

Home Visit

Ronald Cantley-Allyene balanced his reading glasses on the tip of his nose and peered at the tiny screen of his new mobile phone. This state-of-the art device was a recent present from Diana, his bossy but well-meaning niece. Diana, Miriam's brother's daughter, was a high-powered, high-flyer, who worked as an aide at the White House:

*Uncle Ronnie, don't worry about the size of the keys. Look, just press the **Yellow** symbol to **Record** what you want it to type and the AI Bot will convert it to text for you, yes? Then press the **Orange** symbol to **Playback** and listen to be sure it's what you want to say before you press the **Green** symbol to **SEND**.*

***Yellow, Orange, Green.** What could be easier?*

Diana seemed to have forgotten since his stroke he was colour blind but at least she always *raised her voice* when 'instructing' him.

Since her first visit to Devon a year ago, Diana had insisted on appointing herself as his personal carer, checking up on him with *FaceTime* calls every Sunday and making flying visits to see him every other month.

Ronnie guessed as his nearest relative she was expecting to inherit his estate although she had never asked outright. Hopefully she would get over the disappointment, in time. At least she would always be able to visit *High Tops* when it became a museum.

Now that the energetic thirty-seven-year-old had flown back to Washington DC, he might get a bit of peace. After all, he had been coping well enough before Diana had taken over his life, having 'found' his website gallery on the internet.

Using the tiny stylus which came with the phone, Ronald tried poking at the key for a third time but the '*Playback*' function did not respond. Eventually he stabbed at what he hoped might be the '*SEND*' key.

The phone dinged and the message flew off to ask for a Home Visit from his chiropractor.

An hour later, his new phone double-dinged and vibrated madly. He did not reach it in time but when he poked at it, a cheery woman chimed brightly:

Hi, Ronald, Ashley Kimbabwi here. I have you booked into my schedule for ten o'clock tomorrow. And hey, you're my most famous client ever! I looked you up on Google. Absolute Wow - you do have a fabulous house. I've seen it dozens of times of course, but just driving past. Not in my wildest did I ever think I would get to see it up close.

Home Visit

Now, Ronald, please make sure you wash the affected areas thoroughly before I arrive. Saves you time and money, eh? You know what the song says - 'Money makes the world go round', right? Oh, and loose clothing essential, please, Ronald.

00000

Ronald did not sleep well and was up early. He stood under his power-shower for over half an hour, letting the hot water pound against the small of his back.

Promptly at ten o'clock, *Alexa* sprang to life, another innovation imposed on him by Diana:

Motion detected in your driveway.

Then:

Motion detected at your front door.

With radiant skin, perfect white teeth and curly ebony hair, he judged her to be in her mid-forties. As she unloaded her car, Ronnie thought:

Perhaps like Miriam, her parents were from the Windrush generation?

The slim, wiry woman was dressed in a smart pale green trouser suit. She was carrying an aluminium briefcase with a folding canvas chair contraption in her other hand and wearing a large rucksack with many bulging pockets.

Standing at the threshold of the open doorway, they shook hands:

'So, you're Ronnie and I'm Ash, right?'

Her perfume smelled of coconut and lime. Delicious.

She glanced around the grand hallway and her eyes settled on the Dining Room:

'Oh, what a magnificent room. West facing, yes? Ideal for dinner parties. And what a lovely table. Is that walnut? I did a course on Interior Design at the OU.'

'Yes, my late wife Miriam was very fond of that table. It's a family heirloom. Her grandfather bought it with him when he sold up his legal practice in Trinidad and moved the family to England. This was his house. He built it here because the views over the River Dart reminded him of his childhood. The whole place is stuffed with his hordes of antiques and curios.'

'Amazing. Well, Ronnie, we should make a start, right? Time is of the essence, don't you agree. Now, why don't you sit over there by the window on that upright chair while I get set-up, OK?'

Ashley placed a fresh towel on the table, laid her briefcase on it and flipped open the lid, revealing an array of what appeared to be surgical instruments and medications.

Home Visit

Ronald hobbled over to a chair and lowered himself gingerly.

Ashley set up her chair, unfolded a footrest and covered it with a second towel. Seated in front of him, she slipped on pale green latex gloves then rolled up his trousers to his knees, removed his loafers, eased off his socks then lifted his feet gently onto the towel.

'Oh Ronnie, what lovely feet you have, they're so, so beautiful. But talcum powder, sorry but no Ronnie. No, no, no, I do *not* approve. Powders of any kind are a bad, bad, bad. Talc is a particular menace, so fine it clogs your pores creating a barrier to natural transpiration. But no worries, I'll soon have your good as new.'

'Now, Ronnie, am I guessing this is the first time you have had an acupuncture treatment?'

'Oh Ash, I think there may have been a misunderstanding. Are you from the DBP?'

'Sorry Ronnie? You've lost me. Who are the D-B-P?'

'The Devon Backpain Partnership.'

'No honey, I'm from DPA, Devon Podiatry and Acupuncture.'

'Ah, sorry Ash, but it's my back that's the problem, not my feet.'

'Well Ronnie, in eight out of ten cases I treat, foot issues are at the root of back pain problems. If you let me cleanse your skin then apply my ever-so-gentle aromatherapy lotion followed by a reflexology manipulation, I think we can soon clear up that back pain of yours. What do you say?'

'How much would that cost, please?'

'For a thirty-minute session I usually take £75, as per my website, but as you are a new client, how about we agree on £60? I do *Tap and Go* if that suits you. Keeps my accounts simpler too.'

'Yes Ash, go ahead but no needles please.'

Using medical wipes, she cleansed his feet then clipped his nails, finishing with a light rub of lavender oil around his toes, 'nature's germicide'. As she worked, she proselytised:

'Ronnie, Ronnie. Let me tell you that acupuncture is completely safe and if this massage doesn't work, I'll add a fifteen-minute acupuncture treatment *gratis*. Did I already say that you have lovely feet?'

'There, how does that feel?'

'It feels truly wonderful. And yes, my back feels a little better, not so tense, thank you. That lovely smell, what is it?'

Home Visit

'The main ingredient is Tea Tree Oil with added Orange and Lavender extracts. All my treatments are organic, nature's cure. Well, do you like it?'

'Yes, very nice, thanks, that feels very nice indeed.'

'Now Ronnie, close your eyes, let all the tension flow out of your body. Good. Now tell me all about your amazing life as a Watercolourist. And about your wife, Miriam Allyene. She was a Sculptor, right?'

I could get used to this, he thought.

00000

After the reflexology session, she did not mention acupuncture again. Instead, she asked to check his outdoor shoes. She examined them closely, particularly checking the wear on both heels.

'Ronnie, what you need are proper shoes which give good support. You are a bit splay-footed but it's not too bad. Next time I call I'll bring a selection for you to try out. I'm sure with proper shoes, improved posture and a few walking lessons, we'll cure that back problem for you.'

'I hope so, I've suffered this for nearly thirty years, on and off.'

With Ash packed and ready to go, they shook hands at the doorway.

'Bye-bye Honey, see you same time, same place next Monday. OK?'

'Yes, Ash, already looking forward to it.'

'But from now on it'll be £75 for a session. Business is Business, OK?'

'Yes, that'll be just fine.'

00000

Over the weeks which followed, Ronnie would learn Ashley Kimbabwi was fifty-eight, super fit, regularly running marathons to raise money for *Water Aid*, a grandmother with six grandchildren and happily married to Albert McFetridge, an Orthodontist.

As she had promised, his backpain steadily reduced then vanished.

He was walking better and even gardening again.

At Ash's suggestion, he was sketching with charcoal and crayons, a long-forgotten pleasure rediscovered.