOUND YOU!"

Esme did not make her way directly to Viviana's dressing-up room as she had originally planned. Instead she wandered from room to room, stopping to touch the rich upholstery, glance out a window, empty an ashtray, straighten a rug, admire a painting, her mind racing ahead, playing out the role of mistress of the house.

Esme planned to stop and hide behind a doorway and watch as the bloated overweight form of Viviana skipped past like a ballet dancer dressed in a tight-fitting version of a child's party frock, one of many from the dressing-up room.

As was normal, when the effects of LC 17 gradually diminished, Esme became calmer and more calculating but in a slow deliberate way, talking to herself, telling herself in mumbled words what she had planned, rehearsed earlier in her mind. In this slow dwam, time passed and the voices of Viviana and George Jnr seemed unimportant, ethereal, far, far away.

When the music eventually stopped, Esme was in place, standing in the dimness of the dressing-up room, with its heavy curtains drawn to hide the now open window behind them. The nurse was smiling, confident, omnipotent and, uncharacteristically, feeling randy. As the chemicals took hold of her mind and body, a thought flashed:

Esme, honey, you have been selling yourself short. In future I'll use this double dose more often for special occasions. On our wedding day? Yes, and again later, on our true honeymoon night. The Bahamas? Or perhaps we should take a trip to London on the Mauretania, find out if the bed in the State Room is as good as George Jnr says it is.

A side-effect of the drug combination was to make her feel hot, flushed, overheated. Uninhibited, she stripped off her clothing and observed her near perfect body in the full height mirror. The voice from her head was now on her lips:

God, Esme, you are truly stunning, honey. Who could resist you. Come on, Georgie, chase tubby up to me and I'll set her free. She'll enjoy flying.

The potential difficulties of her plan evaporated. When the heiress eventually slipped into the dressing-up room to hide, Esme would stab and empty the syringe into her neck close to the group of blood vessels which served the brain (the internal and external carotid arteries). The 'hit' should be almost immediate. Esme would guide her drugged victim to the curtains and push her through to oblivion.

As had been well reported in the sensationalist magazines she read, most suicide jumpers landed head first (the brain is the heaviest single organ in the human body). Therefore, Esme reasoned, any bruising from the stab to the neck would be unlikely to be detected

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during a post-mortem examination. The woman was well-known in the household as a drug addict. It would be classified as an unfortunate overdose and hushed up by George Jnr who would be glad to be rid of his burden in favour of a younger, beautiful new wife.

Esme had also convinced herself, if LC 17 was detected during a post mortem examination, it would be interpreted by any psychiatrist as 'not uncommon' for its users to attempt to 'fly', giving further impetus to the 'death by misadventure' finding.

No blame would attach to George Jnr, she reasoned.

In her plan, Nurse Esmerelda Ramirez would be soon back with her dying patient and 'unaware' of the accident until the news filtered down to her four floors below in the guest wing with her dying patient.

During her career as a psychiatric nurse, Esme had witnessed many attempts by patients to 'fly' under the influence of LC 17. 'Patient Flying' had been a 'fun activity' to amuse lowly members of nursing staff during long, boring weekends when the normal hierarchy of doctors and consultants were away at their country clubs playing golf. Typically, a disruptive person who 'deserved to be punished' for some real or imagined misdemeanour would be chosen. Once prepped with a dose of LC 17, the victims typically became fearless. Taken to an open window a suggestion they 'fly away' often resulted in the patient leaping out head first flapping their arms to land on a pile of old mattresses up to two floors below. While bone breakages and bruising were a common outcome, Esme had not witnessed any serious injuries. The grapevine rumoured deaths which had occurred had been covered up by management.

Perhaps an independent adviser might have cautioned Esme that her plan might be derailed by a factor she did not know about and therefore had not considered. Even during her hide and seek games and up to and including the act of consummation, Viviana toted her large handbag with her wherever she went. To be fair to Esme, since the arrival of her new husband, the heiress had been calmer and had not fired off her gun for many months. As a result, Esme was oblivious to the danger she might face if Viviana was riled to action.

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Carnage

While waiting in the dressing-up room for her victim to arrive, Esme began to suffer the jitters. She had never self-injected before but the thought, once it had planted itself, took hold and she decided a small blip from the syringe would help to boost her resolve.

She moved back to the open window and parted the curtains a little, found a suitable spot on her left wrist and injected what she judged to be a teaspoonsful of the Codeine/LC 17 concoction.

The effect was almost instant and unexpected.

She felt wonderful. Her body felt tingly and her mind flashed ahead to making love to George Jnr, making her intensely jealous of the gross woman she could hear approaching, calling out:

"Come and find me, Sweet Boy."

Sweating profusely as her liver strived to cope with the effects of the injection, Esme moved back across from her hiding place to pull aside the curtain hoping for a flow of cool air to give relief. Her mind soaring, she leaned out of the window to admire the view of the vast estate which would soon be hers.

With Esme missing and his patient crying out in agony, Rubin Monreal had already taken the matter of George Snr into his own hands by injecting a final 'comfort dose'.

In morphine delirium, George Snr smiled and began to recite the words he had chanted at his investiture as a Grand Master of the Masonic Lodge, his words slowing and trailing off into a whisper.

Rubin, walking towards the Mayo Clinic Ambulance parked on the driveway in front of the main building was looking ahead to the trip home. His eye caught the movement of the curtains on the fourth floor. He stopped to make sure his eyes were not deceiving him.

Why was Senior Nurse Ramirez leaning out of the top floor window?

Why was she naked?

Rubin would later prove to be a useful witness.

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Inside the dressing room Esme heard Viviana thunder towards the door behind her. As the heiress approached the dressing room door, she stopped and opened her handbag to get a few "poppers" which she downed with the dregs of bourbon from her small day flask.

George Jnr called out from the far end of the corridor: '*Good Sister, you're Sweet Boy is ready to come to you.*'

'You wait now, *Sweet Boy*, you hear me? I'll tell you when *Good Sister's* ready.'

'I need you now, *Sweet Sister*. I'm coming to find you.'

At this call Viviana pulled opened the door to the dressing-up room and slipped in, slamming it closed behind her, giggling in her high screech.

Standing behind her in the corner, Esme raised the syringe, her thumb on the plunger. Her mind was zinging, racing ahead, already imagining herself celebrating with George Jnr.

As the nurse moved towards her victim, her naked image reflected in the full-length mirror.

Esme's arm swung down viciously.

Viviana, thinking she was seeing a ghost of her dimly remembered mother, lurched forwards towards the mirror. Her feet caught up in Esme's discarded clothes and she fell to the floor just short of the curtained window.

The syringe missed Viviana's neck and continued in a downward arc and lodged in Esme's thigh.

Under the influence of the massive dose she had just received, Nurse Ramirez screamed:

'You fat bitch! Get ready to fly!'

George Jnr ran forwards and pulled open the dressing room door.

Ahead of him he saw the naked Esme leaping towards Viviana who was crouched with her pistol outstretched.

It seemed to be pointing at him.

Frozen, he screamed: '**NO! NO!**'

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In panic, Viviana squeezed the trigger. As the gun fired off its six shots George Jnr was hit three times, including a fatal shot to his neck. Perhaps if he had remained silent he might not have attracted her aim.

Esme took the other three shots in her chest but her momentum carried her forward to thud heavily into the retreating Viviana.

Hearing the explosions, Rubin looked up again and saw the two women, locked in a death hug, fall onto the ornamental railings and land with a sickening thud.

His training kicked in and he ran forward to render assistance only to find both women were already dead.

In the guest wing, George Snr, oblivious to everything, let out a long sigh and slipped away into the hereafter.

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A Silent Killer

In Glasgow and throughout the UK generally, the winter of 1925-26 began in early November with a six-week spell of overnight sub-zero temperatures and dry, breezy days at or just above freezing. The cold weather was also taking its toll on the population as the grim reaper visited the weak and elderly.

Unlike Saratoga Springs the snow did not fall in Glasgow until January but from mid-November the ground was rock-hard, making it nearly impossible to dig graves. Bodies were piling up in the Graham's funeral parlour and Mrs Margaret Ferris was working flat out to prevent them from turning 'high'. Most mornings Bert Graham was working in the office of *G. Graham, Funeral Director* before setting out by tram for *MacLennan & Co* to catch up on his other duties.

Wednesday 25th November would prove to be the coldest day in decades.

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In the McFetridge's single end located behind 7 Pollok Road, the inner glass of the small window was coated with thick ice, condensed from the breath of its occupants. The nappies and baby clothes hanging on the pulley were as stiff as boards. The fire had not been lit for days because Jean had been unable to persuade any of the local coalmen to extend her further credit. The chimney was stuffed with rags to cut out the downdraft from the moaning wind and the water tap over the jawbox sink was frozen. Gordon had been bringing pots and kettles of water from Miss Fowler's, wrapping them with old blankets to keep them from freezing. The water supply serving the external WCs was also frozen but not everyone bothered to bring water to flush away their detritus.

Jean lay awake with her eyes fixed on the fluorescent hands of the old battered clock on the narrow mantelshelf. The clock had been a gift from Miss Fowler, a cast-off because the alarm no longer worked. It had looked presentable when it first arrived in the McFetridge household but was now battered, the face cracked, keeping uncertain time after being thrown at the wall in one of her husband's increasingly violent outbursts.

Peggy had told Jean that Willie was to meet Bert Graham at the stables no later than five o'clock. McFetridge was to drive the closed horse-drawn hearse out to the residential school at *Tower Ridge*, seven miles away.

An order had been received by Mrs Ferris by telephone from Father Hegarty. Graham's were to remove a body of a child and return it to its home church in Townhead where it was to remain overnight before a second removal back to Graham's to await burial at the

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first opportunity. This arrangement had become familiar: there had been a spate of unexpected deaths among these children since Monsignor Creity had taken charge at *Tower Ridge* over a decade earlier.

Peggy had also told Jean this first removal must be made before daylight, by seven o'clock or earlier, to avoid upsetting the other fifty or so children resident at the school.

Since it would take at least two hours hitch the horses and reach *Tower Ridge*. Bert Graham would expect Willie at the stables at five o'clock and would go with him to complete the paperwork and direct him to the church in Townhead.

Jean continued to watch the clock, waiting until the last minute, fearful of what might happen when she tried to rouse her husband. The minutes ticked down towards four-thirty. The room was pitch black and her breath turned to steam as she gasped at the now familiar pain in her gut. Her mind turned again to the events of the previous evening, making her ear throb anew.

How could I have been so stupid?

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Jean had scuttled back along Pollok Street from Wilma Binnie's house with her ménage money amounting to ten shillings and sixpence. Most ménage syndicates paid out on a Saturday when the pay-ins were due. Because some people were always 'late-payers' (Jean included), Wilma organised her pay-outs for Tuesday nights at 7.30 pm when the recipient was treated to a cup of weak tea and a stale bun from the seconds counter of the bakery. Walter was banned from the house on these evenings and usually took himself off to the pictures.

Wilma's reward for hosting the ménage and acting as guarantor against defaulters, meant she got a free 'turn', by tradition always the first week of each cycle. Wilma had no children but many pets: two small Pekingese dogs, three long-haired cats, a large goldfish tank with seven goldfish and a raucous budgerigar called Lester who was encouraged to fly freely from the open door of his cage, making a nuisance of himself by terrorising visitors.

Perhaps it was the experience of Lester continually landing on Jean's head then swooping down to peck at her bun which had caused her to forget to hide the ménage money in the little cotton bag she suspended on a cord from her neck, inside her clothing, next to her skin. It was here she kept her mother's engagement ring when she had it, (the ring was a frequently pawned item which kept the family afloat in the very worst of financial storms).

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The ménage pay-out had included a nearly new ten-shilling note, making Jean feel rich, at least for a few minutes. To get her 'turn' Jean had committed to paying Wilma sixpence a week for twenty-three weeks which meant her pay-out was eleven shillings less her weekly dues of sixpence. At the draw Jean had been lucky to get an 'early' (it was week six) and so had a further four months to keep paying before the next draw. If she defaulted, she would be banned from the ménage and word would soon get around and her name would be mud.

Released at last by 'Her Highness', (Wilma's nickname used by all of the ménage group behind her back), Jean almost ran home through the dark streets. Her mind was racing ahead: firstly, she would pay her 3/6 to Harold Pawnbrokers to get her mother's ring back then she would pay off part of her 'tick' account with Tommy Pearson the coalman (she was at her 5/- limit with Tommy, the softest of the coalmen, the others could wait). She would also clear her 2/6 debt at Mrs Hart's greengrocers and pay off the 2/- she owed at Mrs Murray's newsagent and tobacconist shop. With the residue she would treat herself to ten Woodbine. Squared up, she would be nearly back on an even keel, relying on her wage from the bakery, small gifts from Walter, her cleaning money from Miss Fowler and Peggy's wages.

In recent weeks Peggy had been holding back part of her Saturday wages, doling it out to her mother at a shilling a day for the gas meter without which they could not eat hot food or make tea.

Jean had not received any money from Willie for almost six months. In part this was because of his drinking but he was also trying to pay off his gambling debt to McGowan, the local unlicensed bookmaker, the man he owed over £4 to which interest was added at 5% per week. Willie had other debts at pubs where he was no longer welcome and to various men in the Thornliebank Flute Band whom he had bullied or cajoled into lending him money. Some of these debts were years old.

Relieved that only Wilma had seen her black eye (the result of a recent beating), Jean turned into the outer end of the tenement close at number 7 Pollok Street. She was moving quickly, keen to get back indoors, back to her baby. As she left the innermost end of the close to transit the enclosed backcourt, she was grabbed in a stranglehold from behind by her husband who reached down into her pinny, grabbed her purse then hit her hard with a dismissive backhand blow which made her head spin for several minutes and her ear throb for hours. As she turned to face him, ducking, expecting a further blow, he rifled the purse, found the note, took it, threw the purse at her and disappeared.

Jean had not cried out to protest. To do so would get her a slapping or worse, a kicking. She had watched him pull himself up to his full six foot two inches, lift his chin defiantly, turn on his heel and head off. She guessed he would go to the *Old Swan Inn* where others of his kind would already be drinking heavily, chief among them Abe Reuther the rent collector. Jean guessed the two others present would be Alec Vernon, the butcher from

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Shawlands, a tall, weedy man with thick glasses who was involved with the Freemasons, (where Willie was now banned for drunken brawling), and Father Francis Hegarty, the hugely fat little man from St Mary's Chapel House whom no one had ever seen fully sober.

Jean had been told repeatedly by various local gossips that these three men like to bate and poke fun at Willie, goading him into making bold and rash predictions about which horse would win the next big race, then railroad him into making side bets with them for which they would 'claim' payment from Willie if his horse lost but deny paying him if his horse won (which was seldom) by saying it was all a big joke.

Two hours after he had robbed and assaulted Jean, Willie had returned, tipsy, merry, singing in a slurred voice. Already in bed although wide awake, Peggy and Gordon were pretending to be asleep, fearful they would have to witness another violent outburst.

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Inevitably, the clock hands showed half-past four.

'Willie', whispered Jean, afraid to wake the child in the crib beside their bed, afraid to touch her husband in case he took another swipe at her. 'Willie, its hauf fower. Ye huv tae git up. Bert Graham's 'spectin' ye it the stables. Will Ah make ye a wee cuppa tea. Ah think there's enough gas left in the meter.'

He turned towards her and his sour breath washed over her, a mixture of strong tobacco, stale beer and sweet sherry.

'Naw! A'm no effin goin' away oot there in this weather. Eff it, send Gordy, it's only a pick-up. And no' anither word frae ye, mind, or ye'll git a hidin'. D'ye hear me?'

Jean lay stock still, supressing a sob. Her stomach gurgled and she felt a desperate need to defecate. This would mean a trip to the communal external water closets, two unlit narrow cubicles shared with seven other families.

She lay waiting to be sure he was asleep again before she moved, exhausted from her vigil. Bloating from eight pregnancies, Jean had been suffering from loose bowels for many weeks before the birth of her latest child. Henry, she had called him, who was now three weeks old, was ailing, refusing to suck from her limp, empty breasts.

As if thinking of the child had roused him, Henry began to grumble, whining intermittently. Jean, who had been brought up in a large Roman Catholic family, had long forsaken her faith but she said a quick silent prayer for Henry. She had almost come to accept she would lose him as she had lost five others to miscarriages and cot deaths. The previous three children before Henry had died within weeks of being born, ill-

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nurtured in the womb and unable to get sufficient goodness from her breasts to recover once born. She was already filled with foreboding for her latest child.

Not for the first time did Jean curse the day she had fallen for Willie McFetridge. Why had she got stuck with him when there were much nicer men out there, men like Walter Binnie? This was an old and frequent comfort thought she nurtured, an impossible dream that someday she would wake up married to Walter, living in his lovely house. In this fantasy it would be just the two of them. Wilma would be gone, somewhere, anywhere, just away so Jean and Walter could be happy together. (There was a truth in this 'romance': if it had not been for Walter and his kindnesses Jean might have already put her head in the gas oven, a temptation which had become more frequent with each passing year.)

Jean was trapped behind Willie in the bed recess. If her infant was not picked up soon, he would cry in his thin, high-pitched wail, a screech which could raise the dead. If this happened, Willie would get angry and might well punch her again, as he had been doing for weeks now because she had resisted his demands for proper frontal sex, reducing her to the torture of his coming at her from behind.

Moving carefully to avoid causing draughts which might waken her husband, she eased herself first to a sitting position, then forward onto her knees before hauling herself up to an unsteady vertical position. Here she stood in her dressing gown, fully clothed underneath as dual protection against the cold and her husband's advances. When Willie had settled, Jean moved carefully to the foot of the bed. This bed, called a 'high bed', was almost five feet above the floor level. Below it, hidden by an old curtain, lay a collection of tea crates and wooden boxes in various sizes which held the family's meagre possessions including their few changes of ragged clothes.

To dismount she stepped first onto a kitchen chair beside the crib before lowering her bare feet into her old slippers (also cast-offs from Miss Fowler). The floor was of bare, dusty timber and she dare not wear her clogs because of the noise they made. For years she had longed for a linoleum square and a fireside rug but had never been able to afford them. There had once been a time when Jean had been house-proud, still filled with hope that her life might improve. Willie had talked big, with bragging plans for a loan from a rich cousin in Belfast to help him set up a rival funeral business, one which would serve the Protestant community rather than Graham's, who clients were predominantly Roman Catholic.

Jean shrugged off her dressing gown, folded it and kneeling on the chair, laid it on the bed beyond her husband. It was one of the few 'nice' items of clothing she possessed, a secret Christmas gift from Walter Binnie. As she straightened, she suppressed a sob as her hand moved to the old leather purse in her apron pocket. She knew exactly what it contained: one silver sixpence, one bronze coloured thruppence, four brown pennies, one ha'penny and two farthings. Just enough to swap to get a shilling for the gas meter but

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she knew in her heart she would buy cigarettes instead. She fished her last cigarette from it packet and lit it, picked up Henry and leaned across the crib to rouse her older son.

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Gordon McFetridge was now fourteen and had been freed from school a few months earlier on his birthday. Although not yet officially in the employ of *G. Graham, Funeral Director*, he had been helping at the stables since the age of ten and, like his father, he was good with horses. Gordon was a tall young man, not unlike Willie had been at his age.

Regrettably, Gordon was 'slow'. (He had suffered oxygen starvation during a difficult birth.) At school he had struggled with reading and could not cope with even the simplest arithmetic. Soft and gentle, despite his size he had been bullied in the playground and given the nickname 'the tortoise'. In the company of his contemporaries Gordon was nervous, with a tendency to stutter. However, when alone, locked in his own world, he was a happy soul, biddable and well-liked by older ladies like Miss Fowler. From a child he had been running errands for elderly neighbours, always with a note and a small purse. (The purse had been a gift from Miss Campbell his primary three teacher, given when he had once lost 'change back' from a shopping errand because of a hole in his trouser pocket.) In this way Gordon, although simple, also contributed to Jean's income, earning a few shillings a week from his endeavours, money accumulated in farthings and ha'pennies.

When Willie had returned drunk the previous evening, he had reached down affectionately towards his simple son, intending to tousle Gordon's curly, red-gold hair. Sensing his father's hand approaching and fearing he was about to be slapped, Gordon had ducked away under the bedcovers.

Willie's mood had changed instantly: 'Aye, pull away from your father, why don't you. Aye, just like your mother, as cold as an effin' Eskimo, she is.'

This scold had been too much for Gordon's bladder, causing hot urine to escape from between his clenched fingers and leak into the towel he wore as a nappy. Even at fourteen he could not be trusted to stay dry.

Peggy heard her brother whimper quietly and had guessed what had happened. Like her mother, she was fully clothed against the cold and Gordon's wandering hands. She heard the clink of a bottle hit a glass and liquid being poured. It would be cheap South African Sherry, she guessed. Willie began to tap his foot as he sang his usual selection of Orange songs.

Peggy heard her mother move around and then remind her husband to douse the gas light before he came to bed. Willie did not reply, merely draining the bottle into his glass

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before throwing it into the jaw box sink where it rattled but did not smash. Peggy hoped the rim was undamaged; if so it would be worth a ha'penny on return to the licensed grocer.

At the sharp sound, Gordon began to wheeze, struggling to breathe and Peggy feared he was about to have another asthma attack. These had been more frequent since the onset of the very cold weather. However, after a few minutes Gordon's crisis passed and he settled. Brother and sister lay quietly side by side, hoping their father had forgotten them.

Peggy heard her mother settle baby Henry then climb up into the bed and move to the back. She heard her father grumble as the table legs scraped and he stumble forward. A horrible stench filled the air as he urinated in the sink. The gas mantle hissed quietly then died as the pre-payment meter closed off the supply, this unnoticed by the occupants as the room descended slowly into darkness. There was another familiar sound as Willie passed wind then dropped his trousers and kicked them away as he staggered across the room to bed.

Peggy steeled herself, expecting her father to force intercourse on her mother but her fears were unfounded and soon she could hear his uneven snoring. She sensed Gordon was also asleep and turned quietly to look at him. What would become of him, she wondered, and offered up her familiar prayer for him, herself and Bert.

As she always did at the end of the day she began her litany of thanks and supplication, starting with Auntie Agnes and all she had done for her and her family. At least in Miss Fowler's flat Peggy could wash and tidy herself and change into her nicer clothes kept safe from the pawnbroker and free of damp and odours of the single end, hung neatly in a wardrobe scented with lavender.

As she prayed, she turned onto her side and pulled the small lavender-scented pouch from under her pillow and held it to her nose, symbolically escaping the squalor in which she was forced to live. Maybe soon, Peggy hoped, she would escape by marrying Bert, when he had saved enough to buy Miss Walker's small terraced house in Auldhouse. Auntie Lexie planned to move to 7 Pollok Road and stay with Auntie Agnes after her mother died. The plan had been discussed and agreed between Peggy and her two 'aunts' and tentatively agreed with Bert who confirmed he had almost a hundred pounds saved towards the £160 sale price. This included a nearly new bed and mattress which Lexie had bought because of her bad back and other pieces of furniture, crockery and cutlery which she would leave behind as a wedding gift.

The arrangement had been agreed in principle but they must all wait until God called the old lady to Him.

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Unknown to 'Miss Margaret McFetridge', both honorary aunts had prepared Wills in favour of their adoptive daughter, these documents lodged with *McConnell Solicitors* who were sworn to secrecy on this matter.

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Peggy must have fallen asleep but was instantly awake when she heard her mother's match scrape as she lit her cigarette. Peggy hated the smell of tobacco smoke and the sulphurous reek of the match-lighting which preceded it. Jean approached their narrow bed and stroked Gordon's cheek.

'Gordy, cum oan, son, Ye huv tae git up. Cum oan. Yer faither says ye huv tae go up tae the stable and help young Mr Graham.'

'Naw, Mammy Ah kinnae. Ma asthma's bad.'

Peggy intervened: 'Mammy, I'll go. Leave him be. I'll run up to the stables in his place. Alright?'

'Ur ye sure, Peggy?'

'Yes, Mammy. You know it would probably kill him to have to go out in this. Look, I'm already dressed.'

'Aw Gordy, ye've no wet yersel again son, huv ye?'

'Sorry, Mammy. Ah couldnae help it.'

Gasping for breath, sitting up and pulling the bedclothes around his shoulders, Gordon began to wheeze, crying with shame and frustration.

'It's awright son, don't worry. Is yer sheet wet through?'

'Mammy, you get him dressed and send him up to Auntie Agnes's with the wet things, and she'll put them in her laundry bag. It's Wednesday and the laundry girl will be round to collect about eight o'clock. He'll be better up in Auntie Agnes's place, won't he? It'll be nice and warm for him.'

'A' right, Peggy. Yer a good lassie. Ye widnae huv a shilling ye could gie me fur the gas meter, wid ye?'

'Here, Mammy, and here's a ha'penny to get wee Tommy Ingram tae run to Mrs Netherton's house to explain I'll be a bit late coming in this morning. Get him to say I'll make it up by working this afternoon instead, alright?'

'Thanks, Peggy. Noo, up ye get Gordy and gie yerself a wee wipe wi a damp cloth and git yer claes on, son.'

'Right then, Mammy, I'll just away to meet Bert then. God Bless Us All.'

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At the stables Bert was waiting with the horses already in the harness and Peggy wrapped herself into the heavy weatherproof cloak and snuggled into him. Her head was wrapped in a headscarf concealing her hair curlers: she intended to comb them out later, when

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she would sponge herself down and change into her much smarter, freshly laundered clothes she stored at *Netherton's Boutique Ensembles*. This was an agreement she had struck with Mrs Netherton who had given Peggy a key to allow her to come early to use the small staff toilet. In return, Peggy lit the two fires and got the kettle boiling ahead of the other 'girls' arriving - three ladies in the mid-fifties, seamstresses who had been with Celia Netherton for years.

Ten minutes later the hearse was clear of Pollokshaws, passing Auldhouse with Thornliebank ahead and then six miles further on, up onto the *Glennifer Braes* and the dark foreboding structure of *Tower Ridge*, the residential school for gifted children run by Monsignor Creity.

Leaning into Bert, Peggy was dozing but her mind was churning, thinking of the various possibilities for escape from her situation but knowing her Christian duty was to live out her present trial in Faith in obedience and to trust God to direct her future.

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Directly after Peggy had gone off to the stables, Jean had left Gordon to clean and dress himself while she went out to the external water closet to relieve her bowels.

Forced to sleep naked by his bed-wetting, Gordon was shivering. The temptation was too great. Dropping his wet nappy-towel to the floor, he levered himself over the wet patch onto the dry side of the bed where Peggy had slept. It was still warm. He buried himself under the covers and was instantly asleep.

In the unlit water closet what came was not urine and faeces but blood, pints of it. The pain was excruciating. Jean, shivering, her blood pressure dropping from the loss of blood, her body bathed in a cold sweat, rightly sensed her end was near.

Jean, whose knowledge of the human body was limited, was unaware she had suffered severe abdominal bleeding caused by the collapse of her womb, the major part of which had slithered from her body unseen into the toilet pan. She cried out for help but no one heard her or, if they did, thought she was being beaten again by Willie and chose not to interfere.

Crawling on her hands and knees Jean made her way back to her single-end leaving a trail of bright red blood which quickly froze; overlaid with hoar frost it soon became another dark brown smear among many.

Back in the single-end Jean had already made her decision. Bolting the door behind her, she took the blanket from Henry's cot and kicked it into the gap under it trying to make the room air-tight. She placed the shilling in the gas meter and turned the handle, hearing

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it drop and setting the clockwork mechanism to run to provide a fresh charge of gas. She did not notice the near silent hiss of gas at the mantle.

If Jean thought of Gordon, she would have assumed he was gone, now safe with Miss Fowler. She had no kind thoughts for Willie and had long ago wished him dead. She lifted Henry from his crib, kissed him and asked the Holy Mother to forgive her for what she was about to do. Wrapped in her shawl, she placed her infant in the oven and lay down with her head beside him, reached up and turned on the gas then closed her eyes for the last time.

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The Removal.

The journey from Pollokshaws on the open seat of the enclosed hearse out to *Tower Ridge* in the hills beyond Barrhead was slow, particularly the steep climb up onto the plateau upon which the house had been built. All Bert had been told was a ten-year girl had slipped from a dormitory window, killed instantly by the impact. After removal she was to be delivered to her home chapel in Townhead.

At only four years old, Harold (Harry) the gelding was unhappy with the icy, slippery conditions underfoot. At the steepest section Harry took to stopping, snorting and neighing, refusing to move ahead. Eventually Bert had dismounted, walking with him, urging him forward, the young man and horse slipping and sliding as they moved slowly up the slope, towards the enormous building looming ominously in the distance in the dim light of the first rays of a cold, dull dawn. From the seat and holding the reins loosely, Peggy prayed Bert and Harry would not suffer injury.

On arriving they made their way to the rear of the building into the enclosed courtyard. Looking up, Peggy saw faces crowded at the windows and the high eerie sound of a child wailing, a sound which made the horse snort with anxiety. At Bert's request, she too dismounted and held Harry's bridle, stroking his long head to calm him while Bert went to the rear door to make his enquiry.

Standing alone with the dark walls towering above her, Peggy felt isolated and filled with a feeling of foreboding. They had hoped they would be welcomed with a cup of tea, perhaps even a bowl of porridge. Now however, all she wanted was to be away from this dark and oppressive place. When the priest emerged carrying the small corpse wrapped in a white sheet, he complained angrily, saying they were late, that they should have arrived by six o'clock at the latest so that the removal could take place in darkness, as had been instructed by Father Hegarty.

With the child's corpse on board, placed inside a simple wooden coffin, they made their way back down the long icy driveway, Bert again walking with the horse to re-assure it. An hour later and back on the public road, Harry settled to a steady trudge with Bert and Peggy seated side by side, huddled against the bitter cold. As they travelled they compared notes on what they knew of *Tower Ridge*, which was very little. Bert said the establishment was run by a mysterious man called Monsignor Criety, a man with powerful connections both within the landed gentry, property owners and local politicians through his service on various *Glasgow Corporation* committees. Based mainly at *Tower Ridge* with an apartment in the city centre of *Glasgow*, he was known to travel widely throughout the UK and was said to have the ear of many politicians and senior civil servants in *Westminster*.

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The *Tower Ridge* children, an elite group of around forty had been selected for their cleverness. They ranged from age ten years to seventeen. All were from poor Roman Catholic families. It was widely reported that these children were well cared for, well fed, well clothed and educated to a high standard. Some went on to be priests and nuns, others to universities under the sponsorship of a fund run by Monsignor Criety. Many from this cohort would be promoted directly into the elite ranks of the civil service, breaking free of the poverty which trapped their families.

Perhaps the only negative aspect of the place was that these children, once they had been selected, were cloistered and not permitted to make or receive visits from their family or even their local priest.

On their return from Townhead, Bert dropped off Peggy at Shawlands Cross then continued up over High Shawlands to the stables at Pollokshaws before calling at *Rosemount* to wash and change into his office clothes. After a brief telephone conversation with Margaret Ferris, Bert caught the tram to the offices of *MacLennan & Co* in town, arriving just as the office re-opened after the lunch break.

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Special Delivery.

Just as Bert arrived at MacLennan's, the letter from George Jnr was about to be delivered to *Rosemount* by a young man riding a bicycle. Most of Billy Lees' deliveries were telegrams and so a special delivery letter was a novelty.

Billy tugged the bell-pull which was answered promptly by Miss Netherton. She was already dressed for her luncheon appointment with her sister-in-law Celia as part of their normal mid-week routine when *Netherton's Boutique Ensembles* was closed from lunchtime for Wednesday half-day closing.

When the door opened, Billy caught a glimpse of a partially-dressed woman standing behind her, at the end of a short hallway. In later re-tellings among his friends back at his base at GPO HQ, Billy would claim she was entirely naked and had smiled and crooked a finger at him.

'Yes?' asked Miss Netherton, stepping out onto the doormat, closing the door behind her. 'Speshul Daluvurry Let'ur frae America.'

'Thank you.'

'It's fur Albert MacLennan Graham, Esquire. He huz tae sign for it.'

'He's out at business, I'll sign for it.'

'Sorry, mare'n ma joab's wurth. It's gottae be the addressee tae sign.'

'He may be at Graham's funeral parlour, just down the hill, at Pollok Street, in Pollokshaws.'

'Aye, Ah ken it. They burrit ma granda. Righ-ay-o, A'll try there, then.'

Billy remounted his bicycle and sped off, his mind filled with erotic thoughts of his glimpse of Delilah. At Graham's, Billy was re-directed to *MacLennan & Co* in Union Street, close to his base in George Square. Although his trip to High Shawlands and Pollokshaws had proved to have been unnecessary, he set off again without complaint, eager to get back to tell his tale of the 'naked lady' to his work colleagues.

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As soon as Billy Lees left *Rosemount*, Miss Netherton collected her handbag and left to do some shopping and to meet with her sister-in law for lunch, following their well-established routine for Wednesday afternoons when *Netherton's Boutique Ensembles* closed from noon.

Delilah was suffering from another blinding headache and swallowed six aspirins to try to dull the pain. Since picking at a late breakfast, she had been drinking steadily. Dressed

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only in a diaphanous silk dressing gown and well past the stage of using a glass, she slurped directly from the dregs of her sherry bottle, the third since waking.

Normally Bert kept his room locked to exclude her incursions to his private space but because of his eagerness to get to his office in town, on this occasion he had forgotten to do so.

Inebriated, confused, feeling lonely and dejected, stumbling around the house calling out to George Snr and Marianna, Delilah noticed that Bert's bedroom door was ajar. From his bedside table she picked up a religious tract entitled:

"Cleanliness is next to Godliness."

She sat on his bed and scanned it, an empty bottle in one hand and the tract in the other.

It spoke of the human condition, of the temptations of the flesh, of an unclean mind in a corrupting, sin-loving body;

- It expounded the virtues of turning to a new life of spiritual cleanliness.
- It urged the reader to turn to God, confess and seek Salvation in Jesus.
- It promised new bodies for old when Jesus returned in His Glory.

Delilah fetched a fresh bottle of sherry from her cache and moved to the bathroom.

Perhaps in her befuddled mind she believed she could wash away her sins with a long, hot bath?

When Miss Netherton returned just before five o'clock, the house was unlit, which she found odd. After a search, she found her mistress in the family bath slumped below the waterline with the hot tap fully open, water overflowing onto the floor, the room filled with steam and a strong smell of fumes from the geyser.

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When Bert was called to the ground floor Reception to sign for the special delivery letter, he had been on his way to a meeting with his Uncle Lachlan and his cousin Donald MacLennan. Guessing the letter was from his father, Bert slipped it into his briefcase still unopened, intending to read it back at home later.

As far as Bert had been aware, this meeting had been called to review the performance of the other managers in *MacLennan & Co* and Bert had felt a bit uncomfortable commenting on his peers, feeling as if he was talking behind their backs.

On his arrival at the Boardroom, he nodded to both men and sat listening to their exchanges, soon realising they were discussing who would take over the running of

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MacLennan & Co when Lachlan retired. He also learned this event was imminent as Lachlan planned to step down as Chairman and Managing Director at Christmas, four weeks hence.

'Well, Bert, what do you say? Will you do it?'

'You want me to take over, Uncle Lachlan. But I'm only twenty-one.'

'Bert, I was only twenty-one when I took over from my father. And that wasn't planned. Father died of a stroke, right through there, in my room. It was hectic of course, and I struggled for a bit. And I had been in the business only a year at that time. You have been here four years and you a quite a bit brighter than I ever was, laddie. And look, Bert, I'll be on the other end of a telephone if you need me, at least for a year or so. And Donald will still be here for any legal problems. Let's say I'll hang about for a year or until you get fed up with me. I'm itching to get back to the croft on Harris, get some fishing in while I'm still able. And Donald here will continue as Company Secretary, available to act as your sounding board.'

Donald added: 'Look at it this way, Bert. Your salary would increase threefold and you would get a bonus each year, depending on results. Lachlan has persuaded the others with shares in the business to give you a try-out. And your second-cousin Andrew Lyle at the Bank has endorsed it and says he will make sure you get a loan on good terms to buy the place in Auldhouse you have been talking about and then you would be all set to go ahead and wed that clever girlfriend of yours. Are you engaged yet?'

'No, not formally. Not yet. But are you sure I could do it? What will all the other managers say.'

Lachlan spoke: 'They'll say, "Good for you, Bert". They all like you and respect you, laddie. But you know that, surely. You're the first person they speak to when they have a problem, am I right?'

Donald spoke: 'Well, Bert, what do you say? Shall I draw up the papers?'

'If you're both sure, yes. I'll promise to do my best but you'll have to be patient with me, I'm sure I'll make some mistakes.'

The meeting then proceeded to discuss each part of the business in detail and Bert was asked to give his ideas on what changes he saw might be beneficial for the future of *MacLennan & Co*. The afternoon raced by, with two rounds of tea and biscuits. As the light faded from the sky and icy hoar-frost smog from countless chimneys filled the street below, flocks of starlings began arriving to roost on the smoke-stained buildings, filling the air with their loud chattering and whistling.

Bert was completing his lists of things to do and think about and the other two men were preparing to leave when Miss Edith Palmer tapped gently at the Boardroom door to advise there was an urgent call for Mr Bert from *Rosemount*, from his housekeeper, Miss Netherton, adding that Miss McFetridge had called from *Netherton's Boutique Ensembles* asking he return her call when he got a chance.

Donald and Lachlan shook Bert's hand and the young man raced down three floors to the small meeting room off the downstairs reception area to make the return call. In his

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briefcase he had the piles of papers from his recent meeting including the unopened special delivery letter he had forgotten about in the excitement of what had just happened.

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Inheritance

When Peggy McFetridge arrived at *Netherton's Boutique Ensembles* it was just after noon and the shop was closed for the rest of the day. Her intention was to catch up on her lost morning by working through the afternoon. She used her key, moved through the dim premises to the rear workshop, disrobed and sponged herself in the small staff toilet before changing into her smarter shop clothes.

The shop had recently been fitted with electric lighting making it bright and cheery. Peggy sat at her workplace and using her vanity mirror she brushed and combed her wiry black hair, teasing it into a *Coconut Bob*, a style she had been cultivating for some months because it hid her large ears and made her face look rounder. Staring at her long, sallow face, she applied a tiny amount of rouge to her cheeks and thin layer of pale red lipstick. Smiling to herself, she relaxed as she pinned on her badge displaying her name and new title.

Miss McFetridge Assistant Manageress

Now twenty-one, Peggy had been recently promoted to *Assistant Manageress* with the expectation of 'acting up' in place of *Celia Netherton* who planned to partially retire after Christmas and would work only on Fridays and Saturdays.

While moving her mirror back to its shelf, Peggy scuffed against a bulky package, which clattered to the floor. Picking it up she read the label:

Private and Confidential

Miss Margaret McFetridge
C/O Netherton's Boutique Ensembles
Fereneze Mansions,
Kilmarnock Road,
Shawlands,
Glasgow.

Peggy stared at the first letter she had ever received in her life and sent up a prayer asking for guidance. Was this a response from the Royal College of Music in London, to the application Mrs Blair had sent on her behalf for a regional scholarship to study piano to an advanced level?

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Prior to opening the thick brown envelope, she set the kettle on the small ring and when it began to whistle Peggy made herself a further pot of tea and ate a few biscuits tin reserved for the best customers and put a penny in the petty cash tin to pay for them. It was her first food of the day.

Opening the envelope, she discovered to her surprise it was from *M. McConnell, Solicitors*.

Always a quick reader, she scanned it through once. By the end of the first page her heart was pounding, her breathing shallow, her mind jumbled with competing thoughts, one of which screamed "this is a hoax!"

Dear Miss McFetridge,

I am writing to enclose several items of jewellery: (please check these against the enclosed inventory, sign it and return one copy to me at your earliest convenience).

These are personal items from the estate of Mrs Verity Shepherd of *Morningside, Newlands*. You may recall her as a customer at *Netherton's* over many years and it seems that is where she formed a bond with you.

I regret to have to inform you that Mrs Shepherd died in June this year.

She was predeceased by her brother-in-law Dr Harold Shepherd who sadly died two years earlier of a long and dreadful illness¹⁴. When she knew she was dying¹⁵, Mrs Shepherd appointed me as the Executor of her Estate with Instructions to sell the house (*Morningside*, off Monrieth Road, Newlands) with its contents excluding the items herewith enclosed.

Net of all charges and fees payable, (see the Statement of Account enclosed), the amount of your Bequest is:

Seven hundred and thirty-five pounds and eleven shillings and five pence, (£735-11/5) (please see footnote).

In accordance with her wishes I have now established an account with the Shawlands Branch of the Bank of Scotland in your name. Enclosed please find your cheque book. You will require to lodge a signature with the Bank prior to issuing any cheques.

(Please take this letter to the Bank with you. I have appraised the Manager Mr Ronald McLaughlin of your impending visit. He tells me he already knows you from your visits to his Branch on behalf of Mrs Netherton's establishment and from your

¹⁴ Verity Shepherd had suppressed the information that Harold had died from syphilis which, untreated, had resulted in a brain haemorrhage, this latter trauma given out by Verity as the official cause of death.

¹⁵ Breast cancer with secondary tumours throughout her body.

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regular attendance at The Pollokshaws' Gospel Hall where, he tells me, he is an Elder.)

Mrs Shepherd seemed to be very aware of your background and domestic circumstances and by way of explanation of her Bequest to you, she asked 'that you view the attached two photographs of her departed brother-in-law and that you do so 'with mercy in your heart', (her exact words).

As you will see from this letter, I am established nearby and will look forward to meeting you when you have had a chance to compose yourself and consider what advices and guidance you may need from me.

I look forward to meeting you and I remain, at your service,

P T McConnell

Philomena T. McConnell, Ph D, LLB (Hons).
Sole Partner
for
M. McConnell's Solicitors.

25th November 1925.

Note:

Mrs Shepherd also instructed me to retain an amount of £50 to cover advice you may need from me in coming to terms with your new wealth. Should you wish to select alternative advice, please advise me and I will of course deposit said amount to your credit in your bank account.

As Peggy skimmed through these words her mind filled with temptations: nice clothes she could buy, cakes, coffee (which she had enjoyed only occasionally but which she preferred over tea), ice cream, and fish and chips with mushy peas.

As her heart slowed, Peggy looked suddenly behind her, afraid she might see the Devil skulking in a dark corner, sniggering.

A new thought came, stabbing repeatedly, putting the words on her lips from I Timothy Ch 6 v 10:

"For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

As she stared at the amount of money which had been promised to her, she was fearful for her soul. The love of money and the temptations it attracted were well ingrained from her years at the Citadel and at the Gospel Hall.

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Peggy had only ever seen Miss McConnell from a distance, driving her car. Celia had once told her Philomena McConnell (Philly, as she liked to be called) had once visited the shop but had found nothing to her taste.

Peggy re-read the letter, this time slowly, savouring every word, finally daring to believe what it said was true. For a reason which did not make sense to her, as she stared at Philly's signature a feeling of calm and certainty came over her and she began to make a mental list of those she would be able to help, if she was indeed rich.

Her next thought was she could now clear her mother's debts but must somehow prevent her father from getting his hands on the money and drinking, smoking and gambling it away.

Peggy opened the second envelope labelled:

"Dr Harold Shepherd"

It contained two high-quality sepia prints. Both were formal poses, taken by different professional photographers.

The child Harold sat on a large silk cushion, on one side bracketed by a display of artificial flowers while on the other side his (disproportionately) large hand (with incredibly long fingers) was resting on an elderly, docile spaniel which stared at the camera with sad, baleful eyes. The boy's face was thin, serious, his long black hair, spilling in profuse, wiry curls onto the collar of his sailor suit, his small snub nose and dark brown eyes piercing into his future with intelligence.

A hand-written scrawl on the rear informed this he was

Harold Kendal Jeffries Shepherd, (Edinburgh, on his third birthday.)

The second photograph showed Harold as a thin, smug, unsmiling young man (his hair already thinning) in his graduation gown, dangling his mortar in one long hand and in the other, a parchment scroll held proudly across his chest.

The rear of the print informed:

Harold, Doctor of Laws, Oxford University¹⁶

¹⁶This award would ensure him life tenure as a Reader in Contract Law at Glasgow University.

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Peggy placed both photographs beside the mirror and studied them, checking her own face, then her large, long-fingered hands and concluded she was looking at her true father.

Now, at last, she understood the mystery of why she bore no resemblance to the brute of a man who had made her mother's life a misery. Jean had never talked of any contact with the Shepherd family from *Morningside* in Newlands but clearly there must have been a loving liaison between her mother and Dr Harold Shepherd. She would ask her mother later.

Only then did Peggy turn to the thicker envelope to examine the jewellery and check it against the inventory:

- one wedding ring, gold, estimate, £10
- one engagement ring, estimate £55
- one pendant, estimate, £33
- one broach, antique, estimate, £85
- miscellaneous rings (seven) costume quality, estimate £23 total
- one ladies' wrist watch (Longines), engraved "To My Darling Verity", estimate, £125
- one gents' fob watch, (Tissot), engraved "Dr Harold K J Shepherd", estimate, £90
- one gent's signet ring, engraved "H K J S", estimate, £28
- one gold Schaeffer fountain pen, engraved "HKJS", estimate £16.

Slowly, prayerfully, she re-read the letter and examined the photographs and jewellery, trying to imagine what her newly found relatives had been like, how they had lived, whether there were others in the family and if so, what they would make of her and if they would resent her because of this Bequest.

Suddenly she was consumed by a desire to visit *Morningside*, the place where she was now convinced she had been conceived, perhaps even born. She wanted to be able to understand this before asking her mother later. Peggy's eyes filled with tears, sadness mixed with anger. For years she had thought of her mother as a spendthrift and now, at almost no effort from herself she would be able to put her mother on the right track. Perhaps she and Bert could find a nice two room and kitchen where they could 'hide' Jean and Gordon from Willie and help her to get well. But it would have to be away from Pollokshaws. Maybe she could find a place in Shawlands, or Langside, somewhere Willie McFetridge could not find them? Perhaps Auntie Agnes would know where to find a suitable place.

Peggy found a scrap piece of paper and used her new fountain pen to list her mother's debts making an estimate of what might be owed, including the future payments due to Auntie Wilma for the ménage instalments. Erring on the high side, she came to a total of £8-14/- which she decided to round up to ten pounds. Compared to her Bequest, it

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seemed such a trivial amount and she was overcome with a great sadness for her mother and many others like her who were forced to live in poverty.

Perhaps this was God's hand again resting on her shoulder, moving her heart and mind, firing her with a resolve to use her new-found wealth to do good for others like Jean, others who deserved a chance. She sniffed away her tears and in doing so her mind cleared and she began to think more clearly, planning for the hours immediately ahead.

Before she revealed her new circumstances to her mother, she must first discuss everything with Bert and with Miss Fowler. Perhaps it would be best to keep the actual details of her wealth from her mother who might spread the news far and wide. When he found out about it, Willie McFetridge would want to steal it from her and drink and gamble it away. She would need to be careful.

Firstly, before visiting *Morningside*, she must visit Miss McConnell with the signed receipt and verify what she was reading was true. After her visit to *Morningside* she would try to contact Bert by telephone at *MacLennan & Co* and arrange to meet him at Aunt Agnes's home later to discuss and pray with her and try to plan their way ahead.

Peggy looked up at the shop clock. It was two minutes before two o'clock. She wound Mrs Shepherd's watch, set it to match the clock, slipped it on and adjusted the gold band to fit her slimmer wrist. She had never worn a watch before: now she was wearing one equivalent in worth to several years wages.

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Using her new pen, Peggy wrote a careful note to Mrs Celia Netherton explaining she had been called away on personal business, apologising but explaining she hoped to be back by about four o'clock and would stay on to complete the garment she was working on, due for a first fitting at ten o'clock the following morning.

After she had tidied her desk and tea things, Peggy loaded the contents of the package into her handbag, locked *Netherton's Boutique Ensembles*, crossed to the far side of Kilmarnock Road and raced along to *M. McConnell, Solicitors*. In the front office she was confronted by a tall, busty woman dressed in a man's three-piece suit. The woman offered her hand and introduced herself as Sally Broughton:

'Sorry, dearie, Philly is out at her meeting this afternoon, up at *The Grange*¹⁷ with the foundlings.'

'Oh. Well, eh, I wonder if you can help me, Miss Broughton. Can you tell me if this letter from Miss McConnell is genuine? I'm sorry to have to question it, but well. . .'

¹⁷ The Grange was originally built for the Horspool family and later became a foundling hospital. Read 'Legacy' by John Bonthron available at www.thebuzzinbee.co.uk .

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'Just call me Sally, dearie. Let me see. Ah, yes, I typed this. Ah, yes, so are you Miss Margaret McFettridge?'

'Yes. Most people call me Peggy.'

'Ah, yes. Well, Peggy, I'm pleased to confirm this letter is genuine. Did you know Mrs Shepherd well? She obviously thought the world of you.'

'Well, no, not really. I did make and modify a few dresses for her, maybe five garments in total, I think. She always gave me a huge tip, one time it was a ten-shilling note. Then she stopped coming in for a bit and we wondered what had happened to her.'

'Ah, yes, now I remember. You work at *Netherton's* don't you? My friend Annette Birkley got a fancy dress from *Netherton's* but your prices are away above my budget.'

'Miss Broughton, do you have any idea why Mrs Shepherd left me all this money and these nice pieces of jewellery?'

'Ah, no, dearie. But when you've done my job for as long as I have, you learn people often have strange notions, especially when they know they are near their end.'

'Miss, eh, Sally, is it all right if I go to the Bank and cash a cheque now?'

'Ah, yes. So you've been thinking it would be sort of like stealing? Ah, no. No, don't worry, dearie, that's a common reaction in some people. You just go ahead, dearie, and enjoy a wee fling. I'm sure you'll get used to being rich soon enough.'

'So, Sally, if I go to the bank and sign a cheque for say, twenty pounds, would they give me the money right away, today?'

'Ah, yes, dearie, of course they would! I heard Philly on the telephone to Ronnie McLaughlin this morning. So, scoot along dearie, before he closes for the day.'

'Thanks, Sally, I will.'

'Ah, wait. Do you want to make an appointment to see Philly?'

'Oh, well, yes, eh, maybe tomorrow. Is lunchtime possible? Anytime between noon and one-thirty.'

'Right-o, that's you in the diary for twelve-fifteen.'

Fifteen minutes later Peggy was back in *Netherton's* with thirty-five pounds in her purse comprising four five-pound notes, five singles, eight ten-shilling notes and the rest in mixed silver. Although she had often carried amounts up to fifty pounds to the Bank to pay into the *Netherton's* account, she had never dreamed of having such an amount in her own purse.

She stood outside *Morningside* for a long time, trying to imagine what it must have been like for her mother living there. Presumably she had been a servant girl: she would ask her later.

Peggy decided she must call Bert to share her good news and arrange to meet him that evening to discuss matters. At *MacLennan & Co* she was put through to Miss Edith Palmer whom she had once met at a Christian Rally in Adelaide's Baptist Church. Edith explained that Bert was in an important meeting with his uncle and could not be disturbed but she would ask him to call back as soon as he was free. Peggy had never used *Netherton's*

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telephone for a private call before and, unsure how much it might have cost, decided to put a thruppence into the petty cash box to pay for it.

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For Peggy McFetridge the rest of the afternoon and early evening went by in a blur.

As she thought of *Morningside* now in new ownership, a new fear arose in her mind:

- What if someone challenged her right to the Bequest?
- How could she prove her real father was Harold Shepherd?
- Would the photographs be enough? How did Jean end up with Willie McFetridge?
- Peggy knew she did not have a birth certificate and that Jean Mulvaney was not married to Willie McFetridge.
- Should I be called Peggy Shepherd, she wondered? Or Peggy Mulvaney?
- Will I ever need to prove it?

She would try to find out as much detail from her mother as she could then ask Miss McConnell.

Turning away from *Morningside*, she checked through the list of her mother's debts before setting off to pay them. It took quite some time to find everyone and agree what was owed. Although Peggy suspected that a few of the lenders had asked for more than was due, she paid up without argument.

In the end Jean McFetridge's debts were cleared for a total of £10-1/4 which included a delivery of two bags of coal to arrive before nine o'clock on the following morning.

On an impulse, Jean went into a hardware store and bought a square of linoleum and a gaudy fireside rug which she lugged on her shoulder to Miss Fowler's house, as a small gift for her aunt. As she passed the close leading to Auntie Wilma's house, she remembered her mother's ménage money outstanding for the remaining weeks and popped in to pay it off. To avoid being cross-questioned about the linoleum and rug, she left them propped up outside Wilma's door.

'Auntie Wilma, how are you keeping?'

'No' too well the day, Peggy. Oh, that's a nice coat. Here, sit down and give me your news. Haud on, get that bit o' curtain on it first, save you getting dog hairs on it. And put on the kettle for a wee cuppa. Lester, get back in your cage and leave your wee sister alone.'

'Sorry, Auntie Wilma, I can't stop. I just called in to pay off my Mammy's ménage money.'

'**What!**'

'Yes. I want to clear her debts, set her square for the future.'

'Where did you get money of that kind?'

'Well, eh, I've been saving it up and I want to set Mammy square.'

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'Oh, you do, do you? Well you can pay me the three pounds she wheedled out of me years ago when you were going to Shawlands Senior Secondary and needed a new uniform¹⁸. And the ten shillings last year for the rent when Abe Reuther was going to have you all evicted. I suppose you heard he's been found drowned in the River Cart. It seems someone punched him senseless then threw him over the bridge near the entrance to the Pollok Estate. His body was found floating down near the big house.¹⁹ They say he was last seen with your father, leaving the *Old Swan Inn*.'

'So, Auntie Wilma, how much does Mammy owe you in total?'

'For everything? Let me see. Near enough seven pounds as will make no difference.'

'There you are, Auntie Wilma, ten pounds to cover interest due. And thanks for helping Mammy down through these years. Now, that's the tea made and your tray set but sorry, I must fly. God Bless Us All.'

'**Ten pounds!** Have you been betting on the horses, like your father?'

When Peggy left Auntie Wilma's the linoleum and rug had been stolen.

¹⁸ Miss Fowler had paid for everything Peggy needed for the move to Shawlands Academy. Either this was a lie from Wilma (which was not entirely out of character) or Jean had used it as excuse to borrow money from her, knowing Peggy was one of her favourites.

¹⁹ When Abe Reuter's body was fished from the water, his wallet and personal effects were intact. Assault and robbery were not considered likely and the police investigation was perfunctory: the man appeared to have slipped into the river, banging his head in the process. He was a perpetual drunk, as everyone knew. Those who saw Willie McFetridge lifting Abe by his coat front and tossing him over the parapet of the bridge into the River Cart were not interviewed and although their story eventually circulated, it was discounted as rumour. After all, Willie McFetridge was dead, and it never paid to speak ill of the dead.

Hand of God

Snowfall in Saratoga

Three thousand miles away the wind veered to the north west and the air became a few degrees warmer. Snow was expected.

Due to its remoteness, there was no telephone at *The Hermitage* and the news of the multiple deaths which had occurred was slow to spread beyond the immediate confines of the great house.

When Nurse Rubin Monreal found Vass and Smart, they were locked in Vass's office, both asleep and too drunk to be roused by banging on the window and shouting.

Rubin, a sensible man and used to death, took charge. Other servants had discovered the bodies impaled on the railings. Rubin told them to throw sheets over them. Someone had ventured up to the top floor of the private apartments and found George Jnr's corpse.

When the stable-boy who had ridden into Saratoga Springs with George Jnr's letter returned, he was immediately sent back again on a fresh mount with a scribbled note for the Sheriff. (Riding overland was the shortest and quickest route from *The Hermitage* as it utilised farm tracks and crossed fields rather than the longer route on the uncertain, made-up roads required by automobiles²⁰.)

When the stable lad reached Saratoga Springs for the second time, it was almost dark. Asking around, he found the Sheriff Dougal MacMillan in a meeting at the Courthouse in the Chambers of Judge Malloy. The Sheriff and Judge were in discussion with Gideon Cochrane, the twenty-five-year-old recently appointed as the senior partner of Galbraith, Cochrane and Templeton on the early retirement of his father. (William Wesley Cochrane was now confined to a wheelchair: he had broken his back in a fall from his horse.) As senior partner Gideon had taken over responsibility for all business matters regarding *The Hermitage*.

The Hermitage stable lad was quizzed aggressively by MacMillan and Cochrane but could add little except:

"Miss Viviana's been ett the juice agin an' firin' off thet pistol o' hers. There's four dead, maybe mare. Vass n' Smart is drunk as skunks agin. Sheriff, ya need ta come an sort it."

²⁰ In 1925 the top speed of the average automobile in the USA was around 30 mph on good roads. On country roads this might be as slow as 5 to 8 mph, on average.

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At nine o'clock that evening the entourage set off from Saratoga Springs into the cold, clear night and made its way by the bright glow of a waxing, gibbous moon. The small convoy was led by a police car driven by MacMillan with Cochrane and Doc Vernon Willetts as his passengers. Willetts was an older man retained by *The Hermitage* to tend its inhabitants and would be needed to certify the deaths for the records and perhaps to authorise autopsies, if required. In their train was a horse-drawn ambulance with two nurses and two horse-drawn hearses with attendants, even though it was being openly discussed that perhaps the dead might be buried on the estate rather than 'contaminate' any of the Christian graveyards in town.

It was well after mid-night when McMillan and his group arrived. Rubin had arranged for the bodies to be cordoned off. He had continued to pack his remaining equipment into his motor ambulance, still planning to be home for Thanksgiving, away from the craziness of rich folks.

The threatening snow began to fall. Overnight the fall dumped four feet directly on *The Hermitage*, trapping all but the hardiest within its confines. With the dawn, the wind began to blow strongly, sweeping down from the north and would bring a deep freeze of twenty consecutive days and nights of sub-zero temperatures.

The roads and farm tracks were now impassable.

The Hermitage was isolated as if under siege.

The only way in and out was on foot, by snowshoes.

Hand of God

Gideon

Gideon Wesley Cochrane was a fourth generation member of a family whose Scottish antecedents had made their way to North America in 1753 as Methodist missionaries and teachers, swept along by the movement started by John and Charles Wesley, believing it was their duty to spread God's Word to the natives and other settlers who had preceded them. The Cochranes had settled first in Canada, in the township of Kingston on the shores of Lake Ontario. Down through the years which followed, the Cochranes had remained pious, some said sanctimonious.

After two generations in Canada, they had moved two-hundred and fifty miles south-east to Saratoga Springs to merge their practice with Galbraith's, another firm with Scottish roots whose main interest was in audit, accountancy and tax law. The union was both commercial and marital: Gideon's grandfather had married Joshua Templeton's only daughter, Sarah.

Fifty years later, John Zachariah Templeton, a newer immigrant from Scotland, had been persuaded to merge his practice with Galbraith & Cochrane, adding his expertise in matters of land management. In Scotland he had served on the estate of the Duke of Buccleuch before immigrating with his sweetheart. Their aim was to start a new life, free of the prejudice which had surrounded his deep friendship with Rosie Quigley, a Catholic servant girl who was originally from Cork in the south of Ireland. Sadly, Rosie had died of cholera during the tempestuous winter sea crossing. On arrival in America, Zach had set his mind to live a bachelor life, throwing himself into the work of the First Methodist Church of Saratoga Springs where he had played organ and piano until his death.

Some said it was the rigours of winter travel to *The Hermitage* estate which had weakened Zach Templeton, bringing on the pneumonia which had killed him aged only fifty-five. Zach's final project, one which he regarded with great pride, was to guide Rod Brabsley over a five-year period while they assembled the packages of land comprising some fifteen contiguous farms into a large, coherent and profitable estate. Zach then went on to oversee the construction of *The Hermitage* mansion.

During these early years, although disinterested in what Zach had to say on "Sin, Damnation and Salvation through Jesus Christ", Rod Brabsley had seemed to be a normal, ordinary man. Without doubt Zach would have "birked in his grave" if he had been able to witness the paedophilia of Brabsley, with his child brides and his incestuous romance with his daughter.

In modern times, although the firm retained the full title "Galbraith, Cochrane and Templeton", it was the Cochranes with their strong male issue who dominated the family

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business and it was their influence and strong religious commitment which stiffened the community within which they were both respected and slightly feared.

Tall, striking with a mane of brown hair tinged with gold, Gideon Cochrane was a vigorous, practical and energetic man who loved the outdoors. In physique and outlook, he might have been better suited to a life as a farmer rather than a lawyer. Partly to "resist the temptations of the flesh" and because he had been encouraged to do so by his father, aged eighteen Gideon had wed the plain and studious Eliza Morgan. Over the years which followed, their marriage would go on to produce a growing family of three boys and an infant girl, Sarah, the name given to all first-born girls in the Cochrane family.

Eliza was six years his senior and had worked as the personal secretary to Gideon's father since joining the practice from commercial college. In this role she had frequently visited *The Hermitage* with her father-in-law William Cochrane and so had been able to advise her new husband what to expect when he inherited responsibility for the Brabsley portfolio.

This included the duty of making obligatory bi-annual visits of inspection when, accompanied by Vass and Smart, Gideon toured the estate, talked to the farmers and read various reports prepared by the visiting tradesmen who tended the great house and its outbuildings.

As primed by Eliza, Gideon was rightly wary of anything Vass and Smart averred to be the truth. He had already begun a meticulous back-audit of the accounts from previous years, convinced the two men were up to no good. Regarding Miss Viviana and her latest husband George Graham Jnr, Gideon and Eliza had spent hours in prayer, asking God to act to save the newly-weds from the Devil's thrall.

Gideon had scolded himself repeatedly for allowing the man Graham to insist on full inheritance in the event of his new wife's death. However, as Eliza had pointed out, who else was there to inherit other than previous husbands, each of whom had been known to be charlatans? At least George Jnr Graham was Scottish and although he was not religious, he was polite and gentle and appeared to love Viviana, albeit in a rather fawning and effeminate way.

While keeping his innermost thoughts to himself and to avoid pre-judgement, it was in this frame of mind Gideon Cochrane arrived at *The Hermitage* to consider the tragedy reported earlier.

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After an initial round of checking the dead, (the two women had to be first excavated from the snow-covered sheets, certified as dead, and notes taken), the four corpses were laid out side by side in an outbuilding where Doc Willetts made his further

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examinations. George Jnr (with most of his throat missing from Viviana's bullet) lay beside the emaciated corpse of his father George Snr. After scrutiny by the Doctor and the Sheriff, the corpses of the two women were wrapped in blankets to preserve their modesty.

In a private discussion, Nurse Rubin Monreal and Doc Vernon Willetts had earlier 'agreed' George Snr had expired of 'natural causes'. Rubin had also revealed to Doc Willetts what he knew of Nurse Esmerelda Ramirez, both by reputation and by his personal observation of her behaviour. Rubin had seen George Jnr enter and leave her bedroom repeatedly during the previous five weeks. (This information was revealed on a promise of anonymity, necessary to avoid any risk to Rubin's employment by the Mayo Clinic.)

In the light of this disclosure, Esme's room was subjected to a very detailed search and her cache of Codeine tablets discovered with three unmarked bottles containing a pungent syrupy liquid. This liquor was first sniffed then tasted (very warily) and found to be revoltingly bitter. It was believed to be some form of acid, not a medication. No one could bear to swallow such a substance. Perhaps it had been used for removing nail varnish, the Sheriff suggested.

Accordingly, the LC 17 was drained away, destroying the evidence of its role in the bizarre deaths.

After much debate and following rigorous interviewing of the entire staff of twenty-three servants, Sheriff MacMillan concluded the deaths of the two women had occurred do to "Death my Misadventure". In a side note, Sherrif McMillan added that this event had involved alcohol and possibly narcotics as yet unidentified.

Despite the evidence of bullet wounds on George Jnr's body, Sherrif McMillan insisted Doc Willetts must certify the death of George Wardley Graham as "Accidental". McMillan's thinking was that the unfortunate Scotsman had been caught in the crossfire during a cat fight between Esme and Viviana.

During this process the stable lad who had acted as the courier to bring the news of the incident to Saratoga Springs was again grilled. This time he explained about the earlier letter sent to an address in Glasgow. Vass and Smart were re-interrogated and only then admitted to being party to witnessing the letter, explaining they had been told it contained a summons to George Jnr's brother to come to *The Hermitage* to 'heal' his father. Although the story seemed unlikely, in the absence of any other explanation, it was accepted that such a letter had been sent.

Despite repeated pressure from Gideon Cochrane, neither Vass nor Smart nor the stable lad could recall the address (the boy could barely read printed words and struggled with hand-written script, he said). Perhaps the US Mail office might know, suggested Vass.

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The visitors settled to wait for the thaw which would free them.

On the third day, a spot was chosen on a small hillock overlooking Lake Saratoga. After a huge effort, the snow was cleared sufficiently to allow four graves to be dug.

Mid-morning on Tuesday 24th November, in a simple ceremony officiated by Gideon Cochrane, he buried his two clients alongside the father and nurse, surrendering them to God's infinite Mercy.

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In Washington President Calvin Coolidge was putting the final touches to his speech to be delivered two days later by radio exhorting the people of America to give thanks to God for their many blessings.

At *The Hermitage*, the Sheriff's party was in the fourth day of their confinement caused by the deep snow and freezing conditions.

In Glasgow, because of time differences, it was just after one o'clock and Billy Lees had just delivered the special delivery letter to Bert Graham at *MacLennan & Co.*

With his presence no longer required at *The Hermitage*, Gideon had decided he must get back to Saratoga Springs. From *The Hermitage* documents lodged in his office safe, he knew that George Jnr's twin brother was to inherit. He racked his memory but could not recall the man's name. However, as it was his professional duty so to do, he must contact this man at the earliest. It was also important to ensure that he made a good impression and prevent some other firm from muscling in on his most important client portfolio.

Carpe Diem was the essence in such matters, as had been drilled into him by his father.

It was ten o'clock in the morning. The sky overhead was clear and the Sun was shining brightly but with little heat in it. The wind was light, albeit from the North and bitterly cold. He knew the trails from his many visits to *The Hermitage*, albeit in recent times these had been on horseback although he had known these hills from his boyhood days, hunting and fishing.

After a short prayer asking for His Lord's protection and guidance, Gideon set out, reckoning he might arrive at Saratoga Springs by midnight unless The Lake was frozen solid enough to allow him to take a more direct route. Using snowshoes, he set off on foot. The snow was firm and crisp. Being an outdoors man and fit, Gideon made good time. Two hours later he was on the north west edge of Lake Saratoga and, as he had hoped, he saw it was frozen solid.

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To the north-east on the far side of The Lake, Gideon could see the smudge of smoke from the fires of his home town. If he skirted The Lake to the northwards he knew he would find the Fish Creek bridge over the Saratoga River but reckoned if he went straight across the frozen lake he would save himself a long and exhausting walk and avoid making the final push to reach his home in the dark, after sunset.

After another short prayer, Gideon set out over the frozen surface. It was a good decision because two hours later he reached the Adirondack Highway where he hitched a lift directly to his house. While he washed and changed into fresh clothes, he explained to Eliza what had transpired at *The Hermitage*.

He then telephoned Judge Malloy and brought him up to date with the news.

On the Judge's authority, he made a visit to the US Mail office and from their records obtained the name and address in Glasgow to which the special delivery letter had been sent. He took this information back home to his wife Eliza and after a short time of prayer together, they drafted a telegram to be sent to the letter's recipient, whom they had once overheard George Jnr disparagingly refer to as "my runt twin brother".

Overseas telegrams were notoriously expensive: Gideon had argued for brevity but Eliza had won out in the end, arguing the telegram must provide enough detail to ensure the recipient fully understood what had happened and be in a position to make decisions.

The final version read:

To:
Albert MacLennan Graham Esquire,
Rosemount,
High Shawlands,
Glasgow,
Great Britain.

Sir,
we are given to understand you are the brother of George Wardley Graham, (George Jnr) of The Hermitage Estate. As his Solicitors, we write to inform you of the recent death of your father George Graham Snr who contracted a virus during his voyage from England. We also regret to advise the contiguous death of your brother caused by a tragic shooting accident in which his wife Mrs Viviana Brabsley Graham has also died.

We have been led to understand that shortly before his death, George Jnr may have nominated you as his successor and as such, you would become the new owner of *The Hermitage Estate*, approximate valuation \$126 million (USD).

We are advised by the US Mail service that a special delivery letter is already arrived or will shortly arrive with you which would clarify this situation.

Would you kindly arrange for your Solicitor to make urgent contact with us to discuss this matter and seek an early resolution.

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This matter is of great import because the livelihood of many people rests on the outcome. If you are indeed the heir, we strongly advise and request you to come to *The Hermitage* at your earliest convenience. It may be advisable for you to bring proof of identity documentation and, if this can be arranged, your British legal representative.

Yours etc,

Gideon Wesley Cochrane
for Galbraith, Cochrane and Templeton, Solicitors,
Saratoga Springs,
New York State,
USA.

Hand of God

The Age of Maturity

As the telegram operator in Saratoga Springs was keying in the script from Galbraith, Cochrane and Templeton to Albert MacLennan Graham in Glasgow, Peggy McFetridge arrived at 7 Pollok Street, intending to discuss her new situation with her Auntie Agnes.

It was early evening and already dark, with a strong breeze blowing spits of rain.

As she opened the outer door to Miss Fowler's flat, she knocked and called ahead.

(Jean had been given a secret set of keys from age sixteen.)

There was no reply. The house was in darkness and uncharacteristically cold. Peggy's first thought was that Miss Fowler might have taken a motor taxi to Auldhouse.

(Lexie Walker and her mother Gladys had both been housebound for weeks, suffering from a virulent strain of the cold virus which had been going the rounds, decimating the old and the weak. Gladys Walker, now eighty-nine, almost blind and very deaf, had always been chesty and was being treated with poultices and anti-congestant syrup for recurrent bronchitis. For over a year, Peggy had been the Walkers' mainstay, part of a little cadre from the Citadel calling on them every few days to do shopping and housework. With Miss Fowler's agreement, Peggy had arranged for Agnes's laundry girl to call at Auldhouse and add their bundle to her collecting barrow.)

Switching on the hallway light²¹, Peggy moved first to the kitchen and then to the parlour. In both rooms the ashes in the fireplaces were cold and grey even though there was plenty of coal in the bunker. Why had Gordon not kept the fires topped up, Peggy wondered.

Moving to the larger bedroom, Peggy found Miss Agnes Fowler lying on her bed, fully clothed, her mouth wide, her skin ashen, cold to the touch, her dentures in a tumbler on her bedside table next to her Bible. There was no detectable pulse at her neck. Peggy was skilled in first aid, learned during her Salvation Army training. She flew downstairs where she found Margaret Ferris still working at the funeral parlour. Here she used the telephone to call Agnes's doctor.

An hour later Dr Mullen declared Miss Agnes Fowler, aged seventy-one, dead of 'natural causes'. Had an autopsy been authorised, it would have discovered she had died of a massive aneurism of the aorta. Distraught, Peggy could not face the idea of returning to

²¹ Electric lighting was a recent addition to the flat, installed because Miss Fowler was finding it difficult to light gas mantles with her arthritic hands.

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the McFetridge home just yet and decided to walk to Auldhouse (about a mile) to check on her charges, praying ahead to find the words to break the news of Agnes Fowler's death.

With the help of Dan Bremner, Bert had already delivered his mother's corpse to the city mortuary and completed the paperwork which they had handed in to the police office in Shawlands before returning the hearse to the stables, unhitching, rubbing down the horses, feeding and settling them for the night. The animals had been working out in the bitter cold from before dawn, as had Bert in two separate stints: men and beasts were exhausted. Although annoyed at Willie McFetridge's absence, Bert was not surprised. The man was becoming increasingly unreliable, often turning up half-drunk, his speech slurred.

Armed with the death certificate from Agnes's doctor, Bert and Dan removed Miss Fowler's body downstairs to Graham's mortuary where Margaret Ferris made a start on the preliminary arrangements to prepare her friend for the wait until the thaw when the bodies could be buried.

(Bert had arrived at Miss Fowler's flat shortly after Peggy had left for Auldhouse, missing her by about quarter of an hour.)

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From about a year earlier, when it became clear that Lexie was slipping in and out of reality, Peggy had been given keys for the Auldhouse home. Approaching, she noted the dull glow at the edges of the heavy drapes, confirming the gas lights were lit in the parlour and in the room above where Gladys had been confined to bed for many months. Slipping inside out of the bitterly cold wind, Peggy found the house reassuringly warm.

'Oh, thank goodness you're here, Agnes, dear. I think Mummy needs to go to hospital, her breathing is terribly shallow. I've been at my wit's end worrying about her. Come and have a look at her, please.'

'Auntie Lexie, it's me, Peggy.'

'Yes, yes, yes, of course it's you, silly thing. But come up and see Mummy, please. Dr Mullen said to leave her, said she is sleeping away, but I think she needs to go to the hospital.'

'Auntie Lexie, before we go up, I'm afraid I have some bad news. Auntie Agnes has died. Dr Mullen thinks it was yesterday sometime. I saw her last night at about seven o'clock on my way home from work and she said she was fine, just a bit tired. It seems she lay down on top of her bed for a rest and passed over peacefully.'

'On no! Oh, Peggy, dear, what will we do without her? Oh no, no, no. Oh, dear, dear, dear. Susan can't have died. She was here a few minutes ago. She just popped out before you came in. No, no, no! She can't have died, not when Mummy is so close to passing over herself. No, no, no, this is not what was meant to happen.'

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Lexie Walker was distraught, her eyes filled with tears, sobbing deeply. Peggy sat beside her, wrapped her arm around her, pulling the small, frail woman close to her.

'There, there, Auntie Lexie, don't cry. Auntie Agnes has gone to her new home where the heavenly chorus will be rejoicing in welcome.'

'But Philly, dear, why can't I go to that home too? What will become of Mummy and me without Peggy to look after us? How will I manage? Do you know how kind she was to us? No, of course you don't. For ages your Auntie Agnes has been paying all our bills, years and years and years. You see, Susan, dear, all Daddy's savings have been used up. We hadn't expected Mummy to live so long. Philly even paid for my clothes and shoes, everything. It seems the only thing we have left is the house. Oh, Susan, dear, what will we do without her?'

'Auntie Lexie, don't worry. I can help you. I've been given a bequest. A lady who used to come into the shop left me money. Can you believe it?'

'Mrs Shepherd?'

'Yes! How did you know?'

'Did you not know your parents used to work for her? Edna Williamson told me what happened. Philly knows her too. We could all see right away Willie McFetridge could not possibly be your father. In fact, Edna implied Mrs Shepherd's brother-in-law Howard was your father. . .'

'No, his name was Harold.'

'Oh, yes, that's right, Harold, yes, yes, yes. Well, just before she died, Edna told me she knew Howard Shepherd was a philanderer. She was so upset about it she asked God to forgive her for not saying anything. Philly said what happened to your mother had happened before with other live-in maids. The difference with your mother was they had taken on Willie McFetridge as their horseman and your mother was so keen on him it made Howard jealous, or at least that what Edna said. But she was so full of tales, Edna. Anyway, when the Shepherds saw your mother was pregnant, McFetridge and your mother were sacked together, or so Philly said. According to Philly, they were paid off handsomely, but it seems that wastrel McFetridge drank and gambled it away almost overnight, so Edna said. And of course, you, Philly, dear, you were only an infant then, weren't you? Oh dear, and all so long, long ago and now, here you are all grown up into a fine young woman. So, Susan, dear, Mrs Shepherd left you a little money, did she? Do you suppose it was her way of salving her conscience?'

'I'm Peggy, Auntie Lexie, not Philly or Susan. And his name was Harold not Howard. Look, I have these photographs of him. What do you think, Auntie Lexie?'

'Yes, Yes, yes, Harold. Apparently, he played the organ and the piano exceptionally well, Edna said. Oh, look, he has the same hands as you, Peggy.'

Lexie turned over the photographs.

'So, Howard Shepherd was a doctor! From Oxford University! Well, well, Peggy McFetridge, you have come up in the world. But we always knew, Agnes and I, we always knew you were special.'

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After this short exchange, they went upstairs to check on Gladys to find she was deeply asleep and could not be roused to take her medicine. They tucked her in tightly, banked up her fire and lit a fresh comfort candle (scented with lavender) before returning to the parlour.

'Auntie Lexie, how long has Auntie Gladys been in a coma like this?'

'Since last week. Doctor Mullen said just to keep her warm and comfortable, that she's likely to slip away anytime. It will be a mercy, really. But, Philly, dear, I had been so looking forward to living with Agnes. Now she's gone. I'll be all alone. What will I do?'

'Auntie Lexie, don't worry, you'll have me. And our Good Shepherd will look after us, won't He? Shall we pray?'

After a long prayer of intercession and thanksgiving they sat quietly waiting for the Holy Spirit to guide them. As soon as the mantel clock dinged out eight, Lexie Walker said:

'Philly, dear, did Mrs Shepherd leave you enough money to buy this house now, for you and Bert?'

'Yes, but are you sure it's what you want, with Auntie Agnes gone. Maybe Bert and I could buy it and then you could stay with us. And don't worry about anything, I have enough to look after you.'

'No, no, no. You don't understand, Susan, dear. You see Agnes and I had decided we should not move into her place at Pollok Road, because of the stairs. There is a new place opened near Shawlands Cross, a Christian retirement home for single ladies like us and we've put our names down for it. It's quite close to Queen's Park for walking in good weather and easy to get into town and all the nice shops in Shawlands. Some other ladies from the Gospel Hall have moved there. Mr McLaughlin's daughter Veronica is the matron.'

'So, Auntie Agnes was planning to move there with you?'

'Yes. We didn't want to tell you, not until you were ready to buy my place. We thought it would be a few years hence before we would make our move, when Mummy had passed on and you were twenty-one, the age of maturity. But now, well, it's all happened so differently from what we had planned.'

Lexie Walker was sobbing again, wringing her hands, her eyes haunted with the fear of the unknown now that her friend Agnes, her soulmate, was no more.

'Don't worry, Auntie Lexie. I'll discuss it with Bert and see what he says. But I'm sure we could make it work, if it's what you want. But Auntie Lexie, I need your advice. I was intending to ask Auntie Agnes. It's about Mamma and Gordon. Now I have enough money, I want to find a place for them and wee Henry to move to, somewhere out of reach of my fath. . . , out of reach of Willie McFetridge. Could you suggest someplace?'

As happened from time to time, Lexie Walker seemed to return to her old lucid self.

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'No, Peggy, dear, sorry, nothing comes to mind. But why not ask Ronnie McLaughlin? He knows quite a lot about what's going on with his work at the Bank. I'm sure he will find you something suitable. Or Philly McConnell, she does a lot of good work with battered wives. Agnes was on a committee with her. We often thought it would be good to get your mother away. But we didn't try to do it, in case we might lose you.'

'Auntie Agnes never said anything about this. I didn't know she knew Miss McConnell.'

'Oh yes, we are both supporters of Philly and Susan's work in the suffragette's society. Did Agnes never mention it?'

'I'm seeing Miss McConnell tomorrow about Mrs Shepherd's bequest. I'll ask her about it then.'

At this point, Lexie's grasp on reality slipped once again.

'Yes, Philly, do ask Agnes. If anyone will know, she will. Yes, yes, yes. Peggy's such an amazing person. Susan too, I think you three will get on well.'

'Well, Auntie Lexie, I'd better get home and see how Mamma is. She looked very poorly last night. And wee Henry needs a doctor. Now I can afford to pay, I'll get her to take him to Dr Mullen first thing tomorrow, get herself checked out too.'

Lexie's grasp on reality returned, briefly.

'Oh, one last thing before you go, Peggy, dear. Did Agnes tell you she wanted to be cremated? And so do I, come to that! And Mummy too. Philly persuaded us. She's on the committee of *The Burial Society*²².

'Cremated? Are you sure, Auntie Lexie? Auntie Agnes didn't say. I'll better tell Margaret Ferris and get Dan Bremner to make the arrangements. I'll let you know as soon as the details have been fixed. Right then, I'll away. God Bless Us All.'

Finally, and for what would prove to be the last time, Lexie Walker's grip on reality slipped away for the last time.

'Philly, dear, I hate to ask, but since you are going to buy this house, could you let me have a little money, please, in advance. It's for the coalman and the Co-op delivery boy. They're both due tomorrow. I had been expecting Susan to come round to pay them for me but of course she has gone over and I have nothing in my purse, not a penny. It's just that I hate to ask for credit, it's so demeaning, isn't it?'

'Here, Auntie Lexie. Would five pounds do for the present? Take it as a gift, a token of appreciation for all you've done for me and my family down through the years. Perhaps I could write you a cheque. What about fifty pounds as a down payment on this house?'

²² Glasgow Crematorium was opened in 1895 after the Scottish Burial Reform and Cremation Society (1888) was established as an educational body, designed to promote cremation as a more sanitary form of disposal for a fast-growing population.

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'You have a cheque book? How amazing, Philly, dear! Did you say fifty-pounds! Oh, would you, Susan, dear? Oh, that's a very nice pen. And a new watch too! Goodness me, you have been splashing out, haven't you! But you deserve it. You are such a kind and wonderful child, as you always have been. But Agnes, you know I can't get out in this weather. Would you go to the Bank and pay this cheque in for me, please? And ask Ronnie to send round ten pounds with one of his girls, please. Get him to send that nice girl Susan. Oh, this is so exciting! It's ages since I've had anything but coppers in my purse.'

As Peggy scurried through the spits of rain to Pollok Street, she thought back over Auntie Lexie's journey into forgetfulness. Over the last months her condition had been declining rapidly, often leaving the gas lit on the hob or the geyser running in the bathroom. One Sunday Lexie had gone out to church leaving the front door wide open, raising a panic locally, with neighbours thinking there had been a burglary.

Perhaps a retirement home was the best option for her.

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News, Good and Bad

As she neared Pollok Street, the spits turned to sleety rain. Peggy began to run. She had been a good runner at school and had played winger in the hockey team.

At the funeral parlour, she found Bert, Margaret Ferris and Dan Bremner closeted in Margaret's tiny office and passed on the news from Lexie that Miss Fowler may have wished to be cremated. This news was met by concern by Margaret who found it alarming her friend had not mentioned it. Leaving Margaret and Dan to debate the issue of burial versus cremation (which they both considered to be 'un-Christian'), Bert ushered Peggy out into the close.

'Peggy, please can we go upstairs to Auntie Agnes's place? I have some news to share with you.'

'Bertie, you look exhausted. When did you last eat anything?'

'I don't know, just some biscuits this afternoon.'

'Me too. Look, Bertie, why don't you get us fish suppers from the chippy, before it closes. And get me some mushy peas and a pickled onion. I'll go up and get the kitchen fire going and the kettle on. I think I'll bring Mamma and Henry up there tonight. And Gordon, if he's there. Do you know he's been sleeping up at the stables recently? I don't blame him, I'm never going to sleep in that hovel through there again, now I don't need to!'

'What? What do you mean?'

'I'll tell you later. Run. Oh, and check on Dan and Margaret, see if they want suppers too. My treat, here.'

'Five pounds! Look, it's new! Did you take this from Auntie Agnes's purse?'

'NO, OF COURSE I DID NOT! Sorry, Bertie, I didn't mean to scold you. Look, just run, please. Catch it before it shuts. I'll tell you my big news when you get back. Run!'

'Peggy, I've got big news too.'

'It'll have to wait, run, quick, before they close. Oh, and Bertie, see if they have any rolls from Uncle Walter's bakery. I'm starving. Get them even if they're a bit stale, we can toast them. And a bottle of lemonade. Let's have a wee celebration.'

'Ah, I get it now, Peggy! Somehow you already know what's happened, don't you? Did Edith tell you when you telephoned? I did call you back at *Netherton's*, but you had gone. Then Amy telephoned about mother and I completely forgot about everything else. So, how did you find out?'

'Find out what?'

'Ah, so you don't know, do you?'

'No, what is it, Bertie?'

'No, Peggy McFetridge, two can play this game! You'll have to wait too!'

'Off you go then, Bertie. But RUN!'

'Right away, Your Highness!'

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'God Bless Us All!'

'Amen to that!'

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Peggy and Bert were tidying up after their feast. The news about his mother's demise and his impending promotion at MacLellan's had been discussed and prayed over.

Peggy had shown Bert the letter from Philly McConnell.

Suddenly they were rich!

In her mind Peggy was already planning the weeks ahead, creating a mental list:

- They would get married as soon as was decent, perhaps even before Christmas?
- They would keep it very simple, maybe even in the registry office with some of the Elders present from the Gospel Hall and a few ladies from the Citadel.
- They would have no reception or celebrations of any kind out of respect for those who had died.
- While still unmarried, she hoped she could stay at *Rosemount* with Amy Netherton as their chaperone. (Peggy had only ever been in the kitchen at *Rosemount*, this in recent months and only then for a few minutes at time, for fear of upsetting Bert's mother. Mrs Delilah Dolan Graham was a woman Peggy had never met and had only glimpsed once years earlier when on her way to Mrs Blair's for piano lessons. Peggy had fantasied many times about living in *Rosemount*. The dream which had seemed almost impossible was now within touching distance.)
- If she were permitted, and only on a temporary basis, Peggy would 'rescue' Jean and move her into Auntie Agnes's flat until the Auldhouse place was available.
- Given what she had heard, it was almost certain Philly McConnell was the Executor of Miss Fowler's estate. Peggy knew she was also the Graham's family lawyer although Bert had never had any direct dealings with her.
- The worst problem would be Willie McFetridge. Perhaps she could encourage Bert to do what he had been planning for a while and sack the drunken bully.
- Bert had talked of giving up the horses, buying motor hearses and courtesy limousines, moving the business up-market. With her money from Mrs Shepherd they should be able to do this.

Although Peggy had shown Bert the jewellery, she had not yet shown him the photographs of her real father. Perhaps she would burn them, she thought. Maybe she should not have shown them to Auntie Lexie who would be sure to spread a rumour, if she remembered.

She took her new pen and a sheet of paper and began to write in her small, neat hand. With her list completed, she said:

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'Bert, shall we pray?'

'Will I lead, Peggy?'

Peggy knew Bert tended to wander off the point, become theological, then stop to check his accuracy by looking up verses in his Bible.

'Yes, please. I've made a list.'

- Give thanks for God's Providence and Mrs Shepherd's life.
- Ask God for strength and guidance for Bert at MacLellan's.
- Give thanks for Auntie Agnes's life.
- Is cremation the right thing for Auntie Agnes?
- Is Philly McConnell the Executor for Auntie Agnes?
- Who actually owns the close at 7 Pollok Road?
- What to do about Auntie Lexie and Auntie Gladys?
- Would their house suit Mamma, Gordon and Henry?
- Can we move Mamma, Gordon and Henry into Auntie Agnes's flat until Auldhouse is available?
- What to do about Gordon?
- What to do about Willie McFetridge?
- Should you come with me to see Philly McConnell?

After their prayers, as they waited for God to answer, Peggy became convinced that Philly McConnell, despite her oddness, had been chosen as God's agent and would give them the advice and guidance they needed. As usual, Peggy waited for Bert to speak first, following the convention of the man being the head of the Christian family, even though she had often questioned this notion in Bible Study sessions.

'Peggy, I think we should ask Miss McConnell to help us even though she is not a Christian. Uncle Donald says she is an atheist and a suffragette with strong socialist tendencies although they believe she is a good person, trustworthy. And from what we know she has already been paid to help you.'

'Yes, Bertie, I agree wholeheartedly. As we always say, "God does His work through people." Think of the Good Samaritan, he wasn't a Jew after all.'

'Ah, yes, Luke Chapter Ten, verses twenty-five to thirty-seven.'

Bert was thumbing his Bible when there was a loud rap at the door. Thinking it might be Dan Bremner, Peggy ran to open it to be confronted by a very wet Billy Lees. At least he had been allowed to travel by tram and had not been forced to use his telegram delivery bicycle.

'Tellagram fur Albert MacLellan Graham. It's anither 'special' so he huz tae sign fur it persunilly.'

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Seeing Billy, the thought flashed that being a telegram messenger might be a job for Gordon but this notion faded quickly. Gordon could not read well enough and often got 'wandered' if sent outside his familiar patch.

Perhaps Gordon could be a lamplighter instead?

'Missus, did ye no hear whut Ah jist said. He huz tae sign.'

'Oh, yes, sorry, I was miles away.'

'Yer wee wuman doonstairs in the funeral place says he's up here. This is anither 'special'. He huztae sign fur it again, persunilly, jist like afore. Ah, there ye ur, sur!'

Peggy had given Billy a sixpence, which raised a huge smile.

The teenager was saving up for a proper racing bicycle and had been working an overtime shift in the letter-sorting office when the telegrams supervisor had tracked him down, recognising the addressee's name from the earlier 'special'.

Billy had been happy to volunteer to take the telegram from America because this delivery would take him close to his home in Thornliebank. He had also been given a special ticket to allow him to travel free on the Glasgow Tramway System for the rest of the day.

He had called first at *Rosemount* and again had been re-directed to the funeral parlour.

Although in theory Billy should have immediately travelled back to HQ to register that the telegram had been delivered and lodge the receipt with the supervisor, it had been agreed this bureaucratic act could be done first thing next morning. Billy was now free to catch a tram home.

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Standing close to the kitchen fire, Bert read the telegram with Peggy peering over his shoulder. Stunned by its contents, they stared at each other in disbelief, struggling to take in what the words meant for them.

'Bert, what does this mean when it says:

"We have been led to understand that shortly before his death, George Jnr may have nominated you as his successor and as such, you would become the new owner of The Hermitage Estate, approximate valuation \$126 million (USD).

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We are advised by the US Mail service that a special delivery letter is or will shortly arrive with you which would clarify this situation."

'Oh, yes, Peggy. That same boy brought me a letter while I was in the meeting with Uncle Lachlan. I put it in my briefcase. It's up at *Rosemount*.'

'You didn't open it?'

'No, I was too busy with the meeting and then Edith came in to say Amy Netherton was on the telephone and then, well, you know what happened after that.'

'What do you think the letter says?'

'I think it was from my father. And now it seems both he and brother *George* and his new wife are all three dead. Surely this must be a hoax?'

'Bertie, that is exactly what I thought when I read the letter from Miss *McConnell* earlier today. No, Bertie, I feel sure this telegram is telling the truth. Look, it's from a solicitor.'

'Peggy, let's go to *Rosemount* and read the letter.'

'Yes, but first, let me try to get Mamma, Henry and *Gordon* up here. It must be freezing down there. It was like trying to sleep on an iceberg last night.'

'Edith said she had banged the door several times trying to rouse Willie but got no reply. She thinks he was sleeping it off. They say he was drunk last night, very drunk.'

'Yes, Bert, he was. You should sack him and then maybe he will go back to *Ulster* and leave us alone.'

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Peggy checked her watch. It was almost ten o'clock. Hopefully Willie would be fast asleep. With Bert and Dan alongside to give her moral support, she pushed at the door of the single-end, intending to creep in and whisper to her mother. The door would not open, which was unusual, normally it was held on a simple latch. She pushed harder. Dan Bremner, a tall, strong man thumped his shoulder against it, believing it was jammed by the cold. Then they realised it must be bolted on the inside, proving there were occupants. After chapping gently for a few minutes, Peggy knocked louder. Dan took charge and banged on the door loudly.

'Willie, open up. It's Dan Bremner here. WILLIE, OPEN THIS DOOR! D'ye hear me?'

Peggy spoke: 'Dear God, something has happened to them! Dan, go and get your tools from the workshop. Run, Dan, run.'

While Dan and Bert were working on the door, they did not hear the distinctive ringing of a fire engine bell approach and then recede. It was heading to the Walker's' home in *Auldhouse*. It would later be determined the fire had started in the parlour, due to coals fallen from an over-loaded fire onto the rug. The blaze had been accelerated by an influx of fresh air from the rear door to the kitchen. (Lexie had left this door wide open when she let out their cat before retiring for the night.)

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When they saw Jean and Henry, Peggy was not as shocked as might have been expected. She had witnessed at first hand the many years of abuse her mother had suffered. On first checking it was thought Willie McFetridge and his son Gordon were asleep but they too were frozen.

All four occupants were dead, poisoned and asphyxiated by Town's Gas.

Her mind tumbling with a mixture of feelings, Peggy sat at the kitchen table, closed her eyes and gave thanks to God for all He had done for her. As she prayed she thought of everything which had transpired during the last few short hours and felt the Hand of God fall on her shoulder.

For Peggy McFetridge (or Shepherd?) Wednesday 25th November 1925 would stick in her memory as the day God rescued her from her predicaments, freeing her to serve His Greater Purpose.

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Death by Misadventure

On Christmas Eve, 1925, as a matter of bureaucratic routine, the Coroner was working through a backlog of papers in his chambers with his secretary Richard Kershaw standing by his side eager to counter-sign his decisions. They were due downstairs shortly for a "Christmas cake and Sherry" soiree and the batch of paperwork was almost finished.

In the case of the woman who had apparently drowned in her bath, and basing his findings on the cursory post-mortem findings and a report of a technical inspection of the geyser and its flue, The Honourable Archibald Kettles-Lawson KC made his summary judgement and certified:

"On the afternoon of Wednesday 25th November 1925, the death of Mrs Delilah Dolan Graham was due to carbon monoxide poisoning caused by a faulty water heater flue aggravated by the uncharacteristically cold weather. A peaceful exit under no suspicious circumstances: death by misadventure."

There was no mention the poor condition of her liver, bowels, bladder nor of the undetected brain tumour which had been adding to her confusion, causing headaches, nausea and affecting her vision.

The next case was the Auldhouse fire.

"On the evening of Wednesday 25th November 1925, Mrs Gladys Fleming Walker and her spinster daughter Miss Alexandra Butterstone Walker succumbed to smoke poisoning caused by a fire started by hot coals spilled onto the carpet of the parlour below. Both women died peacefully under no suspicious circumstances: death by misadventure."

His final case was the demise of the McFetridge family.

"The post mortem investigations reveal all four occupants of the Dye-Worker's cottage behind 7 Pollok Street died of asphyxiation due to high levels of town's gas, viz,

1. Miss Jean Mulvaney (believed to be 34 years)

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2. Her son Gordon McFetridge (believed to be 14 years)
3. Her son, Henry McFetridge (believed to be 3 weeks)
4. Her common-law husband, William McFetridge (believed to be 37 years)

Reports from the police and Dr Mullen reveal this is a sad case of serial domestic abuse. Jean Mulvaney had also suffered recent genealogical trauma and great blood loss prior to her decision to 'put her head in the gas oven' ending her pain and misery. Her son Gordon was asthmatic and of low intelligence. Her infant Henry had malformed lungs and a damaged pancreas and may not have lived beyond a few further days. Her husband showed signs of advanced liver disease and throat cancer.

Taking all circumstances into account, it is my view that all four suffered a peaceful and merciful end: death by misadventure."

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The Lord's Bounty

It was suggested by Margaret Ferris that Bert and Peggy had suffered enough tragedy for one day. Dan Bremner would report the matter to the Police and Margaret Ferris would contact Dr Mullen who would be paid by *G Graham Funeral Director* for his services.

Margaret shooed the two young people away and called on the telephone to Amy Netherton at *Rosemount* to warn her they were on their way, explaining only the basics: the four McFetridges and Agnes Walker were dead. Bert and Peggy had been out since early morning and were worn out, exhausted.

Amy turned the central heating to full in every room and decanted two sizeable portions of lentil broth into a pot which she placed on the stove.

Walking quickly through the downpour, the two young people arrived at *Rosemount*, entering by the Kitchen door at the rear of the building, where they threw off their wet outer garments, shivering.

The grandfather clock in the hallway upstairs welcomed them by tinkling the precursor chimes for two o'clock on the morning of 26th November 1925.

Peggy wanted to run upstairs and check out every nook and cranny of the grand building where she had dreamed she might one day live. She had read once the best way to handsel a new home was to pray in every room at the first opportunity.

Seated at the Kitchen table, Miss Netherton served them a late supper of re-heated soup, freshly made drop scones with butter and home-made raspberry jam with a large pot of tea, snug in a cheery cosy.

Before eating, Bert led them in a short prayer:

'Loving Heavenly Father, thank you for this food and the warmth and comfort of this fine house. May *Rosemount* become a happy and welcoming place for all who cross its threshold. Amen.'

'Amen.'

Peggy added:

'Dear Father, as we struggle to understand what is happening to us, we ask You to send your Holy Spirit to comfort, support and bless us according to Your purposes for our

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lives. We offer up our thanks and supplications in the Name of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.'
'Amen.'

Together the three Evangelicals chimed their mantra from the Gospel Hall:

'God Bless Us All.'

As the youngsters ate, Amy Netherton (secretly pleased that things were working out far better than she had ever dared to hope for) put on her baleful face and turned to Bert.

'Albert, I'm so sorry about your mother. We should have done something about that geyser ages ago. I did say to your father several times there was a funny smell from it. Of course Mr Graham never has to use it himself, does he? With his own fancy bathroom all to himself what does he care about us? Anyway, as you know, he has hardly been in residence at Rosemount over these last few years. At his 'Club', or so he says.'

'Yes, I know you're right, of course you are Miss Netherton. I'll get it attended to forthwith. But we can't turn the clock back, can we? And Dr Fordyce told me Mother would have slipped over peacefully. It is our Christian duty to look ahead, not back.'

After a silence, Amelia Netherton turned her sad gaze to Peggy:

'Peggy, I'm so sorry to hear of your sad losses too. This means you are truly an orphan now, doesn't it?'

'Thank you, Miss Netherton. It may sound odd but I don't feel sad. I believe what happened today is God's Will. As you know from our Bible Study and Prayer Meetings, I have been praying for a solution for their lives for years. Try as I might, I just could not envisage how things could be made better for them. Bertie and I have prayed they are at peace and believe God in his Mercy will find a way to bring them to Him.'

'Oh, Peggy, dear, how strange but this is exactly how I feel about Mrs Graham. I hope you won't mind me saying this *again*, Albert, especially now she is dead, but your mother had a sad, sad life, tortured by her demons and addictions. I could never understand why she always seemed to be locked in a constant feud with Mrs Wardley. I would say they both seemed to get a strange pleasure out of teasing and besting each other. Mrs Graham seemed to be lost without her step-mother, don't you agree, Albert?'

'Yes, but as I said Miss Netherton we must look to the future. And we want you to be the first to know our good news, don't we Peggy?'

'Yes, Miss Netherton we do. Bertie and I have been secretly engaged for nearly two years and we plan to go ahead and marry soon, when we have all the sad business of the funerals and the cremation settled.'

'Cremation? Who is to be cremated?'

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'Miss Walker said Miss Fowler was set on being cremated. She also said she and her mother wish to be cremated, when their time comes. Miss McConnell has persuaded them, apparently.'

'Oh, I see. So that's where its coming from. Yes, Philly has made the same suggestion to me. She has been trying to persuade all of us up at *The Grange*.'

'What is *The Grange*, please?

'It's the clinic for unwed girls who are having babies. It's in Newlands. I go to help there sometimes, read to the girls, try to comfort them. We're not allowed to proselytise of course, since they are so vulnerable emotionally. But if they ask, well that's different, isn't it?'

'Oh, I've never heard of *The Grange* before, have you Bertie?'

'Yes, but not for a while. Eloise was a supporter, wasn't she Miss Netherton. Have you been involved for long?'

'Oh yes, long before Eloise Fischer, I can assure you. Yes, perhaps twenty-years. Miss Annette Birkley runs it now and she and Philly McConnell are the mainstays. Eloise is just like us, just one of the helpers. We're called Associate Counsellors, which Eloise makes a big thing about but really what we do is just common sense. Some people think of these girls as fallen women but that is very harsh. Remember, Jesus was very kind to Mary Magdalene.'

Bert interrupted: 'Oh yes, Luke chapter 7, versus 36 to 50.'

Peggy began to sob.

Amelia reached out and took hold of Peggy's hands and began stroking them.

'There, there, Peggy, dear. What is it? Why are you crying?'

'Oh, it's my Mamma. Some people said she was a fallen woman, because she was never married to my fath. . . . to Willie McFetridge. I've heard them gossip about it when they thought I wasn't listening.'

'Well, Peggy, dear, be that as it may, people often make up things about those less fortunate than themselves. Although I never actually met her, from what I've heard from Agnes and Lexie, your mother was a very kind woman. Everyone liked her, didn't they? Some even said Jean McFetridge was a saint although I doubt that could be true of any of us, could it? If only your mother had married a nicer man. I know we are not supposed to speak ill of the dead, or of anyone for that matter, but from everything I've heard, Willie McFetridge was a horrible, horrible person. Dreadful. Everyone said so. So, yes, I'm glad your mother is at rest now. Praise the Lord. Now, if you will forgive me, please, I'm off to bed. If you are staying over, Peggy, dear, I suggest you use Bert's room and he moves upstairs to his father's old room. It's the nicest room in the house, isn't it Bert? Why don't you show her how nice it is? After all, its where you will be sleeping when your married, isn't it?'

'Yes. Thanks, Miss Netherton. If you don't mind, Peggy and I will make a fresh pot of tea and stay here for a bit. We've a few things to talk over, haven't we Peggy?'

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'Of course you have, Bert! You have a wedding to plan. Oh, and of course the sad business of the funerals. Oh, and the cremation. Dear, dear, whatever will Philly McConnell come up with next. Those Pankhurst women have a lot to answer for! Well, that's me for the night! Sleep tight. God Bless Us All!'

'*God Bless Us All!*' chimed Bert and Peggy.

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Bert and Peggy sat in silence while they listened to the sounds of Miss Netherton moving about. Her room was on the first floor, two floors above, Bert explained, a few doors along from his. In the near silence, they heard the water gurgle gently from the hot water cylinder in the corner of the kitchen and then the rush of water in the drainpipe as the WC was flushed.

Still they waited. When the grandfather clock chimed quarter past three, Peggy at last spoke.

'Bertie, where is the telegram? And you mentioned a special delivery letter too.'

'In my briefcase, in my room.'

'Bertie, I want to do something first, before we read them. I want to handsel this house for us by praying in every room and cupboard. Oh, I know we will have to miss out Miss Netherton's bedroom, but let's go everywhere else.'

'So, should we start in here?'

'Yes, let's stand in front of the fire and hold hands and pray.'

And so the ritual began. Bert and Peggy moved quietly through the house, switching on the electric lights as they went. In each room they stood facing each other and whispered their short prayers before moving on.

Anyone passing Morningside would have seen it come gradually to life as the lights blazed out into the night then switched off.

The sleet eased then stopped as the wind got up, blowing away the clouds to reveal a bright half-moon hanging in the sky. In the gardens nearby the trees swayed and moaned as the temperature again plummeted, this time to a new overnight low of 14 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 10 Celsius).

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While they were in Bert's room, they collected the briefcase and took it with them on their pilgrimage of exorcism. They saved George Snr's room to last.

Amelia Netherton had been correct when she had said this master bedroom was the best room in the house. It dominated the third floor which had been remodelled by Herbert

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V Wardley as his wedding present to himself and his new bride. The younger Vic had been full of modern ideas for *Rosemount*, upgrading his new home by installing oil-fired central heating and electric lighting. During the recent cold snap, the central heating had been running continuously and despite the cold weather, the master bedroom was overly warm, soporific.

From the front façade this room gave uninterrupted views over the railway bridge to the South and West, over Pollokshaws and beyond towards the sprawl of new houses at Eastwood and Mansewood, past Thornliebank towards the Glennifer Braes sprinkled with snow and beyond to the Ayrshire Coast and the peaks of Arran. From its private bathroom windows to the rear, the panorama took in *Glasgow's* city centre, its docks and shipyards and beyond to Loch Lomond and the Arrochar Alps.

During the early days of their marriage, Vic and Marianna had spent many long hours in drunken orgies in the four-poster bed. By the time *George* had taken up the challenge as *Delilah's* stud, she had been in and out of the clinic many times and had withdrawn to live in a separate bedroom on the second floor where she could keep closer watch on her rival, Mrs Marianna Wardley.

With arms looped around each other's waists, Bert and Peggy stood looking out towards Pollokshaws.

'Bert, put out the lights, please. I think it will make it easier to pick out the places we know.'

Anyone looking up from the street below or from the houses nearby would have seen a short, slightly-built couple standing side by side, framed in the full-height window. They stood for a long time and as Bert pointed out familiar landmarks, Peggy's mind was on other things.

Unheard, two floors below, the grandfather clock chimed out five o'clock as they turned to face each other, now holding hands as before.

Bert led the short prayer with the form of words they had eventually settled on as they had made their way to this final room.

'Heavenly Father, please bless this room for Peggy and me. Please banish the demons and memories and make this room a happy room. Amen.'

'Amen.'

Peggy added:

'Dear Father God, please bless our marriage and make it a fruitful one that we may fill this house with happy, healthy children and bring them up in the ways of righteousness.'

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This we ask in the precious Name of the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. God bless all who live and enter this house. Amen.'

'Amen.'

Perhaps what was about to happen was inevitable, driven by hormones and opportunity. Perhaps it was caused by emotional turmoil and the need to feel alive when surrounded by death. And, perhaps this too was part of God's plan.

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As the grandfather clock in the entrance hallway chimed out six o'clock, Amelia Netherton, a creature of habit, stirred, rolled onto her side, threw back the covers, eased her sturdy legs over the side of the bed and, after a short prayer for the day ahead, pushed herself upright. In her nightdress and dressing gown she made her way to the bathroom to relieve herself and complete her ablutions. Passing Bert's room, she glanced through the open door and saw the empty, unused bed. If her friends at the Citadel and the Gospel Hall had been able to see her smile, they would have been puzzled, perhaps even shocked.

Amelia was an avid reader of romantic fiction and women's magazines. Perhaps at last this house will be filled with happy children, she thought. The only person to hear her news would be Celia, she promised herself.

As the clock struck seven-fifteen Miss Netherton placed the breakfast tray on the side-table outside the master bedroom on the top floor and tapped gently. The tray was set for two, comprising full cooked breakfast plates with scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, mushrooms and a large pot of coffee.

Tapping the door she called out, quite loudly:

'Good morning. Breakfast for two is served. God Bless Us All!'

Coming suddenly awake, Peggy looked at her watch and listened to Miss Netherton retreating, whistling to herself tunelessly as she made her way downstairs.

'Bert!', she hissed. 'Bert, waken up! Look, it's late. And Miss Netherton knows we're in here. Come on.'

'Peggy, don't worry. She'll not tell anyone. She likes you, you know that. She's been urging me to marry you ever since father went off to America. Apparently, Celia is in on it too, and has already made you a wedding dress, did you know that?'

'Oh, I thought those 'try-ons' I did for Celia were because the girl was too busy to come in to the shop. Celia said Miss Smith was studying hard for her final exams and that her measurements were an exact match for me!'

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Bert, in his underpants visited the bathroom then returned with the tray, stepping over the pile of clothes which had been discarded in the frantic rush to disrobe themselves prior to climbing into the four-poster.

'Well, Peggy, are you hungry?'

'Oh Bertie, we have been sinful, haven't we?'

'No, not really. There are many Biblical precedents for what we did. I'm sure if you give me a few minutes I could look them up. I'll just get my Bible, it's in my briefcase.'

'Bert, the telegram and the letter! Bring them over and we'll read them while we eat.'

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As the grandfather clock below struck eight-fifteen, they were back at the picture window, fully dressed, facing each other, holding hands.

'Bert, this just can't be true, can it?'

'Yes, Peggy, I think it is. But we need to get help, advice. From what I've heard about Americans they can be very legalistic. Maybe this letter from brother George won't stand up in court. And his wife would never let him inherit, would she? You know what Mother was like, don't you? Remember what I told you, when father agreed to assigning Power of Attorney to me at the meeting in Uncle Lachlan's office, before he went off to visit brother George?'

'Yes, Bertie, of course. With your mother's passing, you *will* inherit the funeral business? Won't you? And the other property businesses too? There's no doubt about that, is there? Are you sure?'

'Peggy, I have to be totally honest. The truth is, I just don't know. We'll have to ask Miss McConnell. She seems to be in control. From what I've heard, she sounds a bit fearsome, don't you think?'

'Yes. But her assistant Susan, at her office yesterday, you know, when I went to ask if the letter about Mrs Shepherd was true, she was very nice. And Mr McLaughlin at The Bank. They were both very polite to me.'

'Yes, Peggy, but remember, people are always polite to richer people, aren't they?'

'Yes, I suppose so. But I'm sure Miss McConnell will be fine.'

'Right then, I'll telephone Uncle Lachlan now. Look, its coming up for nine o'clock, he'll be wondering why I'm not at my desk!'

'Yes. And I'll telephone Celia. Will I ask if I can have the day of? And will it be alright to move my clothes from Auntie Agnes's house, bring them up here? And I would like to have a bath? In there, does that huge bath work all right?'

'Yes, at least I think so. Come on, let's ask Miss Netherton. I suppose I'll have to try to explain things to her about father and George.'

'Let me do it, Bertie. But I won't say anything about you inheriting *The Hermitage*, not yet. Do you agree?'

'Yes, it might all be a hoax. I'll not believe any of this until I see it with my own eyes!'

'Oh, Bertie! You wouldn't go to America, would you?'

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'Not if I don't have to. But let's take one step at a time.'
'Bertie, before we do anything else, let's pray.'

In the discussion which followed this short prayer, they had agreed Peggy would not reveal to Celia or Amelia the news of her inheritance from Verity Shepherd. Peggy's new situation as a wealthy young woman was a private matter and should not be broadcast, Bert had said. To tell anyone of her inheritance would smack of boastfulness and almost certainly invite unsolicited requests for financial help. There was no shortage of beggars and shysters, not just in Pollokshaws but everywhere, he had repeated three times, emphasising that although it would be impossible to keep her situation a secret forever when people learned she was rich, she might become a target. Almost certainly, some people would resent her sudden wealth, especially if she talked about it in their presence. Far better to have them learn of it slowly, from others.

Peggy, whose mind had been soaring to dizzy heights at the mere thought of the apparent certainty of her own new wealth from Verity Shepherd, had been surprised by Bert's stern, rather scolding manner but she knew instinctively it was good advice. Perhaps he was really hectoring himself, she concluded, thinking ahead to the possibility that he might inherit a fortune under the bizarre circumstances the letter from George Jnr and the subsequent telegram described.

What they both agreed on wholeheartedly was that Peggy's money and whatever might or might not come of Bert's possible inheritance from America, this sudden vast wealth was The Lord's Bounty, to be used wisely, prudently, prayerfully and not squandered on those who might drink or gamble it away.

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In God's Good Time

The next hours flew past.

Amelia, desperate to share her news good and bad, telephoned her sister-in-law Celia at just after nine o'clock and told her of the deaths of Miss Fowler and the McFetridge family and that Peggy was now living at Rosemount with a wedding in the near future, asserting it as a fact.

A few minutes later in the kitchen, as Amelia was clearing up the breakfast dishes with both young people beside her, Peggy gave an edited account of the contents of the special delivery letter and the telegram, explaining in simple terms that Mr George the elder and his son George had both died in tragic circumstances. As agreed with Bert, she did not mention that young George had been married. As agreed, she did not mention the possibility of an inheritance for Bert.

While Peggy was talking to Miss Netherton, Bert took his chance, slipped upstairs and picked his way carefully along the icy pavement heading to catch a tram to MacLellan & Co with the letter and telegram from America safely in his briefcase.

Peggy returned upstairs and tidied herself, re-making the bed in the master bedroom, trying to conceal the fact that they had slept together. As she did so she puzzled over Amy Netherton's silence at this latest news and wondered why the housekeeper had not pressed her for more detail. Perhaps before he set off for America, Bert's father had told her his son was married to a wealthy heiress.

Peggy crept downstairs quietly, intending to leave for Pollok Street to collect her clothes from Auntie Agnes's wardrobe. However, at the foot of the stairs as she headed for the front door, Amelia called after her.

'Peggy, dear, did I here Bert slam the door. Has he gone? He always slams the door. Anyway, listen, I've had a call from Eloise Fischer. Oh, Peggy, dear, I have more very bad news for you. I'm so sorry to tell you but there's been a fire at Auldhouse, both Lexie and Gladys are dead, from smoke inhalation. Eloise says they died peacefully. She had telephone Dr Mullen and he confirmed they would not have suffered. Oh, I will miss them, and Agnes too, of course, won't you?'

'Praise God they died peacefully! I suppose all three of them are meeting up in Heaven as we speak, looking down and smiling on us, now they have their new, beautiful and eternal bodies. Did I say I went to see the Walkers last night, to tell them about Auntie Agnes? Auntie Lexie said Dr Mullen told her Auntie Gladys was sleeping away and wasn't expected to last more than a few days. Then Auntie Lexie said an odd thing. She said she wanted

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to be cremated, Auntie Gladys too. Have you ever heard of anyone you know being cremated?'

'Oh no! It seems such a, well, crude thing, doesn't it? Don't the savages do that in India, or is it Africa? I doubt Lexie meant it, no, never. She's being getting more wandered with every passing day. I'm sure she wanted to be buried, like all decent Christians.'

'I'm just going down to Auntie Agnes's house to collect some of my clothes. God Bless Us All.'

As Peggy turned to leave, the telephone rang. Amelia answered it and at once signalled to Peggy.

'Peggy, dear, it's Celia. It's you she must speak to, she says.'

'Hello, Mrs Netherton, I was intending to ring you to. . .'

'Oh, dear me, Peggy. I'm so sorry to hear about Agnes and about your family. But Peggy, dear, there's been a fire at Auldhouse and Lexie and Gladys are dead too. Oh, dear me. Peggy. So many people all dying at once, who will be next? Look my dear, you must *not* come to work today. We'll just have to manage without you until you get settled. Who will be next, I wonder.'

'No, Mrs Netherton, I'll try to get in later, or maybe tomorrow. We have so much to get ready for the end of the week, and there is the wedding dress to finish too.'

'No, Peggy, dear. Take a few days off. We'll manage. Well, I must go, I've so many people to see, tell them the news. I wonder who will be next to die? Well, we shall just have to wait and see. All in God's good time, I always say.'

'Yes, God Bless Us All. Bye-bye.'

'Oh, yes, well, yes. God Bless Us All. Bye-bye, Peggy, dear.'

Before Peggy had replaced the receiver, Amelia barked:

'Well, what did Celia have to tell you that was so important and secret she couldn't tell me?'

Peggy related what she knew of the tragedy at Auldhouse, as explained by Celia.

Satisfied, Amelia Netherton whispered:

'Yes, but I wonder if *Graham's* will get the bodies? I suppose they will go to the Coroner first. Probably Philly McConnell will know.'

Getting into her stride after the upset, she added:

'Mind you Peggy, dear, they were both failing badly, weren't they? Gladys had not been over the door for months and months and Lexie was more or less gaga, wasn't she? When they get to that stage I think it's best they go quickly, don't you? It's a blessing really.'

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Yes, I know, Peggy, dear, I know, all in God's good time, as Celia always insists. But, dear, I do wonder who will be next, don't you?'

Peggy made to leave but at the door, Amelia called after her again:

'Peggy, dear, when will you be back?'

'I'm not sure, Miss Netherton. Maybe mid-afternoon?'

'So, not for lunch, then?'

'No, I'm meeting Bert at lunchtime.'

'Oh, are you? In town?'

'No, we have some private business to attend to, in Shawlands.'

'Oh, right, I see, its private then? Well, I'll go to Vernon's, the nice butcher in Shawlands and get something for tea. What about a nice piece of silverside? Mr George was very friendly with Mr Vernon. Oh but Peggy, dear, doesn't it seem impossible that Mr George and young George are both dead too. So many people we know dying. How many is it, I wonder. Now, dear, are you sure you've had enough to eat? I could rustle you up some porridge, if you want? Or I've got some black pudding to and a few potato scones?'

'No, no thanks, Miss Netherton. I don't normally eat very much at breakfast time, thank you.'

'Right, then. Well, Peggy, I suppose I'll just get out right away and do the rounds before Celia steals the show. Dear me, I wonder who will be next to die?'

Peggy blew her nose as tears welled up unnoticed. Amelia Netherton had moved on, reaching for her coat and hat, determined to beat Celia in spreading the news.

As Peggy opened the door and stepped out into the bitter cold, Amelia was still chattering to her back.

'What amazing news to tell, eh, Peggy? But don't worry, Peggy, your night of passion with Bert will remain our secret. It will be so nice having the patter of tiny feet in this old house. That's what it's been missing since George and Bert grew up. Well, God Bless Us All. Bye-bye, Peggy, dear.'

Peggy's face flushed crimson as she called back over her shoulder:

'Bye-bye and God Bless Us All.'

As she picked her way down the icy pavement, she could feel Amelia's eyes on her back and wondered how long it would take for everyone to learn of her premarital sex with Bert.

As she waved over her shoulder, she smiled, unrepentant, comforted by Bert's many Biblical precedents of sex before formal marriage. She and Bert had not succeeded without spillage at the first attempt but later, after lying quietly and waiting until he

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was ready again, she had coached him through the second attempt and while it had hurt a little it had also been very nice. The third time had been wonderful.

The key truth which she held fast in her mind was that they both loved and respected each other. And, as Christians, they would honour and uphold each other for the rest of their lives.

If a baby came a few weeks early, she would let people think it was pre-mature.

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At Pollok Street, Peggy decided to forgo her luxury bath at *Rosemount*. Perhaps she might enjoy it later, she thought. She lit the fire and filled the larger kettle which she put on the hob of the fancy gas cooker. This cooker was nearly new, bought less than a year earlier. Agnes had donated her old one to Jean, even paying for it to be installed.

While the water was heating, for the meeting with Philly McConnell, she looked out her Sunday best coat, a heavy dark-grey tweed with a black velveteen collar. This coat had been a Christmas present from Auntie Lexie and Auntie Gladys. However, the collar had proved to be a problem, always attracting ooze. As she brushed it, Peggy decided maybe she would get a new coat like the one she had seen in a magazine, one with sable fur at the wrists, collar and hem, like the one Veronica McLaughlin wore on Sundays. Immediately this thought arose, Peggy scolded herself for indulging in the sins of jealousy and avarice. As she prayed for forgiveness, she gave thanks to her Saviour for all the lovely clothes she already had, nice clothes which would last for years ahead, provided she looked after them. Finally, she chose her newest stockings and shoes.

She carried the kettle to the small bathroom intending to use its washbasin but it was bitterly cold in there. After strip-washing in front of the kitchen fire, she sat in her underwear and again teased her hair into a *Coconut Bob*. From Auntie Agnes's dressing table, she allowed herself a little make-up and perfume, luxuries reserved for special occasions like the day she and Bert had visited the fancy restaurant in Shawlands for afternoon tea to celebrate two years of their unofficial engagement.

Working to a new plan, she took time to sort through Miss Fowler's valuables, finding her 'day' purse under her pillow with thirty pounds in notes and over three pounds in silver and copper coins. (This was an old green leather clasp and button sneck type which Peggy had played 'shops' with as a child when Agnes had filled it with some fake paper money and a sprinkling of coins.)

In its expected hiding place, she also found her aunt's second 'savings' purse behind a compendium of Bible Stories for Children. This newer shiny patent leather purse contained £500 in £50 notes.

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Attached to this purse with a thick elastic band was a well-worn pass book in the name of 'Miss A Fowler', issued by the Pollokshaws branch of the Clydesdale Bank (a few doors along at 10 Pollock Street).

After resisting for several minutes Peggy decided to check the balance and was flabbergasted to see the latest entry for 1st November read:

£1430-11/3.

Sitting at the kitchen table with a pot of black tea, (the milk had gone 'off'), she prayed for guidance. When the answer came, she loaded all the valuables including Miss Fowler's rings and two wristwatches into her aunt's dark burgundy 'Sunday best' handbag.

She checked the time on Miss Shepherd's watch - just after ten-thirty.

Staring at her long thin face in the vanity mirror, Peggy wondered what it would be like to be pretty but quickly decided once more she was better being plain, as God intended. Pretty girls were usually vain and often got into trouble with boys. This was an old thought and led naturally to thinking of Bert. Like her he was small and slim with a plain face: they were well-matched - all part of God's plan.

She put the kettle on again to make a fresh pot of tea. While it was heating, she looked from the top floor kitchen window down at the dye-workers cottages. At Margaret Ferris's suggestion, Peggy had agreed she did not want to visit the cramped dinghy room ever again. As she watched, Dan Bremner rolled out a handcart heaped with the possessions from her former squalid, shabby home. Peggy sobbed, thinking how pitiful these items seemed, almost worthless except to a rag and bone man. Her parents' wealth was insignificant compared with this comfort of this flat, the place which had been her sanctuary. And even the modest luxury of this flat was a world away from the splendour of *Rosemount* which was to be her new home, God willing.

This thought led her mind to the wedding photograph of George Jnr and the grossly fat American woman standing on the steps of the enormous house called *The Hermitage*. This image in turn spurred her to open her own purse and remove her grandmother's engagement ring which she tested out on her ring finger, knowing in advance it would be too large.

Peggy sat by the fire and sipped her tea. She closed her eyes. Her mind drifted.

She heard again her mother confessing how she had deserted her family in Fenwick to escape to Glasgow. It was a story Peggy had heard many times before and as she always did, once more Peggy prayed for her unknown maternal family. Perhaps in the months to come she would ask Bert to take her in the gig to Fenwick to try to find them.

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(Sadly, this would have been a fruitless trek. Without Jean to help him, Sean Mulvaney had moved back to his roots in the West Coast of Ireland taking his other children with him. In Galway he married a girl no older than his lost daughter with whom he started a second family, driving his second wife to an early death twelve years later when she died of a ruptured womb during her ninth pregnancy.)

Imagining the journey to Fenwick, Peggy's mind began to whirl on overload.

Only a day earlier she and Bert had travelled through the darkness on the closed hearse, huddled under the driver's cape against the bitter wind, climbing the steep winding road into the hills out to *Tower Ridge*, located high in the *Glennifer Braes*. At seven miles distant, it was the furthest Peggy had ever been from Pollokshaws. The journey had been long and slow with the horse's hooves scrabbling on the icy puddles caused by run-off water from the bleak rocky hillside. The road was poorly maintained, pitted with holes, hewn by hundreds of navvies a century earlier when the house had been established by a tobacco baron. Since *Tower Ridge* had been taken over by the Roman Catholic church, the main building and its motley collection of outbuildings had been in steady decline. Standing on a high plateau against a backdrop of trees, the dark, lowering edifice loomed ahead, shrouded by low swirling cloud.

Peggy had been surprised when she saw Father Hegarty was there to meet them. She knew he lived at St Mary's RC Church in Pollokshaws but until that point, she had not known much about *Tower Ridge*²³ and did not know of his involvement nor that Hegarty was related to Bert's Aunt Marianna.

As Peggy had waited on the hearse by the rear servant's door, she had heard children crying. When they left with the child's body in a tiny coffin, she had looked back at the huge rambling building disappearing into the mist and thought it had an intense aura of sadness.

During the remainder of the journey back into town, the sound of the children crying had haunted her. Now, listening to the crying again, she realised it was her own voice she was hearing. Tears flowed. Now with Auntie Agness and Auntie Lexie and her family gone, she was truly an orphan with no one to care for her but Bert.

Jean sniffed away her tears and offered up a prayer for the poor children who were kept at *Tower Ridge*, separated from the parents and siblings on the promise of a superior education and the chance to become priests and nuns.

But surely keeping them isolated from their families was not what God intended for His little lambs?

²³ Read 'Living with Myra', due to be published on www.thebuzzinbee.co.uk later in 2024.

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In the dying glow of the embers, and exhausted from the previous long day and lack of sleep, Peggy's head drooped and she dozed off into a daydream.

In her vision she was standing in the doorway of *The Hermitage* and all around her she saw children playing happily. As she looked at them she felt confident this image was aligned with the Will of God.

She shuddered, overwhelmed by the inspiration that this is what God intended for her and Bert - that together they would rescue these orphans.

As she looked more closely at them, she saw some were disfigured and some disabled but despite this they were playing happily, dressed in smart uniforms, with caps for the boys and bonnets for the girls, all wearing good shoes and good quality clothes.

Her daydream spun on.

The entire community of *The Hermitage* was gathered in a large church.

Dressed in a light grey suit and wearing a purple shirt with a white dog collar, Bert was conducting the service from a lectern on a high pulpit.

Wearing a lilac dress and a wide-brimmed straw boater, she was seated at a large pipe organ. The whole assembly was singing enthusiastically. It was a favourite hymn from the Citadel.

*Stand up! stand up for Jesus!
Ye soldiers of the cross;
Lift high His royal banner,
It must not suffer loss:
From vict'ry unto vict'ry
His army shall He lead,
Till every foe is vanquished
And Christ is Lord indeed.*

Half-way through the second verse she was pulled back to reality by Agnes Fowler's telephone ringing in the hallway.

It was Susan, who had tracked her down to check that 'given 'developments', Peggy was still intending to meet with Philly McConnell at lunchtime.

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Just Good Friends

While Peggy was washing and dressing herself at Agnes Fowler's flat, the news of the many deaths had spread quickly on the gossip grapevine, both by word of mouth and telephone.

Mrs Avril Fraser (mother of William Fraser) lived in Auldhouse opposite the Walkers and had witnessed the full drama of the previous evening. Earlier, after breakfast, her first duty, as she thought it, was to advise her cousin Ronnie McLaughlin of the shocking news of the fire and deaths at the Walkers' home. As she did not have a telephone, she spruced herself up and bustled along to Shawlands to the Bank, arriving just as it opened to the public at nine-thirty.

Ronnie immediately rang *McConnell's* to tell Philly. Susan, who took the call, thanked him but did not reveal his call had been unnecessary. In her turn, she was able to make him aware of the death of Agnes Fowler and the McFetridges, information telephoned to her by Dr Maureen Mullen who had certified the deaths, this message reinforced by an early morning visit from Eloise Fischer.

Maureen Mullen and Philly McConnell were suffragette friends from their time at Glasgow University and now served together at *The Grange* nursing home where Maureen was now an auxiliary visiting physician, providing her services *gratis*.

The Grange, owned and operated by *The Horspool Trust*, was a vast, ornate and sprawling building adapted from a four-storey mansion constructed originally as a family home in the nineteenth century by Charles Horspool. Very few people were aware of its sister organisation (*The Horspool Trust for Foundlings*) which quietly placed unwanted babies anonymously with deserving families with sufficient wealth to nurture and provide them with a good education. (Maureen Mullen was one such unwanted child, a fact only discovered when, shortly before she died, her elderly adoptive mother revealed Maureen's origins.)

Now in her mid-forties, Maureen was a confirmed spinster with strong views on poverty and domestic abuse. As a fervent Methodist, she saw herself as a practical Christian set on serving her Saviour through her good works. Maureen had attended Jean McFetridge and many others like her. While doing her best to support Jean, she was very familiar with her story and knew of her clever daughter Peggy and her damaged son Gordon. She was also aware of the support which Peggy had received from her 'aunts', Agnes Fowler and Lexie Walker.

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Maureen owned a large red sandstone villa originally named *Invercauld*. (Matthew Mullen her grandfather, had bought this twenty-room mansion from *The Horspool Trust* when it had been built as part of the expansion of the Newlands area.) Her father, also called Matthew had died aged twenty-eight from septicaemia, a consequence of a bruise on his liver caused by a riding accident. His marriage to Janice Semple had produced no children.

(*Mullen & Son Shipping Agents*, were close rivals of *McLachlan & Co*, who had bought the business for a fair price from his widow.)

A few years after qualifying, Maureen had chosen to become a General Practitioner. This had defined her life's work. After her mother had died, rather than live alone, Maureen had encouraged Philly and Susan to move to live with her. Together they had established a 'refuge house', caring for an ever-changing population of desperate families fleeing domestic abuse.

Working as a charity called '*Saving Families*', the three ladies re-homed these fugitives in locations hidden from discovery by their abusive males. After a few years, they changed the name of the villa from '*Invercauld*' to '*The Haven*'.

This eclectic and intimate social grouping of well-heeled do-gooders was completed when Eloise Fischer moved first to *Rosemount* and later to live in nearby *Shawlands* with her elderly aunt.

The quartet had also been drawn together by their passion for Bridge. Being first-rank players, they competed fiercely at least three nights a week, sharing local gossip and rubbing salt in wounds arising from old spats legal, political and religious.

Some may have seen their close relationship as a do-gooding virtuous circle. Others thought of them as an inward looking middle-class cabal of *avant-garde* socialists, strong-willed women to be avoided, whenever possible.

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Further Bounty

By eleven-thirty on Mrs Shepherd's watch, Peggy was ready to leave for the intended meeting with Bert at *McConnell's*. With a few minutes to spare, she closed her eyes and began to imagine this short walk from Pollok Street over High Shawlands to Kilmarnock Road.

Her head drooped forward onto her chest. She closed her eyes.

As she walked, her mind was swinging between the likelihood of more sex with Bert in the nights ahead and grand notions and vistas created by her new wealth from Mrs Shepherd before swinging back to scold herself when she recalled her earlier conversation with Bert and their joint declaration that whatever wealth came their way must be treated as God's Bounty and used for His Work.

As she passed the Gospel Hall she became overwhelmed with the thought it would be a good thing to donate a sum of, say, fifty pounds 'in memoriam' for Miss Fowler. Or perhaps it should go to the Citadel? Or maybe twenty-five pounds to each? She would discuss this idea with Bert, later.

Glancing into the stables she saw Dan Bremner mucking out the horses, normally a job which her father or brother would have done. Bert would have to find replacements because, with his weak back, Dan would not be able to do much more heavy lifting. She sent up a prayer asking for help and guidance and almost at once the image of Ronnie Mclaughlin's nephew came to mind. William Fraser worked for a local haulage firm which had recently bought a lorry. She knew William was good with horses and he could also drive. It was another thing to put on her list to discuss with Bert later.

At *McConnell's* office, while Philly was catching up on her list of morning calls, Susan was trying to trace Peggy McFetridge and advise her of the deaths at Auldhouse. She first rang *Graham's* funeral parlour to be told by Margaret Ferris that Peggy was upstairs in Miss Fowler's flat. This was a telephone number Susan knew by heart.

Roused from her reverie, Peggy picked up the telephone and adopted her telephone manner as used at *Netherton's*:

'Hello, Miss Fowler's residence.'

'Peggy, Susan here, from *McConnell's*. I'm so sorry for your great loss. Oh, dearie, Peggy, you are going through a tough time. Are you alone there?'

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'Yes, but Mrs Ferris is downstairs if I need her. I'm all right, really. Auntie Agnes has been slowing down for years. I give thanks I was able to see Auntie Lexie and Auntie Gladys last night. Dr Mullen told Auntie Lexie that Auntie Gladys was 'sleeping away', if you know that term. She hadn't been awake for days. And Auntie Lexie told me that she wanted to be cremated, and Auntie Gladys and Auntie Agnes too. Do you know if that is true, Miss Broughton? I got the impression she had agreed this with you and Miss Philly. Did they want to be cremated, all three of them?'

'Oh, Peggy, dearie. That's partly why I'm calling. I wanted to reassure you they did not suffer. I've spoken to Dr Mullen. They died of smoke inhalation, which she said is a peaceful death, very like your own family.'

'Oh, but I did know, Miss Broughton. Miss Fischer telephoned Amelia before breakfast. You see, I stayed at *Rosemount* last night. Bert doesn't know yet because he left in such a rush he was gone before she got a chance to tell him. Did he call to say I have asked him to join me for the meeting with Miss McConnell. He has some important news of his own. Unless he's been in touch with you, has he? He was intending to call to make an appointment to see Miss McConnell.'

'No, he hasn't called yet, unless he spoke to Philly while I was on the other line. But the reason I called you is because we hold Wills and Powers of Attorney for the Walkers. Did they tell you?'

'No, it was never discussed.'

'So, they didn't tell you about their Wills?'

'No, why would they tell me?'

'Ah, I think I should pass you on to Philly. Just a minute, please, she's on the other line. Ah, there, she's just off. Hold on, please, while I bring her up to speed.'

After a few minutes silence a new voice came on the line.

'Miss McFetridge, Philly McConnell here. Firstly, may I offer my condolences for your sad, sad, losses. Never in my experience as a family lawyer have I had a case where so many deaths have affected one so young in such a short space of time. I have spoken to Maureen Mullen and she has confirmed the Walker ladies died of smoke inhalation. With Agnes that makes seven people, all of them close to you. Unprecedented. The Grim Reaper is having a fine old time to himself. And I had a call from Dr Fordyce to tell me Mrs Delilah Dolan Graham has also died. I telephoned *Rosemount* a few minutes ago to offer my condolences but Albert had left. Amelia tells me you are in the process of moving to live there and plan to marry young Albert soon. A fine young man by all accounts. Congratulations. Now, to the matter in hand. You are scheduled to see me at twelve fifteen today, about the Shepherd Bequest. I've just had a call from dear Donald MacLennan asking me if we might have a conference at his office in town. He wanted you and I to go there immediately but I have persuaded him two-o'clock would be more suitable. I need to meet with you first. He said the meeting concerns your Albert but was a bit oblique about what the subject of the meeting is to be. But Donald did emphasise they wish you to be there and asked me to collect you and bring you with me.'

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Indeed, they said it is *essential* you are present, apparently. Can I take it you are happy to attend this meeting?’

As she was listening, Peggy was trying to imagine from Miss McConnell's clip, alto voice what she looked like. What came to mind was the image of a military person, perhaps a General or Brigadier, someone of authority, a no-nonsense type of person.

‘Yes, Bertie said he would telephone to ask you if he could join me later, when I was due to meet you. But I suppose the meeting at MacLennan's is more important. I think. . .’

‘Yes, Miss McFetridge, that's a good decision. I'll ask Susan to confirm this. Anyway, who could refuse Donald anything? He is such a charming man but irritating, don't you agree? And far too soft for his own good. But, to be fair, I do enjoy a good intrigue, don't you?’

‘Yes, Miss McConnell. Actually, I'm fairly sure I know what it's about but . . .’

‘NO! don't say a word. Let it unfold in its own good time. In any case I need to speak to your Mr Albert MacLennan Graham about his inheritance. I hold his mother's Will so if we can commandeer a room at *MacLennan's* for an hour after this mystery meeting business we can clear up his business regarding his mother's estate.’

‘Oh, yes, of course.’

‘Please hold a moment while I ask Susan to load all the documents I need into my brief case.’

Peggy stared at her face in the vanity mirror and saw the tiredness in her eyes.

Is this another fantasy dream? Will I waken soon and find I am still trapped?

‘Miss McFetridge, I could be with you there at Number 7 Pollok Street in about fifteen minutes, with my car. I need to speak to you about Miss Fowler's Will and about the Wills of Miss Walker and her mother, if you feel you are sure you are strong enough. Are you?’

‘Yes, I'm fine, thanks, just a bit tired.’

‘Ah, yes, Amelia explained to Susan about your nocturnal activities. And quite right too! Marriage is just a bit of paper. Important legally, of course, but when two people are meant for each other they should get on with it, don't you agree?’

‘Eh, well, I . . .’

‘Good. So, you sit tight. I'll drive along and see you now and then we can depart from there and drive into town. How does that sound for a plan?’

‘Yes, fine. Thanks.’

‘Oh, do you have any nice coffee left there? Agnes keeps a tin of beans and grinds it fresh for me. And she normally has a tin of ginger snaps. On the high shelf of the dresser. They are both blue tins, with floral patterns. Her little joke.’

‘Oh, I'll have a look.’

‘With you soon. And Peggy, please, do call me Philly. Everyone does.’

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When Peggy answered the door to a stern rap from Miss Philomena McConnell she had been expecting a tall, mannish woman dressed in a similar fashion to her assistant Miss Susan Broughton.

What she saw was a smaller, slim, fresh-faced woman with dark brown hair and flashing blue eyes shining from a pretty, smiling, doll-like face. The hallway filled with floral scents from her perfume. Peggy thought she might be thirty years old, much younger than her telephone voice had suggested. The woman was slightly taller than Peggy, helped by her black ankle-length boots. She reminded Peggy of a picture she had once seen of a lady-in-waiting to Queen Victoria.

Philly McConnell was dressed in a three-quarter length cream-coloured heavy cotton skirt with a small blue floral motif worn with a cream blouse. The blouse had a dark-blue ruffed collar and she wore a large bow at her long slim throat. Peggy would learn this was her trademark outfit, worn for all occasions without exception. Her complexion exuded health and well-being, with rosy cheeks and full, sensuous lips. Her left hand dangled a large, scuffed, brown leather briefcase with the faded initials, a briefcase which she had inherited from her father:

"M. M. Mc C."

As her right hand shot out, she said:

'Philly McConnell, good to meet you at last. I had hoped to have a chat yesterday when I dropped off the letter at *Netherton's*.'

Philly breezed into the kitchen and said, 'Ah, good, I see you found Agnes's coffee and biscuits. No milk or sugar, thanks.'

'Yes. Would you like to infuse it, please? I'm not sure how strong to make it. I do like coffee but I've only had it twice, in a café.'

'From a café? Ugh! Ah, well, you're in for a wee treat. So, dear old Agnes has left us. Pity, I'll miss our chats. She held strong opinions, as I do. So, Peggy, you've got the fire going well. Let's stay here in the kitchen. Sit down in Agnes's chair why don't you. After all it's your place now.'

'Sorry, what did you say?'

'So, she didn't tell you after all?'

'Tell me what?'

'Well, Peggy - may I call you Peggy?' Peggy nodded.

'Well, Peggy, you are the sole beneficiary of three old ladies who adored you. It was as if you were there daughter, or perhaps grand-daughter. I've brought copies of their Wills with me, over there in Daddy's old briefcase.'

'What?'

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'Yes, Peggy, they have left you everything. It seems they had no close relatives and they wanted it all to go to you although none of them expected to pass so soon, but there we are. Remember, Peggy, life is for the living. The dead have had their turn.'

Peggy closed her eyes and tried to formulate a suitable prayer but her mind was frozen. When she opened them, Philly handed her a cup of black coffee with two ginger snaps on the saucer.

'Right Peggy, try it black, unsweetened. Agnes did not take to coffee, she was hooked on tea. This is the coffee blend I like best. I gave her the bag of beans. Nor did she like ginger snaps so I had to keep topping those up too.'

Peggy sipped. It was strong but not bitter. She sipped again then nibbled at a ginger snap. At the third longer sip, she felt the buzz. This pick-me-up was just what she needed, she thought. The previous day had been long with a roller-coaster of emotions. Remembering how it had ended in the four-poster Peggy found herself smiling and blushing.

'Mmm. This is delicious. Thank you.'

'Good, now to business.'

'Shall we leave the paperwork until later. I'll give you the bottom line and you can have a think about what you want to do. We only have about an hour until we have to leave for MacLennan's.'

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During the journey into the city centre Philly drove aggressively, overtaking at every opportunity, muttering to herself under her breath and sounding her horn at the stupidity and incompetence of other road users, especially the pedestrians and cart-boys who dodged across from one pavement to another with reckless abandon. This was Peggy's first trip in a motor vehicle and she was alarmed at the speed and apparent violence with which Philly accelerated and braked. She gripped her seat tightly and closed her eyes.

During their short meeting at Miss Fowler's, Peggy had learned:

- Over many years Miss Fowler had grown her initial capital to an estimated valuation after taxes of about £1850. Martin McConnell had been her solicitor and confidant; a duty Philly had inherited. This portfolio included the entire close of tenement flats at 7 Pollok Road in a fifty-fifty partnership with the previous owner of *G Graham, Funeral Director*. To this had been added other joint ventures into the property market, also made initially with Herbert V Wardley but which she had bought out when he died.
- Peggy also learned Auntie Agnes had taken rents for tenants in several blocks of tenements in Pollokshaws, Shawlands and held a 15% shareholding in *G Graham*,

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Funeral Director with the remaining 85% held in Trust within the Estate of Mrs Delilah Dolan Graham.

- The combined wealth of Mrs Gladys Walker and her daughter Alexandra had come from the Estate of Lexie's father who had been a printer of theological books. Knowing he was dying of cancer, Robert Walker had sold out for £2200 in 1905, a sale organised by Martin McConnell. Over the ensuing years this amount had diminished to a net of £1232 held in a special higher interest savings account in the Bank of Scotland (Shawlands branch), administered jointly by McConnell's (Philly) and the Bank (Ronnie McLaughlin). In addition, the terraced property at Auldhouse (valued at £200 before fees and taxes), was registered in the name of Gladys Walker. (Lexie's claim that she was penniless was a fear-fiction generated by her increasing confusion and forgetfulness.)
- All three ladies had signed codicils requesting they be cremated rather than buried, with the further request for their ashes be scattered into the sea from the Rothesay ferry. (Rothesay was a favourite haunt where the three friends had shared many happy summer holidays.)
- Taken with the Shepherd Bequest, Peggy McFetridge was now a young woman of considerable wealth amounting to approximately £3600. For a girl who earned twenty-three shillings a week and retained only three shillings for her pocket money and church donations, this amount of money was unimaginable.

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'Peggy, wake up dear, we're here.'

'Sorry, where are we?'

'MacLennan's for our mystery meeting. I hope they do good coffee. If not I've got some grounds with me in my briefcase. Such a stupid hold up on Bridge Street. Thank goodness you slept through it. They had to amputate the poor woman's legs to get her out from under the tram. Gruesome, blood everywhere. I doubt she'll survive. Right, let's go, it's nearly two o'clock. I hate to be late for meetings, don't you?'

Edith Palmer was waiting for them in Reception and led them up to the Boardroom on the top floor. She offered to take them in the elevator cage but Philly refused, preferring to walk.

When they entered, the three men rose to greet them.

Bert smiled. Peggy smiled back, her heart soaring, her mind racing ahead to the time they could be alone together, after Miss Netherton had gone off to bed. Bert had said earlier Amelia seldom stayed up beyond eight o'clock, preferring to retire early to read.

Peggy had met Lachlan twice before, both times at Christian rallies which she had attended with Bert. She had heard quite a lot about Bert's cousin Donald Lyle, how clever he was, that he taught part-time at the university and was a Doctor of Laws. This was the first time she had met him. From his fresh complexion she judged him to be about

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thirty, much younger than she had imagined. From what she had heard, she had expected Donald would be nearer to Lachlan's age. He was tall, stooped, studious and seemed more like a church minister than a solicitor. Peggy was immediately impressed by his genial friendly manner and felt at once he could be trusted. To her it was another sign confirming God was at work in her life.

As Philly was being introduced to Lachlan and Bert, Donald gestured she should sit beside Bert. Only when Peggy and Philly were seated did the three men sit, Donald side by side with Philly directly opposite Peggy and Bert with Lachlan at the head of the long table. Looking across at Donald and Philly, Peggy thought they made a perfect couple.

Edith re-appeared and offered tea and coffee.

Peggy drank her second ever cup of strong coffee. Her head began to buzz. Everything in her life was moving so fast she could not keep a proper focus. She closed her eyes and tried to concentrate. For comfort, she held Bert's left hand under the table, enfolding it in both of her large, strong hands.

Lachlan spoke: 'Thank you all and welcome. With Bert's agreement Donald will offer a precis of the situation and we will take it from there, shall we?'

Philly responded: 'Please, can I establish who, in a legal sense, is representing whom?'

Donald nodded to Lachlan and replied: 'Miss McFetridge, may we assume that you are represented by Philly?'

Peggy looked to Bert who replied on her behalf: 'Eh, yes, I think so. Miss McConnell is our family solicitor and since Peggy and I plan to marry soon that seems the best plan. Do you agree, Peggy?'

'Oh, yes, Bertie. Miss McConnell and I have already had a meeting earlier when she asked me if I wanted to sign a letter of appointment but I said I would leave it until I had the chance to speak to you.'

Lachlan spoke: 'Shall we take it then that Miss McConnell represents both Peggy and Bert.'

Bert and Peggy glanced at each other and chimed, 'Yes'.

Donald chuckled: 'Excellent! Now, I have prepared a . . .'

Philly interjected: 'So, before we proceed, may I ask both of my new clients to sign these forms. Just for the record, please.'

The forms, already prepared in triplicate, were retrieved from Philly's briefcase. She set them out before Bert and Peggy who read through them carefully, nodded to each other then signed as directed by Philly.

Donald cleared his throat: 'Excellent! Now, *if* I may. . . .'

Philly McConnell raised her hand: 'Before you set off on one of your famous legalistic diatribes, my dear Donald, may I ask what exactly is to be your role in this meeting, from

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a legal standpoint? And, without meaning to be rude, and purely for information, what is the purpose of this meeting? I think you can understand this from my point of view, yes?' Donald chuckled: 'Well, I anticipated you would ask that. Would you care to see the agenda?'

As he circulated copies which had been hastily typed by Edith Palmer, Philly peered at her copy and said:

'Ah Donald! Only two sheets of paper? My, you are improving. Now, let me see, Two misspellings on sheet one and three on sheet two.'

As everyone looked on, she read the sheets again, more slowly.

'Mmm. Interesting. Big money here! May I see the telegram and letter, please, if this is acceptable to Bert here?'

Bert replied: 'Of course, yes, please do.'

Donald said, 'Philly, if I could just add. . . .'

'Not yet, Donald. Let me read these 'clean' without any prejudicial notions imparted by you, if you please. Could you please ask Edith to make a fresh pot of coffee? Thanks. Ask her to use these grounds, please.'

Philly took both documents and read them. At the second reading she delved into her briefcase, retrieved a pencil and legal pad and began making notes. Coffee arrived and was served. Philly resumed her reading and note-taking. Peggy found it difficult to keep her eyes open and when her head dropped forward, Bert squeezed her hand and brought her back to the edge of wakefulness.

Time passed and still Philly McConnell studied the documents. As the clock began to ding out four o'clock, she broke her silence.

'In summary, in respect of the letter, we have what appears to be a valid document which could be construed as the Last Will and Testament of George Wardley Graham in favour of his twin brother Albert MacLennan Graham. Further, I am prepared to venture that George Jnr was either depressed or inebriated or both when he wrote this letter. Although it is apparently certified by Andreas Vass and Paddy Smart, these men are not, insofar as we can tell, competent witnesses in a legal sense. If they were Notaries, surely they would have recorded this when signing. If they too were drunk, this could be a hoax. And even if the intent was true at the time of signing, there is always the possibility there is a later or amended version expressing his wishes which may have changed.'

'But Philly,' said Donald, 'look at the date of the letter and the postmark. Surely it is highly likely to be valid?'

'Dear Donald, in the famous words of the unknown poet, 'Haud yer Wheesht!'

Donald chuckled and leaned back holding up his hands in mock defeat.

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Philly continued: 'Let us consider this bizarre wedding photograph for a few seconds. Firstly, are we sure this is George Jnr?'

'Yes, that's George alright,' said Bert. Lachlan and Donald nodded.

'So, George has found an older woman who is the love of his life. They are depicted here on their wedding day. Now, it might be *The Heritage Estate* is as real as it appears to be here but consider this; it may not actually be owned by the happily married couple. I've read that in the US it is quite common to rent such a place as a wedding venue. Here in Scotland we have a simpler example at *Gleneagles Hotel* or on a less grand scale, the *Sherbrooke Castle Hotel* in Pollokshields. As I said earlier, the letter is phrased in grandiose language and may have been written 'under the influence', as our American cousins call it. However, ah, yes, sorry, verbosity is not required.'

Philly stopped for dramatic effect, causing Donald to giggle.

'Let us leave the letter for a moment. The telegram is of much greater interest. This man Gideon Cochrane from Saratoga Springs seems to believe my client Albert MacLellan Graham has a claim of some sort to what seems to be a vast fortune. Shall we assume for a moment the estate is worth \$150 million USD as George Jnr claims. Erring on the cautious side by assuming we can get five dollars for our pound Sterling, this means *The Hermitage* might be worth £30 million Sterling. Surely a family which has accumulated such wealth will be unlikely to allow it to be entailed to a young man they hardly know? Surely such wealth will be protected, ring-fenced by Trusts and such-like?'

Donald spoke: 'Well, Philly, I think. . .'

'Donald, please, before you give you opinion, may I be assured, on behalf of my clients here any advice you are about to offer them is given *pro bono publico* by which I mean it is offered for free?'

'Yes, of course, Bert is my cousin. I am pleased to offer my services to him free of charge.'

'And to Miss McFetridge, who is of course, a separate legal entity, under the law.'

'Yes, of course, to both!'

'Good. Now, Donald, it is at last your turn to speak. What is your view? What should we do here? But one more minute while I write down what my advice is and we will compare notes. Oh, this is terrific fun, eh? Just like back in the day in tutorials with old Doc Malloy.'

'Whatever happened to him, Philly, do you know?'

'He went off to live in New York but we lost touch. Uncle Terence was never a letter writer, nor was Daddy.'

'Right Bert, here's my advice. Keep it folded while Donald opines. Now, first, please, is there any chance of more of that coffee? Time for a quick comfort break?'

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With fresh coffee and tea served, Donald began to speak.

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His 'lecture' on 'American v British Law' was one he taught to post-graduates under the banner of *Mercantile Law in Action*. He would speak for three-quarters of an hour.

To Peggy his words seemed like a long, boring sermon from an Old Testament text, like waves crashing on a shore. She began to feel sleepy and rested her head on Bert's shoulder.

Lachlan looked at the girl and smiled, thinking, she is a good sort, not a money-grabber. They will make a good marriage. If this whole business is true, Bert will never need to work again. I will need to carry on here for a bit longer until I find someone else to fill my shoes. Lachlan set his face to 'concentrate' but his thoughts were elsewhere. Such a pity about Donald and his 'special friend' Richard. At least they are discrete. If only he had found someone like Philly to settle with.

When the clock dinged out five o'clock, Philly intervened:

'Right, Donald, you have taken us through the annals of tort and what you think you know of US law. Well done you! But was any of that relevant to our situation? No, don't answer, please. Instead, tell us in a few words, please, what you advise Bert to do?'

'He must go at once to Saratoga Springs and deal directly with this man Gideon Cochrane. He should take you with him and sufficient funds to hire the best legal representation he can afford. The prize, even a small part of it, makes the risk worth it. £30 million would make Bert one of the richest men in Britain. It might be possible to . . .'

'Donald, dear, enough for now . Thanks. Now Bert, please read out what I jotted down.'

Bert opened the folded sheet and read aloud:

1. Cochrane does not know what is in the letter George Jnr sent to Bert, so he is fishing.
2. I recommend we telephone him from here to ask him what he means, try to get the lie of the land, see what he might reveal.
3. Even if Cochrane obfuscates, tries to mislead us, I recommend Bert and I go to Saratoga Springs at once.
4. This prize is too large to ignore. We must pursue it vigorously and at once. We must be prepared to fight them, including hiring the best legal advice we can afford.'

Philly spoke: 'There you have it Bert. Dr Donald MacLellan Lyle and Miss Philomena Mary McConnell agree for once. So, what do you think, Bert? Are you up for it?'

At Philly's words Peggy felt a rush of energy pound at her heart. A non-believer would have claimed it was caused by four cups of strong coffee combined with sleep deprivation and the suppressed emotions welling up from bereavement. But to Peggy the sensation

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gave her the certainty that God was speaking to her. She grasped Bert's hand under the table and squeezed.

Bert scanned the other faces and returned to Peggy to see her nod vigorously, then said:

'Before we decide, I suggest we bring this matter before the Lord in Prayer.'

Philly rose and said. 'I'm sorry but you'll have to excuse me. I'm an atheist but I fully respect your views. I'll step outside. Is there a telephone I can use, I need to call Susan, my secretary. Let me know when you want me back.'

She stood outside the door and listened as Albert deferred to Donald who began:

'Dear loving Heavenly Father, we are at a crucial point in the lives of Bert and Peggy. Firstly we give thanks for their lives and ask . . .'

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The meeting reconvened at half past five.

Lachlan spoke:

'Thank you Miss McConnell. It is our view we should take it one step at a time, as you have suggested. You may use the telephone in my room to try to raise this man Cochrane in Saratoga Springs. Edith Palmer has reminded me it is Thanksgiving Day in America. She had been onto the International Operators. They tried his office without reply but they are in the process of attempting to connect us to Cochrane's home. Yes, just through there. Yes, that door. Bert and Peggy will sit in with you and Donald and I will listen from here, if that's acceptable?'

Over the first ten minutes the two lawyers parried words, trying to get an advantage until the conversation took an unexpected turn.

'Miss McConnell, we have a house guest today who is originally from Glasgow. His name is Doctor Terence Malloy. Do you happen to know him?'

'Yes, he was my tutor at Glasgow University and he is my late father's second cousin.'

'Well, Doc Malloy has been listening in on our side and he wants to speak to you.'

'Philly! How are you girl. And did you and Donald marry?'

'Uncle Terrance, what a surprise. We thought you were in New York.'

'No, not for the last twenty years. I'm the voice of authority around here, at least until next spring when I plan to retire as the local Judge.'

'Uncle Terrence, this business about The Hermitage Estate. Is it true that it is to be inherited by my client Albert MacLauchlan Graham. I must add that he is here with me, listening to our conversation.'

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'Yes, Philly. It may seem outrageous to you but not to us here. You would need to understand the strange workings of the drug-befuddled mind of Miss Viviana Brabsley and her equally weird father Barodo Brabsley to understand how this situation arose but I can assure you that yes, Alber MacLachlan Graham will inherit the entire Estate, all signed, sealed and certified by me. All that is required is for your client to come and sign for it. Now, Philly, stop spatting with Gideon and get down to business.'

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Five Years Later

In 1930, the month of May on *The Hermitage Estate* brought warm sunny weather and an outburst of spring colour to its forests and meadows.

Bert and Peggy, (who was three months pregnant with their third child), were preparing for the inaugural *Hermitage Spring Festival* at which their second child Jean would be Christened. Al (Albert Jr) their eldest, was to be a 'helper' at the service, dressed in a kilt outfit.

From their 'modest' villa, (called *Rosemount*, a slightly larger version of the original in Shawlands) they looked across the shallow valley at the splendour of *The Hermitage* about a half mile distant and saw that the preparations were in hand, with the marquees and temporary bandstand erected and decorated with bunting.

Bert was dressed in a light grey suit and wearing a purple shirt with a white dog collar.

Albert MacLachlan Graham Esquire had been inducted as an Auxiliary Minister in the First Methodist Church of Saratoga Springs and would be assisting at the service but not officiating. Gideon Cochrane would be Jean's Godfather, as he was to Albert.

During the day long Service of Celebration, Peggy, wearing a lilac dress and a wide-brimmed straw boater, would be conducting the massed choirs of the local churches, to be joined by the choir of *The Hermitage Refuge*, a group comprising fifty pupils plus staff and teachers (all of whom were committed Christians).

Across the valley Eliza Morgan Cochrane (Gideon's wife who led the Saratoga Springs Brass Band) was rehearsing the opening hymn with the ensemble:

*Stand up! stand up for Jesus!
Ye soldiers of the cross;
Lift high His royal banner,
It must not suffer loss:
From vict'ry unto vict'ry
His army shall He lead,
Till every foe is vanquished
And Christ is Lord indeed.*

As special guests of honour, Philly McConnell, Dr Maureen Mullen, Susan Broughton and Eloise Fischer had travelled to be with them and to lay the foundation stone for the planned *Hermitage Academy and Training Centre* to be blessed later in the proceedings.

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In Glasgow, the business of *G Graham Funeral Director* was being run by William Fraser. William was now occupying *Rosemount* on a peppercorn rent with Miss Amelia Netherton retained as Housekeeper and to assist his wife Elizabeth and their two boys, Samuel and Joshua.

Philly, acting for Bert and Peggy, had drafted plans for William to buy the business at a fair price from *The Horspool Trust* who had been gifted it from Bert and Peggy as part of a tranche of substantial bequests which included:

*The Greenview Gospel Hall,
The Citadel,
The Horspool Trust for Foundlings,
Saving Families
The Haven
And several other worthy causes which Philly had proposed.*