Third Time Lucky?

The Beatson [1] Café was always busy after visiting times and surgeries. Stuck near the back of the long line, the tall medic shuffled forwards. At nearly two metres, she could see the harassed lone Barista darting around like a demented leprechaun while talking ten to the dozen on his phone via ear buds.

Anita felt her promotion interview had gone fairly well - *would this be third time lucky?*

She had been an hour early so she could check on the other candidate. Perhaps this ploy had been a mistake. The stress of waiting while the others came went and left, (some of them after only ten minutes), had left her tense but hopeful.

Rolling her shoulders, breathing deeply, holding then exhaling slowly and fully, she tried to relax as she had been taught at Pilates. Rotating her head slowly from side to side she stopped to look out of the window at the trees and the clear blue sky - *a perfect Autumn day.*

Rifling through her playlist she found Eva's version [2] , popped in her new Apple Ear Buds, closed her eyes and drifted off.

A voice intruded, querulous:

'SCUUUS ME, move furrit, why don't ye?'

This demand was accompanied by a gentle shove.

'Keep your hair on, why don't YOU?'

Turning briefly, Anita saw an elderly woman in a long Parka-type coat, clean but a bit tatty, leaning on a Zimmer, no make-up, long grey hairs on her chin, wearing a poorly-fitting blond wig. Her eyes were gaunt, haunted, exhausted.

She seemed familiar - *was she a patient?*

Stepping forward, Anita closed the three-person gap which had opened up while she was day-dreaming. The woman followed and ran into her, catching the back of her right buttock.

1

The Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre is Scotland's largest specialist cancer facility and the UK's busiest cancer centre in terms of clinical activity, located on the Gartnavel Hospital Campus in Glasgow's West End.

2

Eva Cassidy, Autumn Leaves YouTube link https://youtu.be/xXBNlApwh0c?si=0ZR7yL2Rc_3PQxqh

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'*Fuck!* Sorry hen, Ah cannae seem tae get the hang o' this bluddy fuckin' brake.'

'It's okay, no harm done.

The Café manager Sally joined the diminutive Roberto behind the counter. The queue moved forward more quickly. Anita did not know Roberto's surname, only that he had been born and raised in Easterhouse.

'Buongiorno Roberto, Un Flat White con tre dosi di caffè, per favore.'

Although he did not speak Italian well, he understood it.

'A three-shot Flat white coming up. Is Tuesday not your day off?'

'Yes but it's a sort of D-Day, really. If I don't get the promotion this time, I'm off.'

'Where to?'

'Who knows. Maybe it's time for a change.'

'And you're a Radiologist?'

'Yes, well remembered.'

'Easy-peasy Dr Bolleti, it's on your badge.'

'Eagle eyes, beak to match.'

The Zimmer lady being served by Sally complained:

'Hey, kin sumday no' kerry this fur me. Ah cannae dae it with this contrapshun.'

Anita responded, a bit reluctantly:

'Please, let me. There's a free seat over there.'

'Thanks. Hey, Ah know you, hen. You zapped me every day at thurteen minutes efter four fur five weeks but it dinnae work so it's back oan the chemo again. *Fuckin' chemo*. Six rolls o' toilet paper every fuckin' day. Cannae get oot the hoose wi'oot inconstinent pants. Cannae even make it tae the Bingo. Ah've nae fuckin' life left wurth livin'.'

'Sorry, I've forgotten your name?'

'Nae wunner, ye must huv done hunners like me. Ah'm Jeniffer Cochrane, Jenny.'

'There you are, Jenny.'

'Thanks. Kin ye get me three sugars, hen, an' two o' they wee pot's o' milk.'

'Back in a tick.'

When Anita returned, Jenny was staring at her mobile phone, tears streaming.

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Anita sat across from her and waited, studying the woman carefully.

Poor woman's on her last lap. Probably only a month or two left.

The woman sniffed, wiped her face with the back of her coat sleeve.

'A WhatsApp fay Henrietta ma dawturn-law. It's her Jaden, Ma grandsun, he's loast his joab at Asda. Thur cuttin' back. *Bastirts.* Jaden's goat learnun difficultays. He's only been wi' Asda fur aboot a month. No' really his dream joab, naw. Stacking shelves a' night lang but it went arse fur elbow so they put him on cleanin' the flairs. Fucked up on that tae. So he's oot, back tae the brew. Turns oot the night manager's a right wee shite. Ye know the kind, aw mooth and nae baws.'

'Is he *physically* fit, Jaden?'

'Aye, he's still playin' fitba at thurty-eight, a strikur wi' The Bens [3] an' playur o' the year two years in a row, tae. He's big an' aw, aboot the same height as yursel, hen.'

Due to her height, Anita had always found it difficult to sustain a romance.'

'So, Jaden's talented at football and Benburb are a very good team.'

Jenny fiddled with her phone and handed it to Anita.

'Ma album o' fottays and videos o' Jaden.'

'*Wow*, Jaden's quite a looker, isn't he?'

Anita enlarged his face.

No tattoos. Clean shaven, nice teeth, short fairish hair and kind, smiling brown eyes.

Anita felt a ripple of excitement - *not too bad. Not too bad at all.*

'Aye, an' he's a real nice, nice boay, so he is.'

'I used to play centre back for West Park United Ladies [4]. Since they folded I've been looking around. Actually, I wrote a few weeks ago to Benburb asking for a try-out for their Ladies' team.'

3

Benburb Football Club (The Bens) is a Scottish football club based in Govan, Glasgow. Formed in 1885, the club is a member of the Scottish Junior Football Association and currently competes in the West of Scotland Football League. Benburb's colours are blue and white.

4

Formed in 2017 by West Park United (Bishopbriggs) , their senior women's side competed in the Scottish Women's Football league before folding in September 2026.

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'***Huv ye?*** Ma Daniel, Jaden's faither's the Sekrity o' The Bens Ladies' so Ah'll tell him he shood gie ye a run oot.'

'Thanks Jenny. Look, the reason I asked if Jaden is fit is because I was in Dobbies at Milngavie the other day and I overheard the Manager saying she was looking for someone to pick up litter and water plants and take heavy items out to customers' cars. I guess it might just be temporary on the run up to Christmas but you never know.'

'Jaden lives wi' his Mammy an' Daddy in Bishopbriggs. He huznae goat a caur just noo but he does hae a fancy racin' bike so it's no' too faur tae Dobbies, is it?'

'So Jaden can drive, he has a licence?'

'Aye, but his auld banger failt its MOT an' since he didnae huv a joab, Ah used some o' ma Bingo winnings tae buy him a kit and he bult that fancy bike himsel, so he did.'

'Tell you what Jenny, I'll call into Dobbie's and ask them to send him an application form.'

'Naw hen, thanks, but it widnae wurk cos Jaden's displexic tae readin' and writtun'. He's mare o' a talker, so he is. An he's posh an' aw oan, accoot o' his Mammy. Oor Henrietta's frae Newton Mearns. She's a Dental Nurse noo, worked her way up from being a Rayshepshunist, so she did. A real nice, nice lassie, just like yursel'.'

'Ah, yes, my youngest brother is slightly dyslexic. He was given special glasses and it made a huge difference. Tell you what, I'll get the form and if you give me your phone number, we can fill it in over the phone and I'll mail it to his home with a stamped envelope so he only needs to sign it and post it to Dobbies. Would that work, do you think?'

'Aye, thanks hen, that's totally brullyint, so it is.'

Anita copied Jenny's name and number to her Contacts App and created a WhatsApp link inviting Jenny to join.

'Thanks hen. Wait till Henrietta hears aboot this, She'll be owur the moon, so she will. O' lookit the fuckin' time! Ah'll huv tae get weaving so as no' tae miss ma train tae Partick.'

'Me too, I get a train from Hyndland out to Bearsden. Come on, we can go together, yes?'

Sitting in the Waiting Room, (they had both missed their trains), Anita's mobile pinged. It was an email from the Appointments Committee confirming her promotion. At thirty-seven she was probably the youngest Senior Radiologist in Scotland, she thought.

Jenny had been busy on her WhatsApp account, spreading the news about the Dobbies job opportunity. The phone rang. She checked the caller. Holding the phone to her ear, smiling and nodding, Jenny's face lit up, transforming her.

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'But she's here Jaden, haud on, Ah'll let ye talk tae her.'

'Hello Jaden. I'm Anita Bolleti.'

'Hi Anita. Mum WhatsApp-ed me with the news about the possible job at Dobbies. Thanks for that. Sounds good. I'm on the train from Queen Street due at Hyndland in two We're in the Waiting Room.'minutes. I'm coming to help Gran Jenny to get home. Thanks for helping her.'

'We're in the Waiting Room.'

'Ah, here we are, with you in a moment or two.'

Anita handed the phone back to Jenny.

He has a rich baritone and perfect grammar to match his smiling face and kind brown eyes.

Anita watched him approach. He was wearing a blue and white track suit and matching trainers.

The ripple of desire was back. Her mind was buzzing. She opened her phone and checked her face.

The Waiting Room door opened and he smiled, offering his hand.

She rose and shook hands – *it was like electricity!*

'Hi, nice to meet you Anita. I hear you're into football. Mum has been onto Dad and he's keen to give you a try-out. There's a practice session this evening, if you're free?'

'Yes, that would be great, thanks. What time?'

'Warm-up at six o'clock. It's a Guys and Gals session.'

'Jaden, thur's ma train comin' in sun.'

'Okay Gran, here we go.'

Smiling over his shoulder he added:

'Bye Anita, see you tonight then?'

'Yes, great. See you later --.'

He beat her to it!

'Alligator!'

She watched them board. As the doors pinged to close, he stuck his head out and gave her a thumbs up.

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She waved.

He waved back.

Schemin, she made her plan:

From Bearsden station she would drive direct to Dobbies, ask for the form. After the practice session she would help him fill it in and deliver it first thing tomorrow.

Perhaps after training they might go for a meal.

Maybe Cellino's?

Better still, choose from the freshly made carry-outs and eat it at her place?

She put in her Ear Buds, restarted Eva, closed her eyes and drifted away.

Could Jaden be the one?

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