

# Mutal Garden Aid Society

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The letter had arrived three weeks earlier, the day after Jane's funeral. It looked official, intimidating.

Donald's confidence had been shattered when he had been made redundant, making him unsure, tentative, disorientated. Jane had been very understanding. From the outset of their marriage, she had been their leader in all things domestic, their decision maker, right to the end. Oddly, Jane's long illness and her increasing dependence on him had helped, giving him a new purpose, a new imperative. Alone now, Donald had fallen back, feeling jittery, unsure, fearful. After a long wait, he was now receiving therapy but had made little progress.

He put the letter onto the sideboard once more, still unopened, propped beside the photograph of his late wife, taken when she was forty-eight, in her prime, the day she had received her MBE at Buckingham Palace, awarded for services to Children's Dental Health.

Donald had taken to speaking to her photograph as a way of sorting out his thoughts. He had mentioned this to his therapist Miriam who had explained this was commonplace, part of the grieving process, emphasising that it would pass, over time.

'Well, Jane, should I forward it to Allison and Allison to deal with, like all the other bumf? But there's no rush now, is there? Whatever it is, it can't touch you now, can it?'

He turned his attention to the newly arrived newspaper and made a start on the easiest of the crosswords. He knew he would not be able to complete the hardest one without *Google*, now he was on his own.

Alexa reminded him he was due to play golf with Tom.

He looked out at the teeming rain, the third day of heavy showers.

The phone rang.

'Donnie, shall we cancel golf and meet for coffee instead? 10:30?'

'Good move. At the clubhouse?'

'No, let's meet at the garden centre at Mugdock. I need to get some bags of topsoil. Oh, and Donnie, can you email me a copy of Jane's recipe for Cullen Skink. We have Edith's cousin and her husband coming for lunch tomorrow and we thought we would give it a try. Oh, and can I borrow your Dremel kit, please?'

'Sure.'

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'Right then, the bacon butties are on me.'

By ten o'clock, the rain had eased to a drizzle and when they were leaving the garden centre, the sun was out, the ground steaming. Al Jolson's *April Showers* started running in Donald's head. His father had been a big fan. He heaved two bags into the *X-Trail's* boot.

'Fancy a walk, Tom?'

'Sorry, no can do. I'm due to go swimming with Edith. We've joined that fancy sports centre again and this time she's determined to get our money's worth. She's on a mission for our fortieth wedding anniversary. 'Slim and Trim' are the watch words now. Oh, and no alcohol. But on this diet you can have as much lime juice and fizzy water as you wish. And green salads galore. Why don't you come and join us, as our guest?'

'No, but thanks. I'm not much for swimming, never have been. Last time I went swimming was on our honeymoon in Corfu. The water was so warm, it was like swimming in a bath.'

They agreed to play golf on Sunday morning then Tom drove off.

Donald changed into his walking boots. Retrieving his walking pole, he stared at the empty boot of the *CRV*. The words escaped, sotto voce:

'Perhaps Gemma is right. Perhaps I should get another dog, get me out and about more. Something smaller. Maybe a whippet like the *CRV* lady in the next street. Or a rescue greyhound like that couple who live across from her. Something not too demanding.'

Donald thought about the whippet woman's cheery face. It seemed she was always smiling. Although they had never actually spoken, they always waved to each other when passing in their cars. Her *CRV* was the same colour as his and the same registration year.

He felt he should do a longer walk, try to tire himself out in the hope it would help him to sleep better. Miriam had emphasised how important it was to push himself physically, stressing the strong link between physical and mental health. He set off, slowly at first then forcing himself to pick up pace. When he reached the split in the path, he turned right, up the steep incline, heading for the woods, hoping to hear a woodpecker or see the jays.

Two hours later he was back at the car park, surprised to see the car next to his was the whippet woman's *CRV*. There was no sign of her. As he changed out of his muddy walking boots, the sky clouded over with rain approaching.

He turned at the sound of the dog's yip and saw her beaming smile.

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'Oh, hello, it's you then. I saw the car and I was hoping we might meet at last.'

With short grey-blond hair damp under a woolly hat, she was draped in a full-length padded coat, toting a large sports bag on her shoulder.

'Yes. I'm Donnie from number twelve, round in Kipford Drive. So, how do you like the CRV?'

'Yes, ideal for my purposes. It was your Jane who persuaded me to go for it. In fact, we both got £500 off by buying from the dealer on the same day. She was very good at negotiating, was Jane.'

She held out her hand and as he reached to shake it the dog gave another yip.

'I'm Angela, number fifteen in Kipford Road. Excuse my appearance, I've just been wild swimming down at Abie's Loch but when I saw the clouds turning black, I skedaddled back here with Maddie. She loves muddy puddles but absolutely hates the rain. Her full name is Madeline. She's fourteen now but when she was a puppy, she was a right little tearaway, weren't you Maddie. Let me show you her party trick.'

The dog approached, sat in front of his feet and offered a paw which Donald duly shook.

'She's a lovely wee doggie. We used to have Border Collies. Hector passed away two years ago while Jane was in the Beatson for the first time. We decided he would be our last.'

'Yes, I know. Jane and I used to meet during our doggie walks. Hector was a great old soul. He and Maddie got on well. Donnie, did you realise that we're almost back-to-back neighbours? I can see your house from my upstairs window. You have a lovely garden.'

'Thanks. It was her pride and joy but I'm afraid it's getting away from me. I'm not sure what I'm doing. When she was too frail to do it, I thought of getting a gardener in to guide me, but Jane refused. She left me a notebook, a sort of what to do and when, a month-by-month guide I suppose but it assumed I would know the names of the plants.'

'Yes, I know. I miss Jane terribly too. We were dog walking friends for years and years and during her illness we kept in touch by *Facebook*. My Jim passed to prostate cancer three years ago and in the aftermath, my world was all topsy-turvy. Losing him knocked me sideways. I've only just about got myself sorted. For me the key is keeping busy, don't leave time for moping. So, I can guess some of what you're going through and if you would like help with your garden, please just ask. Maybe you could help with my hedges? A sort of mutual garden aid society?'

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'Yes, that might work. Look, forgive me being nosey but when I saw you with a chap in your car, I thought he was your husband.'

'No, no. No, Duncan is my brother. His eyesight is failing. Macular degeneration, so he doesn't drive nowadays. He can still bowl so I collect and deliver him to his matches. He lives in Lenzie. He's a confirmed bachelor is my brother, married to his huge garden. He used to supply all his neighbours with organic fruit and vegetables but we're on a different plan now, slowly re-wilding it. It's a struggle though, he's fiercely independent, always has been. He was a surgeon, a 'wrist man'. If you meet him, please don't start him on wrists as he tends to go on for hours.'

'Angela, you're right about me being shattered. Although I knew Jane was terminal, when she finally died, it all became so horribly real. Talking to her photograph helps. My therapist Miriam says I'm still in shock, even though Jane and I could both see it coming. It's weird, I keep imagining I can hear her moving about, expecting her to walk into the room. And I'm still trying to sort through her clothes but that's weird too. It's as if she is looking over my shoulder, watching and scolding me. If only Gemma was around, she could have done all that. Maybe there's a charity that could send someone to do it for me.'

'Donnie, look, I know this sounds trite, especially right now, so early into the grieving process but it *will* get better. I've read up on this and it is odd how the human mind works. Eventually we realise that the other person isn't coming back, that they've gone for good. It's then that self-preservation kicks in and we realise there's nothing else for it but to go forward and make the best of our situation. Anyway, forgive my lecturing style. I used to teach History, back in the day. Seems like a million years ago. I took early retirement to care for Jim. He kept telling me it was a mistake and I realise now he was right. After he died, I just couldn't face supply teaching. So, there we have it. On we go, eh?'

'Well, Angela, here comes the rain. Pity, I was enjoying our chat.'

'Donnie, why don't I get Maddie settled in the boot and we can grab a coffee in the garden centre and share notes there? Don't worry, I'm fully clothed under this coat, honest!'

'Yes, that would be nice. But let me treat you, please.'

'OKAY. Right, Maddie, in you go, good girl. Come here and stand still while I wipe your paws.'

During their chat, they swapped telephone numbers and email addresses and agreed to meet at the same spot two days later, weather permitting.

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Later, in the afternoon, when he finally gave in and used *Google* to solve the last of the crossword clues, Donald decided to open Jane's letter:

Dear Mrs Forrest,

Firstly, a big, big thanks for your most generous donation to the Beatson Family Support Group. Without contributions such as yours we would not be able to operate.

Secondly, as requested, I have added your husband's name to our list. We will email him in due course with an invitation to join the North West Glasgow branch. Our organiser Stella Grainger will also be in touch soon. Stella is our lead fundraiser. She said she knows Donald from Langside Primary School days and that your husband is just the man she has been looking for. I guess she'll have Donald doing leaflet drops, knocking on doors. She really is quite persuasive.

I've also been in touch with my ex-husband Ewen who has promised to make contact with Donald to try to set up an appointment at a mutually convenient date and time. Please be aware that Ewen is, I quote, 'always busy' but, to be fair he does stick to his promises.

Finally, I understand from your oncology team that the new Austrian treatment regime you are scheduled for has proved very successful over recent months. It sounds very hopeful.

Good luck from all of us here at BFG.

Best regards,

Eleanor Drennan

Donald stared out of the window at the drizzle and tried hard to remember anyone called Stella Grainger. Nothing came until he remembered Estella Campbell also known as Bubbles because of her short curly hair, the girl who was always top of the class at the end of each week, leaving him in second place by a good margin. The exception had been when she had been off school for a few months with Scarlet Fever and he had been moved up to top of the class.

He reached for his iPad and entered: *Stella Grainger nee Campbell*.

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Her image showed a small slim woman with tight blonded curls standing beside a tall, lanky, boyish faced young man wearing a graduation robe. Both had large beaky noses, unmistakably mother and son.

He read on:

Austen Grainger who recently celebrated his twenty-fourth birthday, poses for our photographer with his mother Stella on the steps of Glasgow University to celebrate his award, a PhD for research into the causes of prostate cancer. His findings are set to revolutionise the treatment of cancers of every kind.

Dr Grainger has accepted a post as a Researcher at John Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. He will start in his new position next week. His mother will travel with him, to help him settle and to enjoy a short holiday following her recent retirement as a GP in Glasgow.

Many readers will remember Austen's father Austen Grainger Snr was a renowned cell microbiologist and served on the Board of The Beatson Cancer Charity for several years before his untimely death in a motorbike accident.

Donald zoomed in on the mother's face and concluded she was indeed Estella Campbell. He checked the date of the article and noted the graduation had been on the day of Jane's funeral.

Given what he had read, it seemed unlikely he would hear from Stella Grainger but out of curiosity he re-entered into *Google*:

*Stella Grainger retired General Practitioner, Glasgow.*

This time he read from an article in the Milngavie and Bearsden Herald.

Stella's smiling face shone off the screen, clearly a photograph from twenty years earlier taken long before her decision to retire. The article read:

Dr Stella Grainger retires from Greendykes Medical Practice, Bishopbriggs.

Staff and patients wish to record their sincere thanks and send their warmest best wishes for a long and healthy retirement. It is hoped that her new role with the Dog Trust preparing and certifying dogs as Thera-Pets will prove a huge success. We wish her luck in everything she tries.

He turned to his photograph of Jane.

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'Well, Jane. It seems I might have two ladies hoping to befriend me. What do you think?'

He decided to look across at Angela's house from the spare bedroom upstairs, the one that had been Gemma's room which Jane had converted to her dressmaking studio. They had hoped for other children but after the miscarriage, they stopped trying.

Gemma had won a place at Oxford to study English Literature where she had met Shaun, from Auckland, now an Investment Banker in his father's firm. Donald and Jane had never visited New Zealand but Gemma had come home every other year until her kids started to arrive. She now had three boys with a girl on the way, due in two months. Jane had called them her *FaceTime* grandchildren.

From the upstairs window Donald located Angela's house. It was a larger version of his own with two dormers upstairs. Apart from her car and dog, and that she had taught at Lenzie Academy, he knew almost nothing about her. Jane had been the one who had known everyone while he was more of a loner, bird-spotting and more recently, golf, which Jane and Edith had instigated, to try to divert him during her illness.

Donald's work as a resident supervising engineer on overseas construction projects, mainly power plants in Indonesia, had meant almost thirty years living out of a suitcase. It had been going well, he thought, and he was intending to retire early until the firm he worked for went under spectacularly, leaving him with a pittance of a pension after years of paying in extra. He had also ploughed every spare penny buying shares in *Pearsons International Projects* under their generous share purchase scheme. Then, without warning, *Pearsons* went under, taking his pension and shares with it, an estimated loss of around £1.45 million after tax at the time of the collapse.

It had been the money from the sale of Jane's parents' large Edinburgh villa and their holiday home in Fife which had enabled them to enjoy a reasonably comfortable lifestyle, with at least one and sometimes two summertime river cruises and a Winter Sun fortnight at a five-star resort hotel in the Canaries.

Returning from his reverie, he spotted Angela kneeling in her garden, wearing gloves with a trug of tools beside her. From this angle, viewed from the side, she could have been a taller, slimmer version of Jane. He watched her progress, moving her kneeler and trug as she worked her way along the edge of the border.

She stood up, stretched her arms above her shoulders and rolled her head to loosen cramped muscles. She had a good figure: 'slim and trim' came to mind. She turned, looking directly at him, making him feel suddenly guilty. She waved and he waved back. Holding her hand to her ear, she pulled her mobile from her pocket and dialled. He reached to his side and unclipped his own:

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'Donnie, d'you know, I was just thinking about you. I've got a fish pie ready for the oven. Would you like to join me?'

'Yes, Angela. Will I bring a bottle of wine?'

'Mmm, is it white? I only drink white nowadays and usually only at weekends.'

'Oyster Bay Cabernet Blanc?'

'Lovely, my all-time favourite. I'll get an ice bucket ready and put the pie in the oven. How about 5:30 ish? Gives me time to shower and change.'

'Right then Angela, it's a date!'

'Yes, a date! Imagine!' She giggled and rang off.

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The letter from Estella arrived on the following Wednesday. It was handwritten in a neat cursive hand.

Donald opened it after breakfast:

Dearest Darling Donnie,

Look, things have changed. Sorry. I had originally planned to ask you out to my place to well, you know, now you are a free agent again, at last.

Anyway, I'll leave you to Eleanor's best endeavours. She will be needing to replace me as I have decided to settle here in Baltimore. The thing is, Austen Jnr needs a lot of looking after. Like many brilliant people he has high functioning Asperger's, but the people here recognise this and have set me up with a small office next to the laboratory where he is working and have arranged for me to participate as his research assistant.

Well, that's how I met Ritch. Do you remember Ritchie Mackintosh. His father had a car sales business, back in the day. Anyway, Ritchie and I were study buddies at Glasgow Uni together, but I lost track of him after I met Austen Snr. Well, Donnie, to cut from long to short, Ritchie and I are a couple again. So amazingly wonderful to share a warm bed after all those dry years, if you understand my meaning.



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So, my dear, dear darling Donnie, I bid you goodbye (again!) and hope that you find someone kind to spend your lonely nights with. Or you could just think of me?

Stella.

Donald shuddered at the memory of the graduation ball when a very drunk Estella Campbell had pursued him into the car park, latching both hands around his neck and hauling his mouth onto hers. He could still taste the acrid mix of stale cigarettes and Vodka and Blackcurrant. He had tried to reason with her but she had backed him up against her father's huge old Daimler then forced him into the back with a triumphant shove, unzipping her ball gown to reveal herself naked then launching on top of him.

Her head had thudded into the door handle rendering her unconscious.

Using remembered skills from his time in the Boys' Brigade, Donald had eased her into a recovery position, checked her pulse and respiration to be sure she was not in danger, leaving her with her dress draped over her before hiding the ignition keys and her purse in the glove box then making his escape.

Donald turned to Jane's photograph:

'Why do I feel as if I've just had another lucky escape? I think I'll be much safer with Angela. We have much more in common. Do you approve?'

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Donnie had just decanted a large pot of Cullen Skink into a series of single-person Tupperware portions for the freezer when Angela rang his mobile:

'Donnie, my daughter Esme, the QC one who lives in Edinburgh, has a holiday house in Crail. Her *AirBnb* bookers have withdrawn at the last moment and she's offered it to me. Do you fancy coming with me? It's free for two weeks but we don't need to stay the whole time. So long as we tidy up her garden, there is no charge. I have a country membership at Crail Golf Course. Bring your clubs and we could have a few rounds, if you like. Did I say it has two double bedrooms, both en-suite?'

'Angela, that sounds great. As you know, I'm not good driving on longer journeys. When I was overseas, I had a driver and back here, Jane did the driving, especially on longer trips.'

'That's fine with me. I'll drive. Anyway, my car almost knows its own way to Crail.'

'Great. Just one thing, I'm a bit of a snorer.'

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'Really? Me too! Or so I'm told.'

'Right then. When are we going?'

'The house is free now, if you fancy going today?'

'Why not! I'll ring Tom and put him in the picture. I think they're off in their campervan soon so our golf will be on hold anyway.'

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During their visit to Crail, Angela persuaded Donnie to join her wild swimming. They went online to Amazon and ordered a wet suit, wet shoes, swimming paddle gloves and a snorkel.

Over the holiday they swam off the sands at Crail and at the bay at Ellie, but their favourites became the abandoned swimming pools at Cellardyke and St Monans.

After a discussion about the dangers of sliding into alcohol habituation in retirement, they followed Tom and Edith's example and embarked on an alcohol-free period, spending their evenings in quiet companionship reading, completing jigsaws, playing Scrabble or other board games from Esme's entertainment cupboard. Although there was a TV with a satellite dish, they did not switch it on.

When Donald returned home, there was a small avalanche of mail waiting. He sorted it into piles: 'junk', 'bills' and 'possibly important'.

The brown A4 envelope with his name and addressed scrawled in an untidy hand caught his attention. Inside was a colour photograph of a kidney and white greyhound standing in profile with her head turned towards the lens.

A scribbled message informed:

Donnie,

You will probably have heard from my ex, the imperious Eleanor! My lucky escape, but costly!

Sorry about the delay in getting back to you. I've been away trekking in Spain with my new wife Rosie for the last two months. She is a powerhouse, always on the move, ten years younger than me. This trip was her retirement present to herself after thirty-odd years running a small animal vet practice in Saltcoats. We made that whole trip by public transport. She hates flying which is, she says,

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'environmentally unfriendly'. So much for my career as a pilot then! Hey, who said retirement is meant to be easy?

To the point.

As the co-ordinator for the Scottish Greyhound Sanctuary, I am pleased to offer you an appointment to meet 'Lady Jane Grey', pictured. Her kennel name is 'Spot'. She is five years old and in very good health. As you might know, greyhounds make ideal pets and her present foster parents have rated her as 'ten out of ten' for good manners.

They're expecting your call. Emma and Gerri Stansfield-Baker. Look them up on our website and give them a ring to make an appointment to meet Spot, no rush.

Ewen.

PS Do you remember our callow youth when we used to play for the Uni squash team? How are your knees? If they're better than mine, fancy a swap?

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Donald rang Angela:

'I have a big favour to ask. I've been offered a rescue greyhound. It's up for adoption. The problem is, she's with foster parents in Campbeltown. *Google* says it's over four hours away, way beyond my concentration levels. Would you be able to take me, please?'

'Of course, no probs. I'll ask Sheena and Ronnie to look after Maddie. They have a rescue greyhound. Maddie loves cuddling into Brillo, her idea of bliss.'

'Thanks. I'll make contact and see what the foster parents say. But it's too far to drive there and back in a day, surely?'

'Donnie, here's an idea for you. Why don't we make a mini holiday out of it? Find a nice self-catering place nearby. It's absolutely ages since I've been down there. Did I ever tell you my grandparents were originally from just outside Campbeltown, a place called Peninver. I've still got cousins down that way. I'll *Facebook* them. Maybe they'll offer to put us up. What do you say?'

'Thanks. I'll pay for everything as payback for Crail. That was the best holiday I've had in years. What with me working overseas and Jane's Auntie Phamie in her nineties, and then the cancer treatment, we just got out of the way of holidaying towards the end.'

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'Me too. Crail was amazing, wasn't it. It's just so much fun having someone to share with, isn't it?'

'Yes, Angela, we seem to make a good team. Thanks for rescuing me from the doldrums but my garden's gone mad while we've been away. There are things sprouting all over the place, some of which might or might not be weeds.'

'Here too. This is the late spring surge. Look, I suggest when you ring them you try to arrange it to give us a few days to blitz both gardens first though, eh? How about you bring your fancy mower round to me and those super-duper long-reach battery hedge trimmers and we'll do mine first, eh?'

'I'll be round in half an hour. Are you remembering I have golf with Tom first thing tomorrow?'

'No worries, I'll make a start on yours and we can finish it off after lunch.'

'OKAY, it's a deal. Thanks.'

'Donnie, do you have any of your yummy Cullen Skink left in your freezer?'

'Yes, lots.'

'Why not bring some round and I'll get a nice crusty loaf from M&S. Then, after tea, we'll keep going until we have this place shipshape and then do yours tomorrow.'

'Sounds good to me.'

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Three months later.

The letter arrived from Allison and Allison enclosing the final statement confirming the net sum of £342,000 was due to Donald from Jane's estate. By mutual agreement, when he signed to complete the paperwork, an equal amount allocated to Gemma would be remitted to her personal account in Auckland.

With his own savings this meant he had just over £500,000 to see him out in retirement. Added to this was his pittance pension provided by the fund set up by the *Pearsons'* administrator and the equally minuscule pension due to him from his UK state pension, much reduced as he had lived as a tax exile for most of his working life.

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The surprise was his widower's pension from Jane's NHS employment as a Dentist, adding just over £23,000 per annum before tax.

There was also a copy of Donald's revised Will and Testament with Gemma the sole recipient of her father's estate, duly signed by himself and notarised by Allison and Allison.

The house was the remaining item. Donald and Jane had owned the property jointly. The mortgage had been paid off years earlier. Currently the local market was depressed and the house had been valued at £380,000.

As the solicitors had pointed out, according to Donald's written fifty-fifty split agreement with Gemma, the logic was clear: either Donald should buy out Gemma's £160,000 share now or sell up to release the capital. Instead, a compromise had been set out to allow him to remain in residence meanwhile. Under this arrangement Donald would be responsible for maintaining the property in a good state of repair monitored by annual inspections. The codicil would run for five years to give Donald time to decide what he planned to do.

As he was signing the last of these documents, Angela gave her usual triple press on the front doorbell before using her key to enter with a cheery:

*'Hello, it's me! Are you decent?'*

*'Ah, great timing Angela. Would you be willing to witness my signatures in these legal documents please?'*

Donald had reviewed earlier drafts with Angela who had made similar arrangements with her two daughters.

*'Well Donnie, that was quick. Only about seven months. It took almost a year and a half for me to get to this stage with Jim's estate. So, Donnie, the big question is, are you sure you want to do this? Why not sell up and move with me as my rent-free lodger, no strings. You could do most of the cooking if you want. And the hedges and lawn.'*

*'No Angela, but thanks again for your most generous offer. Look, I agree we suit each other to a tee. At least so far. And as I said to Miriam, it was you who've saved me, turned my life around. And she agrees wholeheartedly, as she said in her sign-off letter discharging me from her list.'*

*'So, Donnie. I sense there is a 'but' coming?'*

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'Angela, my worry is you would get fed up with me and my odd ways and then have the problem of getting rid of me and that could be awkward. So, if you're okay with it, I've decided I'll soldier on here for a year or so and see how we do. OKAY? I mean, where we are now, well, for me it's brilliant. I can't remember a time when I was as happy as I am now, not since Gemma was born. I wake up every morning with a smile on my face, looking forward to our next adventure.'

'Yes, Donnie, I agree. It's a good plan. Let's not rush into anything we might regret. I suppose what makes me want you to do it is to be sure you want to be with me *for always*. I can't bear the idea of living alone again, now that we've come so far. When I wake in the night and you're not there beside me, I feel scared.'

'But Angela, I do want to be with you for always, surely you know that by now? Look, we can still share everything but let's see how we go, shall we?'

'You're right, Donnie, of course you are. I've always been impatient I know that. Let's do it your way, take time. Pass me that pen and I'll sign your papers and we'll carry on as we are, at least meanwhile. But, Donnie, don't be surprised if I keep trying to get you round to my place on a permanent basis, OKAY?'

'OKAY, it's a deal. Let's get to a letterbox and get this behind us.'

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With the letter posted they decided to go out to Mugdock Country Park to swim at Abie's Loch (officially called Drumbrock Loch).

In the car, Angela made her suggestion:

'Donnie, shall we try the new upmarket version of *Crabshakk*, the one just off Byres Road? Sheena and Ronnie went last Friday. She said the layout and décor are amazing and the food is delicious. They had half portions of Cullen Skink as a starter then shared a Dover Sole with market veggies on the side. The servers were totally relaxed with that approach and the prices are reasonable. What do you say? Shall I try, see if they can take us at around five o'clock?'

'Yes, please.'

'Right, I'll go online now and a try to get us a booking, OKAY?'

'Yes, but the big question is, can their Cullen Skink possibly be as good as mine?'