

Moving On

Two women stood framed in the lounge window of the top-floor apartment and watched the removal van arrive at *Sea Breezes*, the block opposite.

Marion, the older sister, had just celebrated her seventieth birthday and the acrimonious end of her second marriage six months earlier. Allison was seven years younger and had never married, changing partners on a regular basis, ever hoping for Mr Right.

The removal men, climbed down from the cab, stretched and then began to unload their van and carry the contents into the building opposite.

'So, what do you know about him, Marion?'

'His daughter Fiona is a GP at the health centre. My Sarah is in the choir with her. Turns out the daughter's husband owns *Crawford's* the travel agency, the one that does those cruise deals.'

'Oh, did you enjoy your trip to China?'

'Oh, so nice of you to ask, *eventually!* That was three months ago. Anyway, it was Vietnam and Cambodia. The food they made us eat - horrible. I complained, of course. They've given me a voucher of £200 towards my next cruise. I think I'll try the Caribbean.'

'Any likely prospects?'

'For meals I was seated with an older couple and their son, Godfrey.'

'How old was this Godfrey?'

'Only fifty-eight. Dyes his hair and has a slight stammer but otherwise quite presentable. He's a lay preacher, apparently, one of those happy-clappy sects which allows alcohol.'

'But?'

'Well, his stories. . . ., pure fantasy.'

'Mmm. Too talkative, was he?'

'No, no, not too bad, really. In fact, he was nearly perfect. Mouldable, I thought. It was just, well, you know, a pity, really.'

'Marion, come on, tell all. *What happened?*'

'Well, it was going quite well'

'Oh, look, Marion! That must be him, the new man, here at last! Look, he's driving a CRV, the new shape. It's only been out a couple of months. Nice colour. Oh, and a personal number plate, B51 DAG.'

'Yes, "Douglas Alexander Gordon". He's from Glasgow, Newton Mearns, Sarah said. His daughter is very worried about him. She was the one who made him move to Troon.'

'Well he looks quite smart. What's wrong with him?'

'Depression. Lost his wife to cancer three years ago, can't seem to get over it.'

'Ah, poor man. Still, Marion, one door closes, another opens, right? His registration, do you think he was born in 1951?'

Moving On

'Maybe. That would make him only sixty-five. Plays golf, Sarah said. Got his application in for *Prestwick St Nicolas*, apparently.'

'Oh? Pity. We could be doing with more single men for *St Cuthbert's*.'

'Hands off Allison McManus! I spotted him first and I bags first dibs.'

'OK, OK. Anyway, things are going not too badly with Ernest.'

'Ernest? Who's Ernest?'

'Met him on the new dating website, "*Golfers in the Swing*". Only thing is, he lives in Motherwell.'

'MOTHERWELL! Oh, for goodness sake, Allison, why would you want a man from Motherwell when you live in Ayr?'

'He used to be a footballer, years ago. Played for Liverpool. Plays off ten at *Gailes*. Wants to move to the coast, he says. Drives a vintage Merc, one of those ones with the fold-away roof.'

'Oh, how old is he then?'

'Seventy-five but he looks about sixty. Goes to the gym every day. Talking of Ernie, I must leave you and love you, Marion. I'm meeting him at *Turnberry* at six and I've arranged to have my girl to come and do my hair and nails at three.'

'What? I thought we would be able to fit in a few holes this afternoon. It is Wednesday after all.'

'Sorry, Marion. Ernie only asked this morning. I was lucky Angelina was free. Must fly.'

'Oh, I see. Just dump me whenever Ernie calls, is that the way of it? So, this Ernie, are you staying over at *Turnberry*?'

'I hope so. Just have to wait and see what happens, eh?'

'Give me a ring, let me know how it goes.'

'OK, sis. Oh, why don't you go over and introduce yourself? Strike while the iron's hot?'

While Marion stood at the entrance to her block of flats waving goodbye to Allison, a red car arrived and parked beside the purple CRV. The small, slim woman who had moved in six months earlier nodded to the removal men as they climbed into their van to drive away. So far, little was known about the Birchall woman from *Sea Breezes* except she worked part-time in the back office at *Crawford's Travel*. Marion reckoned she was about sixty, maybe younger. No one had seen her around the town although it was rumoured she had been born in Troon. If she played golf or bowls, she did it elsewhere.

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As Annette passed the first floor flat, the door opened. The new man emerged carrying a huge pile of corrugated cardboard. He had a nice face, she decided, and not too tall but maybe just a bit too thin.

Moving On

'Hello, I'm Annette, Annette Birchall. I'm directly above you. Welcome to *Sea Breezes*.'

'Sandy Gordon. Nice to meet you. Excuse me not shaking hands. On my way down to the car with this lot. I'd no idea I had so much stuff to unpack. I suppose I'll find everything, eventually.'

'I know, I'm not long moved here myself. It took me weeks to find everything.'

'Excuse me, do you happen to know where the recycling centre is?'

'Yes, but it's tricky to find. When you're ready to go, ring my buzzer and I'll come with you, if you like.'

'Would you? I suppose I could use my new satnav if only I knew how to work it.'

'Of course. I've finished for the day anyway. Look, Sandy, would you like to come up for a tea or a coffee? I'm just going to have one myself.'

'Eh, yes, just give me a few minutes to get shot of this stuff and I'll be right up.'

Half-an-hour later Sandy, fresh from the shower and changed into pair of slacks with an open-necked shirt and a cardigan draped over his shoulders, was leaving his flat to head upstairs. As he was about to pull his door closed, his front door entry buzzer sounded in the hallway.

He moved back inside and pressed the button: 'Hello, Sandy Gordon?'

'Oh, hello. It's Marion Telfer from across the road, in *Sea Vistas*.'

'Yes, how can I help?'

'I wondered if you might like to pop over for a cup of coffee, when you're settled.'

'Hold on, please. I'm not sure how to release the door. Drat. Look, wait there, I'll pop down.'

As he neared front door he saw the outline of a tall figure behind the frosted glass. On opening the door, he was faced by a grinning woman in full war paint who reeked of perfume and recently-smoked tobacco fumes.

He proffered his hand which she gripped firmly and squeezed hard.

'Sandy Gordon. Eh, yes, yes. Very nice of you, Marion. Perhaps we could make it Friday afternoon?'

'Oh, so you're not free just now, then?'

'No, sorry. I'm a bit busy.'

'Oh, I see. Well, Friday might not work for me. I'm in the Ladies' Team at *St Cuthbert's* and we're away to *Belleisle* for a match.'

'Well, good luck. Maybe another time?'

'So, not tomorrow? I'm free tomorrow if that suits you?'

'No, sorry. I'm busy tomorrow. Then I'm away to Turkey at the weekend for a golfing week with some friends.'

Moving On

'Oh, I see. Turkey. I thought Turkey was, well, dangerous?'

'Is it? Well, it's all booked and paid for now. So, Marion, it was nice of you to ask. No doubt we'll see each other about. And good luck again, for Friday.'

'Oh, well, yes, thanks. Bye. Oh, and be careful in Turkey. Not a nice place at all, or so I've heard.'

He waited as the woman made her way across to her entrance door, returned her wave then bounded back up to the second floor and pressed Annette's buzzer.

'Ah, there you are, Sandy. Come in. Tea or coffee?'

'Tea, I'm trying to give up on coffee. Fiona said it was making me jittery.'

Sandy waited in the kitchen doorway, watching as she moved about preparing a tea tray. He saw she was no longer wearing her wedding or engagement rings as she had been earlier. She was every bit as nice as Fiona had said, with a pretty face and nice curves. Petite, probably size 8 or maybe 10, reminding him of his wife before the kids.

Annette could feel his eyes on her and turned to offer a smile, catching the sadness in his eyes. It was just as Tom had said, he was still in mourning.

'Tea it is. Breakfast, Earl Grey or whatever?'

'Do you have Red Bush?'

He caught a trace of Annette's perfume, one of Doreen's favourites. The emaciated image of his wife flashed across his mind. Tears welled up. He fished out a hankie and blew his nose.

'Is it my perfume? Sorry.'

'No, not at all. No, your perfume is nice. Very nice.'

'Thanks. Red Bush for two, coming up.'

'This is a lovely kitchen, is it new?'

'Yes, it is. They finished it last week.'

'Maybe I'll get a new kitchen too. But I'll wait a while, to see if the experiment works first.'

Annette thought she knew what Sandy meant. She was not really settled here in Troon yet. Somehow it seemed too claustrophobic, too insular with everyone watching what she did. The purchase of the new kitchen had been more of an 'impulse project' than a necessity. She was not normally an impetuous person but the display in John Lewis's had been stunning and the designer girl had been excellent.

Moving On

Standing again in her lounge window on the top floor flat of *Sea Vistas*, Marion lit another cigarette and watched as the couple disappeared from the kitchen and re-appeared in the lounge. Surely the new man would not be interested in a stick insect like her, she thought.

'Right, Sandy. Here we are. Try one of these minty cream biscuits.'

'No, if you don't mind. I'm due at Fiona's at seven and I don't want to spoil my appetite. She's trying to feed me up, all part of her grand plan. She's a GP and she says I'm underweight.'

'Well then, surely one little minty cream wouldn't do any harm. Our secret, eh? I promise I won't tell anyone.'

'Right, then, I will, thanks. Mmmm. Yes, nice. It's ages since I ate a biscuit. Years.'

'So, Sandy, if I might be so bold, what is 'the experiment?'

'Ah, well, Fiona, my daughter, has suggested, nay, she has *insisted* I make a break with the past. She found me this flat and well, here I am.'

Annette felt reasonably confident he was unaware of the subterfuge. Tom had promised to keep their conversation confidential. As they both knew, Fiona and her girls were rather talkative. However, now was the time to reveal what would come out anyway.

'Ah, your daughter is Fiona Crawford?'

'Yes, she is. Do you know her?'

'Yes, sort of. I work for her husband, part-time. Tom Crawford is my ex-husband's nephew.'

'Right. So, you're divorced?'

'Seven years ago. It was then I moved back home from Australia and Tom kindly offered me a job. I'm an accountant by original training. I keep his books in order. Keeps me busy, gives me a purpose. I work in a few charity shops too.'

Annette had decided she would not reveal her involvement with *The Samaritans*, in case it derailed the conversation.

'An accountant? So was I! I was with KPMG all my life, in audit. Rose to the dizzy heights of Associate Partner, never into the big league. Australia, whereabouts?'

'Sidney at first then Melbourne, when Robbie was promoted. That's when it all went off the rails, sadly.'

'Oops, sorry.'

'No, I'm alright about it now but at the time, when I found out he had been having an affair with his PA and she was pregnant, well, I was devastated. He had always said he didn't want children but it seems he did. Anyway, we managed to get to an agreement eventually and to be fair, I did alright out of it. After the divorce, I travelled for a bit and then made the decision to come back to Scotland. I tried Edinburgh for a while, then

Moving On

Glasgow for a few years. Six months ago I moved here and well, when Tom got wind of me coming back to good old Troon, he made me the offer. I heard you're from Glasgow, Sandy? Is that right?

'Yes, Clydebank, originally. When I met Doreen we set up home in Newton Mearns, near her parents. We lived in the same house for over forty years.'

Annette could see the sadness back in his face and decided to get him to talk it out.

'Your wife, Doreen, when did she pass on?'

'Three years ago, last month.'

'You still miss her?'

'Yes. Very much. We seemed to be just made for each other. I know it sounds a bit pathetic but living alone in the same house you've shared with someone for so many years, well. . . . Look Annette, I know Fiona's right. I know I was going downhill. But now it all seems to be happening so fast and now I've actually made this move, well, will it work out? Look, I know the idea is to try to let her memory to fade so I can move on, but actually talking about her as if she doesn't matter to me anymore, well, it just makes me sad.'

'Doreen, it was cancer?'

'Yes. It started with what we thought was an ulcer in her bowel. She had two big operations over the first six months and then it spread to her brain. After that, she was gone in weeks. Like you, I was devastated. Our son Kenneth is in Perth, Western Australia. After the funeral, when Kenneth went home, I went back with him, mainly for a holiday but there was also the notion I might become a partner in his business. He runs a small IT business and it's doing well. It was all nonsense, really. I'm hopeless with technology so it wasn't for me. Anyway, they have their own life and after everyone got over the novelty of having 'Grampa Sandy' nearby, I could feel I was a drag on them. That's the worry about this move to Troon, too. Fiona and her girls have busy lives and Tom is on the go the whole time. But who knows? Maybe Fiona's right. She keeps saying, "Dad, you must move on. You're a lovely man and you need to find someone to share your life with. There are lots of nice ladies who would love to have you as a friend. Mum wouldn't have wanted you to mope about feeling sorry for yourself".

'Yes, Sandy, I'm sure your daughter's right. You do need to move on, don't you? You still have decades ahead of you, don't you? You have to try to make a new life for yourself, don't you?'

'I suppose so. I know I was lucky to have had Doreen for so long. Fiona says I must let go, but to tell you the truth, it's all a bit, well, scary.'

'Yes, I know what you mean. At first when I moved here, I thought of getting a dog. They say if you get a dog, you meet the world. It's just I've never been a very outgoing person.'

'Oh, look at the time, Annette. Sorry, I'd better get this stuff to the recycling place before it closes.'

'Right, then, Sandy. Off we go!'

Moving On

Marion stood at her window and saw the new man and the stick insect woman get into the CRV and drive off. She checked her wall clock. Not too early for a large G&T. Perhaps she would try the new dating website?

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Six months later.

Sandy and Annette now live in a newly refurbished villa in Ayr which has a good-sized garden for their two dogs, Border Terriers called Rosie and Rufus.

Annette is taking golf lessons and together they have joined a ballroom dancing club.

Their wedding day is booked at the *Brig o'Doon House Hotel* in Alloway, to be held on the first anniversary of the day they met at *Sea Breezes*.

On a recent trip to Moscow, Marion met Vladimir, the head barman on her *Riviera* cruise ship. The couple Skype twice a week and Vlad is planning to pay a visit to Troon at the end of the river cruising season.

In recent weeks Marion has been keeping a close eye on the people viewing the two flats at *Sea Breezes*, now back on the market for the second time in under a year.

One is a single chap who plays at *Barassie Links*. When Alec Cunningham left after the viewing, Marion trailed him to a supermarket in Ayr where she accidentally met him in the wines and spirits section. Pretending to ask for advice, they debated the merits of New Zealand wines versus those from South Africa. They continued their discussion over a coffee and she discovered Alec is recently divorced. His former wife of thirty-five years has moved to live in France with her new partner, a younger woman called Joss (Jocelyn).

Ernie has moved in with Allison and is renting out his semi-detached villa in Motherwell meanwhile. His family are very against him re-marrying, fearing they will lose out on their expected inheritance. Ernie has taken out an additional membership at St Cuthbert's so that he and Allison can play in the mixed competitions.