

Trumped

By John Bonthron

This is a story set in *Glasgow* in 1958 against a background of greyhound racing.

It is dedicated to Louisa, from the Writers' Circus, who suggested the theme of "Betrayal".

First Prologue

"Betrayal" is all around us. Am I right?

Perhaps it is mostly ourselves that we betray, by easily giving in to our urges, or not being the best we can be, and lazily seeking the line of least resistance.

Although we are familiar with this aspect of ourselves and connive, by our behaviour and our thought life, to ignore the voice that shouts at us from within, we seem regularly surprised to find this same behaviour prevalent in others, especially if they say the words we want to hear.

And who said these words? I did, your humble Muse. (But I am sure they have been said more concisely, elegantly by other, wiser heads, many times before.)

The odd, some said ugly, flamboyant and mostly unpopular Disraeli was born a Jew. But, for convenience and to clear his path, his immigrant father baptised his young son into the Christian Church. Most of his life Disraeli the son was bankrupt, scribing furiously and variously to earn just enough to fend off his creditors, while rising to become a most unlikely Prime Minister, given that he was an 'outsider'.

It is Disraeli who reminds us of the power of flattery.

In the beginning Queen Victoria loathed Disraeli, and would not allow him to be in the same room with her, unless compelled to do so by Matters of State. But, after Albert flew up ahead of her, QV came around, and in the end, she adored Disraeli, eventually conferring on him every honour that she could persuade her reluctant entourage to bestow.

To his diary Disraeli confided these or similar words:

"Everyone likes flattery. Royalty needs, expects, flattery.

With Royalty you have to lay it on thick, with a trowel."

And so to our tale....

It is post-war Glasgow.

SuperMac has just told us that we've never had it so good!

Going to the Dogs

The evening of Friday 28th March 1958 was cool and dry, with a very slight breeze: ideal for greyhound racing. A half-moon hung over Shawfield Stadium, a few miles to the east of Glasgow city centre. The floodlights sparkled around the racetrack as the announcer's voice crackled from the Tannoy system:

'Welcome to our Friday Gala night. We have eight races for you, including the Grand Final of the Fraser Cup. As our regulars will know, this race is the culmination of our winter racing season, with a staggering purse of One Thousand Guineas¹ going to the winning owner. This is a "Winner takes All" race, with no prizes for second or third place. So, Gentlemen, do make sure you hold back something for that one.'

Now feast your eyes on these fine specimens as they parade for us ahead of tonight's first race. The prize-money is One Hundred and Thirty-Five Guineas, to be split between the first three dogs across the finishing line.

In Lane One we have The Kings of Hearts, a three-year-old dog handled by the voluptuous Sandra. Let's hear it for King and Sandra, gentlemen.

And in Lane Two....

Sandra gave the crowd a shy half-wave and then slipped her hand down onto Trip's neck. (Trip was The King of Hearts' kennel name). The smallish dog was sweating, and she knew he would not run well. She had already told her father about this; and her employer Wilson Young, but no one else. This was her rule, and part of the 'code'. Sandra and her family were part of the Shawfield clan, the insiders: the punters were on their own, the outsiders.

Until very recently, the tall curvy Sandra Bletcher had accepted her fate as a non-runner in the marriage stakes. At twenty-nine, with three sisters all younger and prettier already married with families, Sandra feared that she was destined to be stuck at home, living with her parents forever. The Bletchers were denizens of the Oatlands district of Glasgow, and Sandra had been brought up in a tenement building opposite Richmond Park, on the banks of the River Clyde. The Bletcher home was only ten minutes from the kennels, and a few minutes from Shawfield

¹ Equivalent to about £25,000 in 2014

Stadium, the organisation that gave Wilf Bletcher and his extended family its living.

Sandra's dogs were her life.

Wilson Young owned only part of Trip, but would be furious if the dog lost. Despite what he had said earlier, the man hated to lose any race, especially on big occasions like tonight. According to Wilson Young, it was always Sandra's fault if any of his dogs lost. He would almost certainly chastise her, either later, in front of everybody, or, if she was lucky, he would do so in private, tomorrow at the kennels.

It was his best dog Trump, (race name The Ace of Spades), that Sandra was more worried about. Trump would run in Race 8, the Gala Final. Wilson Young owned this dog outright, calling Trump "his pension fund". Her employer was convinced that Trump would win the Grand Final, fulfilling his lifelong ambition. Sandra knew that he would have a large (illegal) side bet riding on Trump.

Sandra was nervous, unsure that she could go through with it, even though she had given Bobby her promise. He might be watching her from the crowd, she thought, scanning the faces. Fridays were always difficult for him, and Bobby had never been to a race, she remembered him saying.

The large crowd comprised mainly of scruffy working men with stubbly faces under cloth caps. Some were still in overalls, most smoking cheap Woodbines or Golden Virginia roll-ups. Many of the older men smoked pipes. Only a few were inebriated: serious gamblers seldom imbibed to excess, even if they won. They got their buzz from the adrenalin of uncertainty during the short dash to the finish.

The Bookies were all better dressed, nearly all sporting soft felt hats tipped back on their heads, standing on their boxes, touting their odds. Most were clean-shaven but a few had thin military moustaches. These men smoked cigars.

The busiest time at the Bookies, when the punters got most excited, was just before the start of a race, as the dogs were paraded around the stadium, before their handlers loaded them into the starting traps.

Each Bookie had his board-man and his bag-man. These two were the brains of every bookmaking business, watching the odds posted by the other Bookmakers while monitoring the bets they had taken themselves. Their job was to do the required mental arithmetic quickly enough to control their own 'position', by adjusting the odds on offer for each of the six dogs in every race.

Sandra's father Wilf Bletcher was the bag-man for "McGuinness Bookmakers", a long-standing family business now led by Dennis, known as young Denny, who had taken over a year earlier from his father, old Royce, a widower. Some said that Royston McGuinness was now living in Spain with his fancy-woman of many years. Others said they had been bumped-off by young Denny and dumped in a flooded quarry. The Police had been around asking, but they had dropped their enquiries for lack of evidence. It was clear however that young Denny was a man to be feared. Everyone said so.

Sandra had found this job as a kennel-maid after a long spell of working alongside her Mum at the counter of Bertie's Bakery. It was her father who had suggested it, used his influence. Wilson Young, now in his late sixties, was a small burly, aggressive man, who made a precarious living from racing and breeding greyhounds. Currently he had fifteen dogs, with space for another three. He only dealt in male dogs, putting them to stud if they won enough races to attract cash offers, or, depending on the dame, he might accept the pick of the litter for services rendered.

Wilson Young's kennels were in Polmadie, in the shadow of the newly improved Glasgow Corporation Refuse Disposal Depot, only a short walk from Shawfield Stadium. Sandra hated the constant smell - in summer it stuck to her clothes. There were flies everywhere. Wilson Young and his kennels were starting to get her down. But mostly the man left her to run the kennels without interfering.

After being stuck in Bertie's Bakery, she loved the freedom walking the dogs gave her, meeting and talking to new people. Although Sandra was a poor reader, she was a great talker, getting most of her notions from plays on the wireless. She loved learning new words, and then 'assigning' them, in her head, to people and situations she met. Saving up words for these opportunities was her secret hobby.

Rats and mice had always been a problem at the kennels but now, with the new Cleansing Depot in full swing, they were much worse. Sandra always wore wellies and she kept a police truncheon handy, a family heirloom from her grandfather, who had risen to be an Inspector. Sandra was expert at chasing and dispatching these disease-ridden vermin. The greyhounds were always kept hungry, making them keen to chase. A stray mouse or a rat would make a very acceptable meal for a hungry dog. These pests, if eaten, often made the dogs unwell. Reluctant to pay vet fees, Wilson Young had accumulated a variety of 'cures' that Sandra was supposed to administer, although she seldom did. She wanted only the best of food and care for her dogs. They were almost like the children she longed for.

As she walked around the track she thought that perhaps now, with Bobby and the house in Hyndland, her dream might come true.

She had to do it. She had to do it.

If Trump did not win, she might lose Bobby.

Trump would be safe, Bobby had promised.

Persuader

Sandra had first met Bobby five months before, a few days before Guy Fawkes' Night. At that time of year she always looked for quieter places to walk her dogs, wary of kids with their bangers. These were often thrown at her inside tin cans, done deliberately to send her highly-strung animals wild. Sometimes it took days to calm them down after an 'attack'.

That was why Sandra had been in Pollok Estate that November morning, even though it was a long walk from Polmadie. But she knew the quiet short-cuts and to her it didn't seem too far. She always walked quickly, blethering to her dogs, confiding her secrets, trying out her saved words on them. In the back of her mind was the idea that the further and faster she walked, the more likely it would be that she would lose weight. The problem was her Mum, who was forever bringing leftovers home from Bertie's.

The Pollok Estate was in a posh area, near Pollokshields with its enormous red sandstone houses. Parts of the Estate were closed to the public, but Sandra was careful not to stray into these areas. At this time of year, on weekdays, the park was almost deserted, apart from a few older people with their dogs. It was vast, quiet and peaceful; "tranquil" was the word that came to her mind.

Soon after entering the park, she saw a lone figure in the distance. She scanned all around but he did not seem to have a dog. Perhaps it has run away, she thought. The man was stationary, erect, "self-assured" was the word. He was looking towards her, as if waiting for her. "Impressive and imposing" were the words that came to mind. As she got nearer he looked too young and too well dressed to be interested in her. Perhaps he was some sort of inspector. Maybe he would accost her for using the park for commercial gain. She had heard this could happen. She liked the sound of "accost" but using it made her feel nervous, "apprehensive", was the word that came.

She pretended to look past him and speeded up. He stepped into her path, deliberately.

'Hello, are these racing dogs?'

'Sorry, yes, but I never let them off their leashes. I don't do any harm. WATCH OUT! Sorry, but they can be snappy with strangers.'

'Can I give them a biscuit, break the ice?'

'Oh, so you're not an inspector then? NO! Sorry, thanks but no, I have to keep them on a very strict diet, keeps them sharp, speedy, ready to chase. Alacritous is the word I like best.'

'Ah, right, alacritous. Mmm. Alacritous, yes, good word. So, how far do you walk them? Oh, I'm Bobby, by the way, is it all right if I walk along with you, just for a bit. I don't really know this place. I've always been meaning to come, have a look around. But I live in Hyndland and it's quite hard to get here.'

ooOoo

That was how it had all started, the meeting that had changed her life.

His name was Robert Shaw, Bobby. She guessed that he might be a few years younger than her, maybe twenty-five or even as young as twenty-three. He was very polite and proper. When he smiled she found herself grinning back at him, like a love-truck teenager. Up close she could see he really was good-looking, like James Dean, with the same tousled hair and smouldering eyes. She felt big and awkward and very aware of her appearance, which made her uncharacteristically quiet, lost for words.

When she caught him looking at her breasts, began to feel hot, and her head was fuzzy. "Aroused" was the word that popped into her head.

Bobby was very well spoken, with perfect grammar: "erudite" was the word she liked. He has a persuasive manner, speaking slowly, quietly, choosing his words carefully, thoughtfully, she thought later.

But in those first minutes, walking beside him, glancing across to check he wasn't a figment of her imagination, yet another of her many daydreams, her mind swung on ahead, to dream of a wedding and children. It was happening to her, she was falling in love, just as it did in the pictures, she thought.

Bobby was speaking, but she was not listening to the actual words, just the warmth of his sweet melodic voice. He stopped speaking. In the silence she realised that he was waiting for answer, and her mind raced to catch up.

He repeated his question and she began; now reverting to her true talkative self. Once she started she forgot to stop. "Clattering on like a hand-bell" was a frequent scold from her Mum. But Bobby listened without complaint, smiling at her little jokes, and quietly repeating her 'special words' as she used. He's attentive and

polite, she thought. "He finds me interesting!" her heart shouted to her head. "He likes me! Me, Sandra Bletcher, in my old wellies and my not too clean overalls!"

Suddenly Bobby stopped and checked his watch.

He had to leave, he apologised. It was his Mother. She needed him, to take her to hospital. She suffered badly from asthma. The Doctors thought that a new treatment just available might help her get through the rigours of winter.

Bobby said his farewells and set off at his slow pace but heading in a direction that wasn't allowed, heading for the private part of the Estate. She called to him, to tell him, but he just waved and laughed, said it was alright, that he had permission.

Turning off the path, going through the woods, he disappeared and she was alone again, her heart thumping, *her mind racing. She was in the Pollok Estate, but she could have been anywhere. The words "besotted" and "enamoured" were not strong enough. She was "smitten", she concluded, and she wanted to stay smitten, forever.*

ooOoo

She looked around. There was no else about except the posh-looking chap in the far distance, throwing a stick for his collie. She waved back, saw him call his dog to heel and start towards her. His dog was lively, sometimes barky; she did not want it near her dogs, upsetting them. She wanted to be alone, to continue to daydream about her recent encounter. She turned, picked up her pace, heading away from him, talking to her dogs, telling them about Bobby.

The exercise flooded her bloodstream with oxygen it burned off the hormones which had been controlling her. Her mind cleared.

As her heart rate slowed, she went through what he had said about himself. She pictured Bobby again, heard his words. He said he didn't smoke but she had smelled the smoke from his jacket, and suppressed the thought that perhaps he might not just as perfect as he had seemed, not exactly the image he had "projected". She disliked the word 'projected' and sought for another more appropriate word, but it would not come.

Bobby was a bit shorter than she was, slim and wiry; the word "jockey" came immediately to her mind. He worked nightshift at the Daily Record, feeding the printing presses, he had said. Without him the place would grind to a halt, he'd joked. It was a terrific job, a job for life, but it meant working at nights, six nights a week. Thursdays and Fridays were hectic, frantic; but he loved it, loved being

busy, hated it when things were quiet. But the great thing about that was that he was off during the day, like today.

Bobby had always wanted a dog, but his mother had forbidden it, because of her asthma. He was an only child, his father had been killed in the war and he had no memory of him.

Bobby was easy to talk to and smiled and laughed at all her jokes and stories, stopping to stare into her eyes, or nudging into her as they walked, reaching out to touch her arm. "Tactile and demonstrative", she thought, but not "over-stepping the mark", not being "overt" or "risqué", although there was a definite naughtiness in his eyes; and she liked it. He's like "Carlo, Miranda's Latin lover" in the play she'd heard on the wireless, a few nights before, she thought.

Sandra felt like Judy Garland in "Listen, Darling" ² and began to sing "Zing! Went the strings of my heart", one of her Mum's favourites.

Gradually, by talking and singing to her dogs, her uneasiness faded. Bobby seemed perfect again. Sandra floated through the rest of the day.

² Read more at : http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zing!_Went_the_Strings_of_My_Heart

New Look

Later, as Sandra lay in bed she began to fantasise.

She decided to try to lose weight, again: she had already refused a mutton pie with beans and brown sauce and two big cream cakes that her Mum had put down to her as a supper-time snack. Her Dad had soon scoffed them, removing her temptation. Wilf Bletcher could eat a horse and not put on an ounce, was the family joke.

She would get her sister to do her hair and she would be more careful with her make-up. She had to get out of her wellies and overalls. Maybe, if she could catch her Dad flush, she would ask him for another loan. Wilf always gave in, and never asked for it back, not like her Mum, who was tight with money. Sandra did not want to think of how much she owed her.

She would need to be careful, or her Mum would soon latch on, want to know, why she was dolling herself up to go to work. Whatever she let slip to her Mum would be used "mercilessly", definitely the right word, to find out about Bobby, getting everyone to ask around, find out if he was suitable for her daughter.

It had happened before, with fatal consequences for her romance with Frank, the cheery and handsome delivery driver who brought Bertie's flour and baking ingredients. Her Mum had very quickly uncovered that Frank was married, had five children and various girlfriends on the side. "You were fourth in line, Sandra", her Mum had said. "So what does that tell you! You can't be too careful, Sandra, especially at your age. You'll probably only get one more chance, if that".

Bobby had said he would try to get over to visit again. But ten o'clock was only a target time, he might be earlier or later, depending on things, and he could only come for a couple of hours at the very most. And he could never be sure when he could get away, because of his mother.

ooOoo

The next day, dressed in full 'warpaint' and in her best clothes and shoes, she had hung about for nearly an hour at the spot they had agreed, hoping he would come. When she gave up she felt stupid, thinking that she had put him off with her chatter. But later as she walked, she remembered what he had said: perhaps his

mother had had an asthma attack. Maybe she had picked up dog hairs from him stroking her dogs!

Happily, after three further blank days Bobby was there. He had arrived ahead of her, waiting at the agreed spot. She speeded up, heading for him, waving. Sandra had made a special effort with her hair and make-up. She wore nylons, and her smart brown shoes that she hated because they hurt, instead of her clumpy wellies. She wore her brown jacket, her second best one, fully buttoned up, to keep out the cold. She felt thinner, and when he smiled, calling out her name, she began to float.

Bobby's visits were intermittent, Sandra always hoping he would be there. Now Pollok Estate was the only place she would consider taking her dogs.

When they walked, Bobby could not match her pace. His knees were bad, like his mother's, a family trait, he had explained.

Sandra found it odd, walking at this slower pace. He "saunters", she decided. Keeping the same long stride, she tried changing her "pattern", perhaps "cadence" was a better word, she thought. Then she tried faster but shorter strides. It was disconcerting, she felt.

Bobby was not keen on long walks, because of his knees. After a few hundred yards he would stop, while the pain subsided. And she enjoyed it, standing beside him, face to face, watching his eyes wander downwards, naughtily, making her heart "zing", his hands reaching out from time to time to touch her arms, squeezing, nudging as he laughed at her chatter.

This was the pattern: Sandra did most of the talking, Bobby her attentive and appreciative audience. "I'm talking far too much. I'll put him off. Men like to talk, like to be in charge", she scolded herself. But even though Sandra tried hard to be silent, and to get Bobby to speak, her every silence resulted in another question or short statement from him; then off she went off again, blethering happily.

Uncle John

After a few weeks, Bobby began to ask more detailed questions about greyhound racing, mentioning a few dogs by name. Sandra was pleased to be able to impress him with her superior knowledge and without her realising it greyhound racing became the main focus of their discussions.

It dawned on her slowly, from the nature of his questions that Bobby seemed to know quite a lot about greyhounds too. It seemed he had been speaking about her to John Thomson, 'Uncle' John, a family friend who had got Bobby his job on the newspaper. Uncle John was an older man who wrote for the Daily Record, using several pen names. His remit, said Bobby, was everything to do with racing, both greyhounds and horses. Uncle John helped Bobby with his mother when he could, allowing Bobby to get away to visit Pollok Estate, to meet Sandra.

Their meetings took a romantic turn one clear bright January day. There were more people about than usual, allowing their dogs to run free, chasing each other, barking, and making her dogs yip with excitement, agitated. Bobby suggested they veer off the path, into the woods. He led them into a spot where they were well hidden, beside a giant tree. He seemed to know it was there, she thought afterwards, and somehow this thought made what happened next feel extra special, that he had actually planned it all.

He smiled naughtily as he pushed very gently at both of her shoulders. She leaned back against the tree and closed her eyes, hoping. He kissed her. After three kisses she felt his hands moving up to unbutton the front of her jacket. She did not complain. Instead she found herself whispering, "please, please", over and over. He brought his hands up to his mouth and blew into them, then slipped then inside and up under her blouse. He whispered that he had wanted to do this since that first day he met her, crooning into her neck that she had "a truly magnificent body", that she was "statuesque, like a Greek Goddess"; that her "breasts were wonderful, sensational", that her "lips were tantalising, sweet and irresistible".

It was lovely to be wanted gently and slowly like this, and her mind raced ahead to wedding bells, possibly at the Cooperative Halls with Uncle Bertie providing the purvey.

At the gate, just before he headed off to catch his tram, Bobby dropped his bombshell. He would probably not be able to come for a few weeks. Uncle John had

to go into hospital to have an operation, an old war wound, and so could not look after Bobby's mother. Of course Bobby would do his best, he wanted to be with Sandra more than ever, but his mother was often worse during very cold weather. He made Sandra promise to watch out for him, to wait for him every day, at their usual meeting place near the gate, at about ten o'clock; but it might be later, or earlier, depending on circumstances. He could only come on weekdays, he explained, he could never come on weekends. His mother was very rigid about weekends, when he must clean the house from top to bottom, clear out all the dust.

ooOoo

Sandra always tried to be early, but she had never been a good riser: and now she had to get herself spruced up, and put on her make-up, carefully. Often she would arrive later than ten o'clock. She compensated by waiting longer, until she felt it was noon. Unlike Bobby, she did not have a watch.

The problem with the spot Bobby had chosen was that it was near the entrance and as the regulars with their dogs went past, she had to walk her dogs back, away from the path, to avoid her boys getting involved. Greyhounds, being nervous, high performance animals could be vicious, especially when in an established pack like hers. She carried muzzles but seldom used them, thinking it unfair to restrict 'her boys' so cruelly. It was her job to keep them calm, stress-free, if they were to run their fastest in races.

During these long waits, Sandra often became convinced that she must have missed Bobby, and that he had wandered ahead with his slow walk, looking for her. Torn between waiting and going on, she would suddenly decide to look for him and hurry around their usual paths in a state of heightened expectation. Every figure she saw in the distance must be Bobby, she hoped, and she would walk more quickly, almost running to catch up, only to be disappointed.

Led Astray

It was the last Friday in February. Bobby was back at last, smiling at first but later, as they kissed, his hands roving as he nuzzled into her neck, he told her what was worrying him.

Uncle John had been threatened with the sack, he explained. The operation to his foot had been a failure, his limp was worse, not better. He could not get out and about as before to gather his information, get his tips. Jimmy Bright, a younger man who had covered for Uncle John while he had been in hospital, was pushing the Editor to get Uncle John's job. Uncle John needed some good race tips to get his credibility back.

Without a second thought, Sandra had willingly broken the code, revealing which of Wilson Young's dogs were sparky and which were off colour. This was information that she had only ever shared with her father, and Wilson Young if he asked, but normally her employer made up his own mind on which dogs were 'ready' and what their chances were.

Sandra knew that Wilson Young was a heavy gambler, and like her Dad, often out of funds. Sometimes she had to wait weeks for her wages, until her Dad 'had a word' with the man. Wilf Bletcher was not averse to using his fists to get his own way, but he never lifted his hands inside the family home, even on the rare occasions when he came home drunk.

After she had done it, given out her tips, Sandra started to worry, waiting for repercussions. "Repercussions" and "untoward" were two of her recent words. She was on edge until the next week until the races had been run without anyone saying anything untoward to her. She knew that the other newspapers had their own tipsters, and punters were fickle, changing their minds at the last minute. After a few times of giving Bobby her intelligence without any repercussions, Sandra relaxed and it began to feel normal.

It was clear that Bobby was pleased. Uncle John felt more secure in his job, he told her, and was now able to help Bobby care for his mother again. But his foot was still bad, not healing well. If Sandra could keep her eyes and ears open for chit-chat on other dogs, from other kennels, this would really be helpful.

During March, Bobby came to meet her at Pollok Estate almost every weekday, and especially on days before any races in which Wilson Young had dogs down to run

at Shawfield or one of the other dog-racing tracks. Although his visits were now much shorter, maybe only an hour, their brief romantic encounters were becoming steamier, his hands ranging freely over her body, including down below, something she had never allowed before. Sandra always wanted him to stay for longer, and pleaded, but unfortunately although Bobby wanted to stay, he said, his mother had hospital visits.

Sandra's dreams, both day and night, were filled with lustful images of a now naked Bobby and his honeyed words, while his imagined hands brought her passion to a climax. It was like being a film star. She thought about him every minute of every day.

A Helping Hand

It was Thursday 27th March, the day before the Gala Final.

Sandra had been waiting for Bobby, walking back and forth for, ages, nearly two hours, she thought. She had almost given up on him. Then she saw him. He was walking much faster than usual, almost running. Her heart pounded, almost exploded.

Bobby pulled her into their place among the trees. They kissed and his soft cultured voice whispering his now familiar "endearments", a word she thought suited. His clever hands quickly brought her to a climax. As she subsided, he let out a deep groan then sobbed.

At first she thought it was something else, and the incident with Eddie came back in a flash.

Eddie Maloney lived around the corner. He was newly qualified as a motor mechanic. He was twenty-one, she was twenty-three. He liked older women he said, they were less frivolous, he said. Although not posh, at the time she had thought of Eddie as "astute", and although not well educated, he was good with words he knew. "Glib" was how Sandra now thought of him, viewed from a distance of seven years. Eddie was quite good looking, robust. There were two things she really disliked about him: his fingernails were always dirty and he smoked, both of which she loathed.

It was still there, in her head, every detail.

They had driven to Cathkin Heights, their usual spot, kissing in the back of Eddie's big car, a Vauxhall Wyvern that he boasted about to everyone. It was before she could drive but she knew he was a good driver, fast and daring, eagerly over-taking slower vehicles with a long blare of his horn.

After weeks of resisting, Sandra had eventually allowed him to maul at her breasts, slurping on them, biting, hurting. It was horrible but she hoped he would ask her to marry him.

"He's a good yin, is that Eddie Maloney", her Dad had said, "he's goin' places, that yin".

Then, when she wouldn't let him go down below, he had grabbed her hand, and shoved it inside his trousers. She had screamed her abuse as she pushed and punched him off, ending their romance.

Arlene, her youngest sister, then only sixteen, had been next in line. Eddie and Arlene got married a year later, Arlene five months pregnant. They moved to Edinburgh within a year, and now lived in a mansion, Arlene boasted, a house which no one had seen.

And now, since last year, Edward as he now titled himself, owned "Maloney Motors". Since moving to Edinburgh, the Maloneys seldom visited Oatlands. But when they arrived, unannounced, Edward always drove a newer, larger car. So far they had four children, and Arlene was expecting again.

Arlene had a car too, she crowed, preening herself as her Mum raced around to get out the good china for them. They were planning to put their oldest, Edward Jnr, into Fettes College. Someone Eddie knew in business was helping with the forms. It would cost a fortune, but "being a Fettes' Boy will make Edward Jnr for life, pay for itself time over time," Eddie pontificated as he puffed at his large cigar, dropping ash on the floor, spreading it with the sole of his foot.

All that could all have been hers, her Mum still cast up to Sandra once every so often, especially if Sandra had been cheeky or argumentative, or her Mum had become exasperated by Sandra's latest outburst against Wilson Young and the horribleness of his kennels at Polmadie.

It was after this disappointment with Eddie Maloney that Sandra's weight started to soar.

But now, hearing his sob, if Bobby asked for "relief", Sandra decided to try to do it for him, if she could.

But it was not what she thought.

'Sandra, wait till you hear this!'

Bobby was standing back, staring into her eyes, excited.

'My Mum and Uncle John are talking about getting married and going to Australia. He's got two brothers there. He says that the weather there is really good, dry, that it will help her asthma, make her a new woman. He asked if I could help him to get the money together, for their fares and to get set up when he gets there. And Mum's dead keen.'

'What about you, Bobby, are you going to go to Australia too?'

'No! No, Sandra, how could I leave you now that I've found you? Unless you want to go, of course. Do you, Sandra?'

'I don't know, Bobby. I just don't know. It seems so far away. I only know I don't want to lose you; that's all I know. If your Mum went, if they got married, what about us?'

'I'm pretty sure I could get the Factor to let me have the house. It's only a two room and kitchen. But it needs a lot doing to it, to make it good enough for you. I wouldn't even think of asking you to marry me before I had it all done up.'

'Oh Bobby, Bobby, could we get married? And stay here, in Glasgow? It's not too far to get back to the kennels, from Hyndland, not really. Maybe I could get the Subway to Bridge Street and walk from there. Could I?'

'But Sandra, it's the money that's the stopper, the money. Uncle John says he's getting the push. He says that Jimmy Bright is already writing two of his old columns every day, except Friday. Oh Sandra, Sandra, it'll just never happen for us, not unless Uncle John gets that money, somehow.'

'Oh Bobby, I wish I had money, but I've only got the coins I have in my purse. My Mum takes my wages and gives me pocket money. Mum looks after everything, buys all my clothes. I have to ask her for everything. I'm really hopeless with money. I have to warn you about that. It's like water through my fingers, Mum says.'

'I've only got seventy-three pounds saved up.'

'My God Bobby, do you have as much money as that? I didn't realise that you were rich. My God Bobby, that's a fortune!'

'I'll tell you the truth Sandra, I know how you feel about gambling, with your Dad the way he is, but I've been using your tips to put on some bets. Before I met you I knew nothing about dog-racing or gambling. But Uncle John helped me to get good odds, through this chap he knows, a Bookie's Runner, who works in a shipyard. And well, it's working. But that money I have, it's ours, for us, for our future. But Uncle John says he needs about two hundred at the very least, to make everything work, and he's only got ninety pounds to hand.'

'I suppose I could ask my Dad, sometimes he has money. But then he goes to the horses, down at Lanark, and then he's broke again. That's the trouble with gamblers, they always lose in the end. It's stupid letting gambling get a hold of you.'

'I know, I know, you're right, of course you are, Sandra. But just as soon as I get enough, I'll stop.'

'What'll we do Bobby? Your Uncle John's family in Australia, could they not help?'

'No, Uncle John says they have quite big families. But of course they'll help as much as they can when Uncle John and Mum actually get out there, but they can't help with money. Australian money is not worth that much here anyway, he says. Uncle John did suggest something, but I told him straight off that I'd never ask you to do it.'

'What?'

'No, Sandra, you'd never do it. I know how you feel about Wilson Young and that stuff he wants you to give the dogs. So, anyway, we're still all right as we are. And I'll keep saving hard, and you never know, with your tips, you'll see, it'll all work out in a year or two. Maybe they'll find a new treatment for Mum's asthma, that last stuff they tired her with didn't really help much.'

'Oh Bobby, what can we do?'

'Maybe Uncle John will just go to Australia on his own, who knows. That's what I'm beginning to think. I'll tell you the truth Sandra, I didn't even realise that they were, you know, doing it. That's why he's been round helping me out, I think. It's just well, they seem so old, to me anyway. But I can see it now, in my Mum's eyes, the way she looks at him, the same way you look at me. I think she needs him more that he needs her. And Uncle John, he's a really good looking guy, and well, she's not that great to look at, at least I don't think she is, not a quarter as nice looking as you.'

'But what did he suggest? What is it?'

'No, I know you'll say no right away. So no, Sandra, just leave it, all right?'

'Bobby, tell me, please.'

'Well, he said if we can be dead certain that Trump wins The Fraser Cup, he could put everything we have on it well ahead of the start of the race, get better odds, and really clean up. Ante-post betting I think he called it. But a good way to make sure that we could get better odds would be if you told your Dad that Trump was a bit off colour and then we could get more back, maybe even three to one, and then when Trump wins, Uncle John and me, well we would both have enough.'

'But Bobby, even if I did that, Trump still might not win. What if he lost? Nothing's certain with dog-racing, you know that.'

'I know, Sandra I know, I know. I told him that and he said we could make certain by giving Trump a wee booster just before the race.'

'WHAT? Give my baby a wee booster? No, no, no I couldn't. You know I'd never harm any of my dogs, especially not Trump, he's extra special.'

'But Sandra, look! Look at this box. See? It's from a proper vet, from Manchester. It's even got Trump's right weight, his best race weight. That's what you've got him at, 5 Stones 3 pounds, isn't it, that what you said? It's been done scientifically, so it can't harm him. I'd never agree to it otherwise. I really love that dog too, you know that. It's just to help him to go faster, just this once. And he deserves to win. That other one, Gangster's Moll, the wee grey bitch, she's the second favourite, isn't she? He'll wipe the floor with her, even if he's barged a bit, he's so much stronger, isn't he?'

'Oh Bobby, I just don't know. Do you promise Trump would be safe? And you're right, Trump does deserve to win, he is the best dog in the Finals.'

'Sandra, Sandra, of course he'll be safe. Here, put it in your pocket. Put it inside a wee sausage, just before you put him into the trap.'

'Are you sure, Bobby?'

'Sandra, just think of it. If they get married next month we could get married in say June, on your birthday, after we get everything at the house right for you? Oh come on, I need another cuddle. Oh Sandra, your body it is, so, so, so fantastic...'

Ashamed

That night Sandra did not sleep well.

Her mind swung between her love for Trump, telling a lie to her Dad, and a bright new future with Bobby in a nice two room and kitchen flat in Hyndland.

He had said it was only a two room and kitchen! Although Hyndland was a place she had only heard of, never been to, she knew it was posh, in the West End, not like Oatlands, which was nearly a slum: even her Mum said that.

It was just as well she hadn't told Bobby that she had been brought up in a one room and kitchen with a WC on the landing. And that she slept all of her life on a bed settee in the front room, sharing with her three sisters. At least now she had it to herself. To Bobby she had said she lived in Mount Florida, describing her Auntie Jeanette's house, with its large rear garden and three bedrooms upstairs.

She had only done it because he was so posh, refined. Sandra had never lied like that before. She was ashamed of her behaviour: every time she thought of what she had done, it stabbed at her mind like a sore tooth.

Diving under the cover to escape these thoughts, Bobby's dark blue eyes smiled at her, naughtily, and her hopes surged, filling her mind: she could almost feel his hands moving over her body.

Turmoil

On Friday morning she set out with Trump and Trip and Twitch. Twitch, (race name Jack of Diamonds), was down to run in Race 5.

On a big race day, a long walk to Pollok Estate was too far, and so she took the dogs around several circuits of nearby Richmond Park instead. It was a place she seldom used, avoiding it because of other locals, the amateurs, those operating with one or two dogs kennelled as pets in their houses. These were the ones to avoid, the ones that never gave their dogs proper exercise, who everyone knew doped their dogs and tried to dope their rivals, if they could sneak access.

Because of her uncertainty, Sandra could not bring herself to talk to the dogs, as she normally did, and the big black dog kept turning his head towards her, seeking reassurance that he had not done anything wrong. Seeing Trump's trusting eyes looking up at her as she stroked him, her mind filled with turmoil.

She felt "furtive", thinking that everyone must know just by looking at her that she was harbouring a dark secret.

If she did as Bobby had asked, and Trump won after she had told her Dad that he was 'off', young Denny would be angry at both of them. It was such a big race. Would her Dad lose his job, or worse? Would young Denny get someone to 'do' something to her, break her wrists, or slash her face, something like that?

But if Trump won, Wilson Young would be happy. "The Winner takes All" purse was something her Employer had been chasing for years. He might even give her a bonus, as he occasionally did when he had a special win. With more than a thousand pounds in his pocket he might even give her ten pounds.

If he did, she could get a really nice outfit for her wedding without having to beg money from her Mum. The thoughts of Bobby and Hyndland kept coming back. She imagined lying side by side with him in a proper double bed, kissing and cuddling and making babies.

The pendulum swung. She desperately wanted to talk to Bobby, to be sure that Trump would be safe. But Friday was always his busiest day. And she had never mentioned Richmond Park, because it was too near her house.

ooOoo

Heading back to the kennels she saw a man on the other side of the railings, outside the park.

It was Bobby, about a hundred yards ahead, heading away from her. How could it be Bobby? How could that be? But it must be him, the same clothes, and the same way of walking.

'Bobby, Bobby!'

She started to trot the dogs towards him.

Bobby, Bobby, wait, Bobby!'

He must hear me, she thought. The man did not turn.

'BOBBY, BOBBY, WAIT! It's me, Sandra. Bobby, wait, please.'

Everyone was staring at her. A few passers-by called to him, pointing to her. Still the man did not look back, but began to move faster, now with a slight limp. Then she realised that it could not be Bobby, because this man was smoking.

Her 'pursuit' ended when the man ducked into a grey car, on the passenger side. It was a Ford Popular like Aunt Jeanette's, the one that she had bought from Eddie. The car pulled out and accelerated away. Sandra stopped running but kept walking smartly, passing out through the park gate onto the pavement, stopping where the car had been. The car turned a corner and disappeared. A burning cigarette lay on the pavement. The cigarette was half-smoked, covered in red lipstick. Sandra ground it out with the heel of her wellie.

Bobby had never mentioned a car. In fact one time he had said that he had tried to learn but because of his knees his coordination with the clutch and footbrake had been so poor he had given up. It must be a case of mistaken identity, Sandra reasoned. The radio plays were full of such things.

ooOoo

Back at the kennels Sandra eased open the small dark green box. The actual name of the vet had been blotted out with black ink, but the letters of his qualifications were still visible. Inside was a small buff coloured envelope containing a half-teaspoonful of yellowish powder.

To get the best odds, either Bobby or Uncle John would have already placed the ante-post bet. There was no going back.

At last she tearfully accepted that she must give Trump the "booster". Trump would be safe. It had all been done scientifically. Trump did deserve to win, everyone knew that.

Sandra took some meat out of the mutton pie she had brought from home, and carefully sprinkled the powder on it. She rolled the meat into a small ball, a treat, which she wrapped into a little triangle of greased-proof paper. She slipped this into the pocket of her white parade coat and covered it with a cloth. She tore the box and envelope into tiny pieces. She pushed everything "incriminating" to the bottom of the galvanized refuse bin, raked it over then put the lid back on, with its heavy cobble-stone to keep the vermin out.

She went home to freshen up and change into her race-night clothes and her special shiny black wellies. In response to Wilf's query she told him that Trump was not quite right, unlikely to run his fastest. Wilf nodded, shrugged his shoulders, lit a cigarette, whistled his way down the hall, and banged the front door behind him, leaving her alone with her guilt and tears.

That sealed it. Never before had Sandra told her Dad an important, deliberate lie.

Doing so impelled her to do as she had promised Bobby.

Prescribed

By five o'clock Sandra was back at the kennels.

Wilson Young arrived to check over his dogs, have a word.

'So, Sandra, hen, a'thing Ticketty Boo?'

'Well no Mr Wilson, Trip is not quite right, I think he may have eaten a mouse, I'm not sure. But Trump is fine and dandy. Twitch too, he's fine, he could do well I think, strongest in his race from what I've heard around.'

'Fur f***'s sake Sandra, it's yer joab, tae keep tham safe. Ye've geid Trip wannae the blue powders, right? Ye pit in his waater, right?'

'Not yet, Mr Wilson.'

'Look Sandra, Ah've goat a f***ing pile on these three dugs, a roll-up bet, an akoomylaitur ower the three races! Ye ken wit a mean? Right?'

'But Mr Wilson, that blue powder, what is it?'

'F****' sake Sandra, its yer f***ing joab. They'r just f***ing dugs, no yer weans. Hoo miny times dae a huv Ah tae drum it intae yer nut, eh? It's ma f***ing bizness here, no a f***ing hame fur stray dugs!'

'Mr Wislon, stop shouting, you're upsetting them, look.'

'Aw fur f****'sake, hen, dinnae stert that greetin' oan me. Gee Trip that wee blue pooder as soon as Ah'm away, right, Sandra?'

She looked down at Trip but did not answer.

'Noo, ur ye *shoorr* thit Trump is a'right?'

'Yes, Mr Wilson he seems to be raring to go, doesn't he? Look at him! Look at his eyes, bright as buttons. He'll do well, I'm sure of it.'

'F***ing hope so, Sandra. Ah've waytit f***ing years fur the night.'

'C'mere Trump ma son, thair ye ur, a wee treat frae yer Daddy, eh, ma son.'

The man blocked her view. She craned over his shoulder.

'Jist ye mak sure ye nail this wan, ma son, and dinnae let the wee grey bitch get oan the inside o' ye, day-ye hear me?'

It looked like a bit of biscuit, but she could not be sure, she did not see it properly.

Sandra did not give Trip a blue powder. She had never given any of her dogs anything, unless it was from a Vet.

Winner Takes All

It was Race 8.

Sandra was back out on parade, this time with Trump.

She stopped at trap four. The lanes were chosen by lot, in theory at least. This was a good sign. Lane four was the big black dog's favourite, suiting his long legs at the first bend. The grey bitch had been drawn in lane two, which suited her shorter legs.

In the crowd the serious punters were agitated, confused. The rumour had spread that "Lucky Chance" in trap one was 'set to win': these words whispered by those on the inside, were well understood. Someone had heard the new boy, the new tipster from the Daily Record saying it to his girlfriend a couple times because she was worried that he would lose the twenty pounds he said he had punted on it.

This boy's information had been good lately. But could they believe it? Everyone knew that Lucky Chance was always a danger, because the big white dog was a 'barger', always running wide at the first bend, running into dogs on his outside, knocking them out of their stride, causing havoc.

Some punters were placing extra bets, some even placing higher bets against themselves, causing the odds to swing wildly. Such 'set to win' and other rumours were commonplace before the start of big races.

Sandra, now at the end of the parade, was unaware of this commotion in the crowd. At the traps, she removed his warmer embroidered with his race name, "The Ace of Spades". She smuggled the small treat into Trump's mouth, buckled his muzzle into place and kissed him on the top of his head, as she always did with her dogs, before easing him in and shutting the door behind him.

Immediately the dogs were in the traps they began to yap and yowl, ready to run, as they had been bred to do. Sandra joined the line of others in their white coats and shiny boots, and they walked off in lane order towards the pen reserved for "Handlers."

'Well gentlemen, after nearly six months of hard racing we have reached the Gala Final. We are almost at the start of Race 8, The Fraser Cup, our big money purse, the "Winner takes All Race" which marks the end of our winter season.'

So, gentlemen, this is your last chance to get your bets on. You have less than two minutes before the hare will be set to run at nine-fifteen precisely.

And one minute....

And the hare is running. No more bets!

And they're off!

And The Ace of Spades has gone off like a train...'

Trump did not disappoint.

He led clear at the first bend, escaping the barging and boring caused by Lucky Chance. By the second bend Trump was ahead of Gangster's Moll by three lengths. At the final bend Trump was six lengths clear of the grey bitch and she in turn was four lengths clear of the chasing pack.

As Trump straightened up for the final sprint to the finish, the crowd roared him home. Sandra's heart was pounding. It would work out. Bobby and she would get married. She would have a home of her own at last, in Hyndland. Hopefully there was still time for children.

At the fifty yard mark, almost safe home, Sandra screamed Trump's name at the top of her voice. Later she realised he must have heard her, because he looked towards her just as his front legs buckled. His head went down and he lurched forwards in a ball, tumbling head over heels, dead in his tracks.

The grey bitch Gangster's Moll crossed the line first. The big white dog Lucky Chance was last.

The other handlers ran onto the track to retrieve their dogs, to break up fights between them, now that the 'hare' had disappeared.

Sandra raced across the track and threw herself on the dead animal, weeping inconsolably. She was crying for Trump and for herself. Trump had lost and with his death she feared her dream of a life with Bobby in Hyndland would never come true. That was what he had more or less told her, was it not?

Her Mum, who worked in the café on race nights, gathered Sandra up and bundled her away.

Trump's carcass was taken into custody by the authorities for an immediate veterinary examination. Nothing suspicious was found. Such sudden deaths were not

uncommon among high-performance dogs. After a ten minute delay, *Gangster's Moll* was confirmed as the outright winner, and the winning punters were paid out.

ooOoo

Her Mum took Sandra home, washed her face with a warm damp cloth, gave her a hot toddy and two aspirins and tucked her up in bed with a hot water bottle.

Sandra sobbed herself to a restless sleep, filled with horrible dreams of Bobby and Trump falling from a high building.

The dream repeated endlessly.

Second Prologue

Those who are blessed with a Faith say, "In God We Trust!"

In whom do the irreligious place their trust?

A common answer, I believe, is that we trust in ourselves, our loved ones, our friends. And we trust to Luck: or, if you like, we believe in Hope.

Hope is central to how we live our lives. It's in all the songs, hymns.

"Will your Anchor hold?" Some of us sang at Life Boys and Boys' Brigade.

"Let's hope for the best", we often think as we face each new day, hoping that at worst "it", if it happens, will be 'good' for us. If "it" happens to be 'bad', almost at once we tell ourselves and those around us that "it" *will* be for the best, if we give "it" time.

This is how most of us who are irreligious live our lives. We base our lives on our hopes and dreams. We do so because we must, as often there is little other choice.

And so we return to our tale.

Sandra Bletcher has acted against her better self to win Bobby and a life she thought was previously out of reach. Despite what she has done, we see her pain and guess that this is remorse. Sandra has few attributes, she believes, but at least people have always been able to trust her.

Sandra is a good girl, everybody says so.

Her acts of betrayal stab at her psyche: a deliberate and potentially endangering lie to her father; the refusal to obey the blustering Wilson Young over Trip, which might cost her Employer dearly; and 'boosting' Trump, her very special dog.

Sandra Bletcher has defied her very upbringing and in doing so she has betrayed the trust of everyone who has made her what she is.

But mainly our heroine has betrayed herself. Just as we all do. She is just like us.

And knowing this, we immediately start to hope for her, because she speaks and acts for us.

Aftermath

The following morning, Saturday 29th March, Sandra lay in bed and listened to the 'ding' of the mantle clock in the kitchen sounding eight o'clock.

Her Mum was already up and out, away to Bertie's Bakery, as she did almost every morning in life; rising at five-thirty, to open the front door of the shop at six o'clock sharp, slurping a cup of sweet milky tea as she served her first customers.

As soon as her Dad went out, Sandra got up and strip-washed using the basin at the sink. For breakfast she prepared two slices of toasted cheese, slathered with brown sauce and a full pot of tea. Just as she put her breakfast on the table a key turned in the door. She tensed as Wilf whistled along the hall and filled the room with a fresh charge of acrid tobacco smoke.

'Hullo Sandra, hen, how ur ye, eh?'

'Dad, look, about last night, I did tell you...'

'Naw, naw hen. Look, Ah'm gonnae tell ye somethin', Sandra, right? Noo ye cannae tell a soul about this, right? No even yer Mammy, right? But see last night, right, well young Denny wiz owar the moon, so he wiz. But he kept his face like fizz, right. Cos, right, that wee grey bitch that won, he actually owns it, so he does, but undercover, like. Amazin', eh? Whit a boay he is! He's a f***ing genius, like a f***ing octippis he is, fing-ars intae every pie.

'Aye, an no whit he telt me efter, right? Oan Friday mornin he took oan a big side bet on Trump to win. F***ing dummy punter pit fifty oan him at three tae wan. Dummy wiz goin roon everywan', wi money drippin aff him, tryin tae git mair money oan. Coorse wi a bet like that tae lay aff, young Denny's jist no gonnae let that big dug win, is he, eh? He jist coodnae let that happ-inn. An onywayi, he's *ownin* the wee grey bitch, right?

'But me, Ah hid nae idea aboot *that* it the time, did Ah? An then yoo telt me the big dug wiz aff and Ah knew a kid gie the punters big odds oan Trump. So young Denny hiz f***ing won baith ways. F***ing genius that boay, so he iz.

'Aye, an guess whit, Sandra? He's aff tae Blackpool oan a bloo-oot, wi that rid-hieded wan, Sharlit sumbiddy, ye no the wan a mean?'

The man seemed oblivious to his daughter's puffy red eyes and the new tears dripping onto her pyjamas. As he had been talking he had eaten her toasted cheese and drunk her tea. He lit another cigarette and blew a flight of smoke rings in the direction of the bare light bulb above his head.

Despite his rough manners, Wilf Bletcher was still handsome; "a debonair rough diamond" was the phrase Sandra had coined for him. She knew all about how her Mum had fallen for him, ending up pregnant, losing her place at Jordanhill College because Sandra was on the way and they had to get married. Wilf had said variously that he was from Dalmellington and sometimes from Twechar. It seemed that he had no family he wanted to speak of, no background. This had put her grandparents against him, making her Mum the black sheep of the family, unlike her striving businessman brother Bertie or her prudish sister Jeanette, who was married to a Chemist, with their big house in Mount Florida.

'Aye, an guess whit an' a', Sandra? He geid me fifteen spondulucks fur masel. An a coorse a hud ma ain wee sider oan the wee grey bitch, efter the buzz, jist in case, right? Here Sandra hen, stick that ten bob in yer pokat, treat yerself tae a fish tea'n a big box ae choaklits, right?'

Wilf whistled his way down the hallway singing. "Ah'm in the money, Ah'm in the money. Lanark and yer gee-gees, here Ah come!" The door slammed.

She was alone again, confused: distraught was the word that came to her. Although strictly forbidden by the rules, young Denny was the owner of the grey bitch Gangster's Moll? How did Bobby and John Thomson fit into all this? Surely one of the two must have been the 'big bet' that young Denny had accepted? And had it been a biscuit that Wilson Young had given Trump?

The mantle clock dinged out nine o'clock.

Her dogs!

ooOoo

Wilson Young arrived at ten o'clock, much earlier than his usual four o'clock in the afternoon.

Sandra sensed at once that he was not his usual self because he could not meet her eye as he delivered the killer blow. It was the most polite and most horrible speech he had ever made to her. Delivered without a single swear word, she realised much later.

'Look, Sandra hen, Ah'm right sorry it's sey sudden like, so Ah am. But Ah'm gettin' masel oot a this geme. Ah'm gettin way too auld fur a this duckin an divin, so Ah am, so Ah am. Ah'm headin back tae Dumfries, to bide in wi ma wee sister an her man. There's a new lad takin owar the dugs, so he is. He'll be in here in a minute, wi a van, so he wull. Ah've selt them a tae him, every wan o them. So, Sandra hen, yer oot o a joab. Tell yer Da Ah'm right sorry, but that's the way it iz, so it iz. So aff ye git hen, an good luck tae ye.'

'Can I just say cheerio to the dogs first, please, Mr Young?'

'Naw, hen, the boay's comin fur thum the noo, so he is. Thur goin wi him tae a place he's jist goat, a place oot Carntyne way he's bought ower. He's no wantin ye here whin e comes. Sayd, "Now Mr Wilson, I don't want that girl there, far too emotional. It'll just upset my dogs." Posh buggar, wan o they minar toffs, so he iz. Drippin' wi money, though. Naw, Sandra, he duz nae want ye here, so he duz nae. He telt me that time owar. So, git yer things thegither noo, hen, an skedaddle, come oan!

'Oh aye, an this place here - itill aa be gone in jig time, so it wull, so it wull. Ye see, Ah'm sellin the kennels here tae the Coonsil in a, so Am ur, thuv bin efter it fur years, so they huv.

'Aw, naw, dinnae hen, aff ye git, noo. Dinnae stert that greet'n, noo. Jist skedaddle, a'right?

'Naw, naw, Sandra, noo look hen, blubbin' ill no dae ony guid, aff ye go, aff ye go.'

She collected her things and made them into a bundle, wrapping everything inside her old overalls.

'Aye, an' here's a wee helpin' haund tae covar yer wages an' a wee bit extra, hen.'

He fumbled what she guessed was a pound note into her jacket pocket, while pressing his other hand into the small of her back and easing her out the door. She did not realise until later how generous he had been.

'Aye, an mind and tell yer Daddy Ah looked efter ye, right. Ah don't need him comin' efter me, so Ah don't, right, hen?'

ooOoo

Sandra was out of a job. And she had lost her dogs, her 'babies'. She stumbled home, by instinct, through her tears. The house was empty, cold, the kitchen fire

was grey. Fully clothed she went straight back to her unmade bed, pulled the covers over herself, buried her head under the pillow and sobbed her hurt away.

Bobby's face smiled his thin smile, and she began to think about him, feel his hands on her. He morphed again into James Dean with his smouldering eyes. Bobby was Jim and she was Judy in "Rebel without a Cause". It was showing again, somewhere, she had heard. Sandra had seen it five times, knew it by heart.

She rolled onto her back and put her hand into her jacket pocket. She stared at the twenty pound note. Had Wilson Young actually meant to give her this amount? Was it to deflect her Dad from taking some sort of retribution on the man?

Was it real? She held it up to check for the metal strip. It was real! If Bobby had lost everything he would need money. Maybe he would be at Pollok Estate. It was Saturday, and she knew it was unlikely, but she must try. She washed and dressed in her best clothes, combed out her hair and pinned it up, made up her face, and raced for a tram.

Throughout the slow stop/start journey she pictured him, standing waiting for her at their usual spot: Bobby would be "disconsolate", she decided, if he was able to come. She imagined them scurrying arm in arm to their secret place to embrace, comforting each other. As long as she still had Bobby, they could start saving again. But she could never tell him what she knew, never. If young Denny found out, anything could happen; he might kill them both, maybe her father as well.

Bobby was not there.

She walked about the park for hours, every so often looping back then slipping into the trees, checking for him at their place. She kept hoping, kept walking, kept whistling to keep her spirits up. Her Dad was a great whistler, and he had taught her how to breathe properly, how to move her tongue, alter her mouth and lips. Concentrating on whistling properly, accurately, helped to divert her, she decided.

Encounter

Late in the afternoon, Sandra gave up. She was tired and hungry and feeling sorry for herself. She remembered seeing a fish and chip shop not far from the park gate.

It had a small sit-in café with a few tables. It was empty. She had a fish tea with red sauce, and to follow extra chips and bread and butter. She was nearly ready to leave. The café girl had agreed she could use the small staff toilet, and she had freshened up, and paid girl, including a small tip. As an afterthought she asked for an empire biscuit and another pot of tea and paid for it when it arrived.

She was drinking the last cup from the pot when she sensed someone staring at her, behind her, near the door, beside the counter. She glanced over and then quickly away from his hard stare. It was the posh man from Pollok Estate. The odd looking, tall thin man, "the man with the military bearing", was the phrase she had coined for him. She watched him in the ornate mirror on the wall across the room. She had seen him many times, but always in the distance, throwing sticks for his collie-lab type bitch with its white eye marking. He had waved and she had waved back, but she had always avoided going near him. She had never seen his animal on a lead and Sandra had not wanted it coming near, upsetting her dogs.

He stood patiently, the dog at his knee, continuing to peer at the back of her neck, she felt, unaware that she could see him. The waitress was busy cleaning surfaces, below counter level, getting ready for the evening rush. "Pre-occupied" was the word for her, Sandra thought. He is a true gentleman, "considerate of other people", was the new phrase she would choose. But why was he staring at her? Maybe he recognises me, even dressed up like this.

The café girl glanced up, nodded and smiled without speaking, and the man moved in and sat down. He is a regular here, Sandra thought. She had had hundreds of regulars at Bertie's and was used to 'reading' people, as she thought of it.

The dog curled up under his table, yawned widely, and at once went off to sleep.

Now that Sandra was close to him for the first time, she saw he was wearing an expensive suit, a smart collar and a tie with dark green with a bird motif. His suit would be Harris Tweed, she guessed. He does have a military bearing, she thought, erect, upright, but tense, on edge, "apprehensive" was the word. He placed his hat on an empty chair. Was it a gamekeeper's hat or a stalker's hat? What was the

difference, if any? He was nearly bald, like a monk, she thought. What hair he had was thin, wispy was the word, and a very dark brown, nearly black. Yes, he looks like a monk, she thought, "tonsured" was the word that came, making her giggle.

He took off his glasses, opened his spectacle case, and cleaned them with a special cloth. Without his glasses he looked much younger. He closed his eyes and might have been praying, she thought. Maybe he is a monk, which made her giggle again. Then suddenly he opened his eyes and glanced at her, caught her looking at him. He turned his head directly towards her. She tried to look away but it would be rude, especially as his eyes seemed to be pleading. He's not fully well, she thought, perhaps shell shock, from commanding his men in action, during the War, she surmised.

He smiled widely, nodding his head vigorously, and she smiled back. He had a kind face, she decided, friendly but a bit sad, tired. He is unhappy, and lonely, she sensed; "forlorn" was the word for him. He has suffered and is still suffering. Perhaps he was a Prisoner of War. Perhaps Burma, she thought, recalling a recent play which she had listened to, which told of the recurring nightmares that followed such maltreatment, usually for years afterwards.

'Lucky her. Sleep, ha, ha, ha', he said. 'Not me, ha, ha, ha. Sleep difficult. Non-existent, actually. Am I right? Margery's idea, the dog. Walking, walking. I like walking. Love it, actually. Am I right? You walk, don't you, dogs? Am I right? Walking alone makes you seem odd, puts people off. Am I right? I think so, especially a man anyway. Insomnia. Tired. Exhausted. Walking. Get a dog, Margery said? Am I right? Lifesaver, actually. Exactly!'

'How old is she?'

'Patch? About four, I think. Got her from Margery's place. Three years. Two weeks after...Aaaah... Two weeks after Harriet, eh, eh...departed'

Sandra rose and the man rose with her.

'Oh! You have to go? No, no. NO! Drat! Sorry. So you have to get off, then, you have to go? Do you? Just like that? Do you? Do you? Am I right?'

He was agitated, angry, probably at himself, shaking his head, muttering something which she could not catch, thumping his hand sideways onto the edge of the table. Suddenly he looked over to the girl behind the counter, who was staring at them. 'Sorry, sorry, agitated. Ignore. Sorry.'

The girl smiled turned back to her vigorous polishing. 'Two ticks, sir, letta me get this last bitta glass done, eh? While-a can still getta shine on, eh?'

He turned to Sandra. 'Please forgive. Sorry. Difficulties.'

His eyes were anxious, pleading again. They reminded her of Trump looking up at her yesterday morning, in Richmond Park, and guilt flooded back. She felt ashamed, and wanted to get away before this stranger could detect it, ask what was wrong.

This time she caught it, his muttering, to himself. "Damn, damn, and triple damn. Pull yourself together, man. Don't blow it now. Not now. Not after all this time."

'No, it's all right. My Uncle Bertie, well, he's very hot tempered, and so is Mum. It runs in the family. But not me, thank goodness. I'm the opposite actually. Slow to anger. It's an attribute, they say. But sometimes I just think it's because I'm a slow thinker.'

'Right. Right. But you do have to go, anyway? Am I right?'

'Yes, sorry, but yes. I've been out a long time, my Mum will be wondering.'

He had calmed down as quickly as he had exploded. He smiled, put his hat on and tipped it to her, ceremoniously, she thought.

'But only Au revoir, I hope? Am I right?'

'Eh, yes, nice chatting to you. I'll be off now, bye-bye.'

What a strange man, she thought as she left.

And then she forgot about him entirely.

Aboard the tram Sandra was fingering the twenty-pound note and visualising every fancy shop on Sauchiehall Street, going into each one after the other; the shops that she had been in with her Mum, just to look, not to buy. Shops that sold the sort of "garments" and shoes Sandra had always dreamed of.

Facing the Future

When her Mum came home from Bertie's, Sandra broke the news that she was out of a job.

She said nothing about her pay-off: this was money she wanted to keep for herself and Bobby. She owed her Mum nearly thirty pounds, she thought, accumulated over years, and her Mum would surely demand her twenty-pound note. If she mentioned the money, it would surely be purloined.

Her Dad was still out but Sandra pretended she didn't know where he was. It would only set her Mum off again. Sandra was tired of listening to endless moans about her Dad, her Mum's bunions and outstanding bills.

Getting a good job had always been a problem for Sandra. Her reading and writing were both poor: the words seem to jump about on the page. If it hadn't been for her primary teacher, giving her many special lessons after school, providing teaching cards, using her tape machine to sound out words, slowing them down, teaching her the music in them, explaining how to break down long words into syllables, Sandra would have floundered. Then, eventually, after nearly two years, had come the partial breakthrough. Sandra read her first whole sentence in a newspaper, making Mum cry with pride. Without Miss Hassard, Sandra would probably never have learned to read. Mum had got Uncle Bertie to make Miss Hassard a special cake when she left to go to another school as its Senior Woman Teacher.

But Sandra was good enough at mental arithmetic, and so working on the counter at Bertie's Bakery had been easy and at first she had liked it. Sandra had been full of chat for her customers as she whizzed about filling their orders. When she was busy she enjoyed it. It was when the shop was quiet she became restless, glum or "melancholic", was a word that might fit, she thought.

The best thing about the bakery job had been when Uncle Bertie had allowed her to drive his small van. She loved the power, the freedom that driving gave her. Bertie had taught her to drive, as his back-up driver. But he loved driving too, and Sandra was only allowed to drive when Bertie was really busy in the shop.

Later, as Bertie's business grew, he started running a small fleet of sales vans out to the new housing schemes. He had hired van salesmen to drive them, but most of them tried to cheat him and got fired. Sandra had argued her case, gone on and

on, repeatedly asking to be allowed to drive a sales van, but Uncle Bertie had refused, saying she was far too young. One day she had gone too far, and he sacked her for cheek. 'Insubordination' he had called it: Uncle Bertie liked impressive words too, as did his mother, Granny, who had been a schoolteacher before Uncle Bertie had been born.

Sandra knew that her uncle had been right. He had sacked for insubordination'.

It had all happened the week after Arlene got married to Eddie. Sandra had become restless, dissatisfied with her lot. She had been very cheeky and had deliberately provoked Uncle Bertie because she was fed up being stuck behind a shop counter. "I am unfulfilled as a shop assistant!" she had shouted at him, with the shop full of customers waiting to be served. "Right then Sandra, go and seek your fortune elsewhere, and right now!"

She had stuck her heels in, refused to apologise, refused to beg. Her Mum had stopped her pocket money but she had enjoyed three weeks of sleeping late into the morning then roving about Glasgow on her own, window shopping, but penniless. That's when her Dad had got her the job as a kennel maid.

Perhaps now that she was older, Uncle Bertie would let her be a van sales driver, if he took her back at all. Or maybe she could find a job driving for someone else.

ooOoo

That night, her first Saturday night off for years, Sandra feigned an excuse of visiting an old school friend, a girl called Frieda who had moved away to live with her aunt in Shawlands, an aunt who had adopted the girl because Frieda's own house was too crowded.

Instead Sandra walked to the Bedford Picture House and sat by herself in the front stalls to watch Frank Sinatra and Rita Hayworth in "Pal Joey". As she crunched her way through a pound bag of boiled sweets, she thought of dyeing her naturally tight curly brown hair to a reddish colour and having it straightened. Maybe she would try an auburn rinse. Maybe she could learn to dance. Could Bobby dance? They had never discussed it, but probably not, because of his knees. In fact the only thing she could remember him talking about was his mother and her asthma, his Uncle John and about greyhounds. She tried not to think about Bobby, but it didn't work, his face kept swimming onto the screen, on Frank Sinatra's shoulders and she saw her own face on Rita Hayworth's.

ooOoo

The next morning her father gave her 'the look', shook his head and held his finger up to his pursed lips. This meant that he had lost his 'bonus', all of it gone, and that she must not tell her mother.

'Don't ye worry hen, Ah'll git ye something, nae fear. Ah'll ask aboot at the track, ye'll be a'right. Yer well liked, so ye ur. They a' no yer a good wi' dugs, so they dae.'

'No Dad, I don't want ever to go back there. I hate that place. I don't want ever to even see it again. I think I want to be a driver, maybe do van sales, maybe for Uncle Bertie.'

'Uch, gie yersel' some time, Sandra, gie yerself a week or so tae git ower it. Think o' it as a wee holiday, eh? That big black dug, well he wiz jist wan dug. It happens, so it duz, so it duz. Ye'll need tae git ower it, hen. Ye'll be fine, ye'll be fine.'

But Sandra was adamant. She did not want ever to go back to Shawfield, or to have anything further to do with dog-racing. It would bring back the horrible memory of Trump dying in front of her.

At this point her Mum chimed in to she would have another word with her brother.

Drenched

On Monday, Easter Monday, and she was back walking in Pollok Estate, hoping Bobby would be there. At two o'clock she gave up and went to the café. She had looked out for the man with Patch but there was no sign of him.

The next day the wind was gusting, throwing sheets of heavy rain against the Kitchen window. Every second Tuesday, Bertie gave her Mum a day off. Today she wanted Sandra to go with her into town, 'to have a good look round', promising to buy her a new pair of shoes as a bribe. Although Sandra liked window-shopping, the prospect of doing so with Wilson Young's money shouting at her from her purse made her determined to resist.

She rejected her Mum's kind offer, politely. Her Mum kept at her, cajoling her, upping her offer to include a new raincoat. Sandra refused, proud of herself that she did not once say anything 'cheeky'. She just kept repeating, politely, that she wanted to go out for a walk, by herself. She was being "steadfast in her resistance", she told herself.

After five minutes of browbeating, her Mum exploded, angry now, pointing out that the wireless had said there was to be a storm later. The rain might ease up, Sandra had argued, pointing out that she was used to going out in all weathers, in her dog-walking waterproof trousers and huge oilskin jacket.

As she skipped down the stairs her Mum's shout rang in her ears: "Sandra Bletcher, you come back here, at once. Do you hear me? Why go out in that when you don't have too. And do you know that you look like a Zombie?"

The weather turned stormy, as predicted, with cold rain lashing at her. The Pollok Estate was deserted.

My make-up must be a mess, she thought. She began to feel she did not want to meet Bobby looking as she did. Even walking fast was not enough to overcome her shivers. After a few hours she trudged back towards the tram stop, near the Waverly picture house, at Shawlands Cross. It was then that she remembered that Bobby had never once come to meet her when it was wet: rain always made his mother's asthma worse, he had explained. She should have gone shopping with her Mum.

Confined to Barracks

The next morning Sandra woke with a sore throat and runny nose. Her Dad was out and her Mum at work. The kitchen fire was dead. The house was cold and damp. She was miserable. This was the first time in years she had been ill. She buried herself under her bedclothes and hoped to die.

It was 'flu her Mum said, later. And it was doing the rounds, everybody was coughing and sneezing in the shop, and she wasn't feeling too good herself.

It took until Friday afternoon before Sandra's nose dried up and she began to feel normal. She had missed three days when Bobby might have been waiting for her. But he never came at weekends, she knew that. She must wait until Monday.

ooOoo

Sandra had always liked clothes and shoes. She had good taste, her Mum had said often, but they could seldom afford what Sandra really wanted. She had looked at the twenty-pound note many times, allowing its temptation to fill her mind, trying to blot out her ache for Bobby.

On Saturday morning she at last gave in to her urges. Her Mum was out at Bertie's, and as soon as her Dad slammed the front door behind him Sandra shot up from bed and went through her routine as quickly as she could. She did her make-up and put on her best outfit and flew into town.

She would buy some new clothes, just a few, and a good pair of sensible walking shoes that might last, stand up to the rigours of the week ahead. She would spend only two pounds from Wilson Young's pay-off, more or less, enough to make sure she bought good quality things, things that would last.

But once she started to spend the twenty pounds, Sandra went mad.

She was home with her new things by three o'clock, giving her plenty time to admire and then hide them before her Mum got home. Sandra had the bottom two drawers of the tallboy, including the deep bottom drawer. This is where she put her new things, covering them deftly with older ones. It was unlikely that her Mum would rake among her things, but it did happen occasionally. If she found them her Mum would 'start an enquiry', and eventually wheedle out of Sandra where the money had come from, before confiscating the little that was left. Everyone knew that Sandra was hopeless with money.

To cover her guilt Sandra washed the breakfast dishes.

Once started, she kept going, moving quickly and effectively. She was fed up doing housework, she often said to her Mum, who just laughed, "Wait till you get a house of your own Sandra, then there'll be no choice, will there?"

Sandra switched on the Kitchen wireless and re-tuned it to Radio Luxemburg. Singing along to the songs she brushed then mopped the floors and put down newspapers in the hall to catch the dirt. The house smelled of disinfectant and so she opened the Kitchen window.

She raked out the Kitchen fire and took the ashes down to the dustbin, (normally her Dad's job). She set the fire going again, before giving the horizontal surfaces a quick visit with a damp duster.

She peeled potatoes and carrots. Saturdays were nearly always steak pie nights in the Bletcher household. Following in her Mum's footsteps, Sandra was not much of a cook. She opened two tins of tomato soup and a large tin of peas. Most of what the Bletchers ate came from tins, or from Bertie's Bakery.

At just before half-past six, she put the potatoes on to boil and was setting the table when her Mum and Dad arrived together, with the good news.

ooOoo

Under heavy pressure from his sister and brother-in-law, Bertie had agreed that Sandra could start back in a week's time. This was on condition that her time-keeping must be perfect, or he would sack her on the spot, no second chances this time. Sandra must be there at five minutes before six o'clock, sharp, every morning. No more shilly-shallying, no more sleeping in, and definitely no more self-awarded days off to go for a walk because the weather was nice.

Sandra listened in silence to her Mum and Dad, and decided not to argue, not yet. This gave her a week to meet up with Bobby, or five days, because he could never come at weekends. She resolved that come what may, rain or shine, she would spend every weekday in Pollok Estate, both morning and afternoon, maybe have a snack at the fish and chip café at lunchtime. She still had nearly two pounds in her purse.

Surely Bobby would come one of those days, unless he had already been there when she was ill, and had given up on her. Sandra had always known that a good-looking man like Bobby could easily find someone else. The thought began to haunt

her that since she had 'failed' him with Trump, Bobby would move on, find someone else.

After they had eaten, Sandra made her excuse of visiting Frieda again, and went off to see what was on at the Bedford Picture House. If she it did not appeal, she could catch a tram and go to the Waverly or the White Elephant in Shawlands.

As she walked along she thought of getting the Subway from Bridge Street to Merkland Street, which she thought was near Hyndland, in the off-chance she might see him. She quickly decided against it, in case she might see him with someone else.

Walker by Nature

Two days later, on Monday morning, Sandra was awake before her Mum went out. As soon as the door shut on her leaving, Sandra surprised her Dad by making an early breakfast for both of them. She carried a basin of warm water through to her room while he sat up in bed reading the Sunday Post again, drinking tea and smoking.

She was out of the house before eight o'clock and shortly before nine o'clock, was on station, waiting for Bobby at their usual spot, near the entrance to Pollok Estate.

It started to rain and she was annoyed. She was wearing her best new outfit, her hair was nice and her make-up was perfect, she believed. She put on a headscarf and walked around for about an hour, checking their secret spot on two occasions, getting her new shoes soaked, making white patches show on the leather.

As she was thinking of leaving she saw the café man in the distance. He waved and started towards her and Patch raced up to say hello, licking her hand, sniffing, hoping for a treat.

'Oh hello again,' he said brightly. So you came! **Exactly!** Look, I'm sorry, in the café, I should have introduced myself the other day. I've been watching out for you. Thomas Walker, or Tom if you like. At your service,' he held out his hand. 'Walker by name, and Walker by nature, hah, hah. Am I right?'

She could tell immediately that he was less tense, happier, more relaxed than he had been in the café.

'Sandra Bletcher.' As she said this she caught sight of someone entering the park. It was a man, but it wasn't Bobby.

'Right. Right. I understand. Yes, Yes. Still expecting your friend?'

'Oh, have you seen him?'

'No, sorry, can't help you on that front, no, no. Not since, eh, let me think. It was the week before last, Thursday I think it was, when you were here with your dogs. I saw you two together, heading off into the woods. Am I right? Well, were you expecting him today?'

'No, not really. I was just hoping, that's all. I think he might be helping his mother, she suffers from asthma and she is supposed to be getting married again soon.'

'Oh, I see. And your greyhounds, where are they today? They were special? Am I right? They looked like racing dogs to me. Am I right?'

'Yes, but my boss sold them off. He decided to retire.'

'Oh, so, eh, you'll have a new job lined up I suppose, with another kennels? Am I right?'

'No, no, I'm giving that up. I never liked the gambling side of it, only the dogs and the freedom. Yes, that's what I liked most, getting out with them every day, even Sundays. It was almost like being my own boss, most of the time. It looks as if I'm going back to my old job in the baker's, on the counter, maybe in a week or so. Uncle Bertie did say yes, eventually, but he could change his mind, he's like that. He's mercurial, yes, that's the best way to describe him. He's very clever. He should have been a teacher, like Granny. But, well, I don't know, his wife's Dad, Tommy Calvin, he owned the bakery originally, and well, it makes good money. But Uncle Bertie's got lots of bad habits and so he's never rich. He's my Mum's brother. It's his bakery now, Bertie's Bakery, in Oatlands, near where I live.'

'Mercurial, eh? Good word, I like that. Mercurial, perhaps that is what I am too? Eh? **Exactly!** So, Sandra, may I call you Sandra? Me Tom, you, Sandra, she Patch? Ha, ha, ha. Am I right? So, Sandra, you've decided on a career change? I can empathise with that. **Exactly!** But perhaps in your case we should call it re-trenching? Am I right? But is that really what you want, Sandra Bletcher? I had years stuck indoors, myself, in a shop, like you. Standing about, mostly waiting. Same old endless chatter, over and over. Nice people. Nice, nice people, don't get me wrong, but boring, boring, boring. Grew to hate it. And a baker's shop. No, no! Hot and humid? Not good for the complexion? Am I right?'

'Uch, I suppose I'll get used to it again. Nothing else for it, is there? As Mum says, "beggars can't be choosers", can they?'

'Not married then.'

'PARDON ME?'

'Oh, I am sorry, Sandra, that's a rude, rude, question. That is a question one should never ask a lady. Rude, rude, rude, Tom. Very, very rude. Please don't answer that. I am sorry.'

'No, that's all right. No, I'm not married, not yet anyway.'

'Ah, yes! *Exactly!* That's what I had deduced. No ring and suchlike.'

His remark made Sandra look. He was wearing a wedding band. He had mentioned Harriet in the café, and Margery. Who was Harriet? What did "departed" mean? Had she been a daughter who had died? Was Margery his wife? Anyway his ring showed that perhaps he wasn't weird.

And she could 'tell' that he was a nice person, just odd. Lots of people who came into the shop were a bit odd. Only a few months after Sandra had started at Bertie's, aged fourteen, her Mum had 'ticked her off' for making fun of an old lady who had insisted that each of her six small rhubarb tarts be put in its own bag, then all six into a large cake box, as if it was something special to buy rhubarb tarts. "Listen Sandra, make allowances, we all walk with a bit of a mental limp, girl, and I do mean *all* of us. Don't you dare think of yourself as above wee Jeanie Fletcher. None of us is perfect, Sandra Bletcher, not even me, ha, ha, ha."

'But well, you never know, a smart looking young girl like you? Surely a handsome prince will ask soon? Am I right?'

'Thanks. Maybe. I had hoped; but to be honest, well, we'll see. Maybe. It seems so long since..."

'Oh look at that Sandra! The Sun is out at last! And the rain is nearly off. Damned rain! Am I right? I'm planning a long fast walk, try to tire myself out. What do you say? I've watched you many times, you know, and you always walk fast too. Am I right?'

'Yes, all right then. Yes, I could do with a good hard walk. I've had a cold, that's why I wasn't here last week. Excuse me asking again, but are you sure you didn't see Bobby last week?'

'Bobby? Ah, your friend. Is *he* your Prince? Oh do forgive, there I go again. It's living alone that does it, I think. Patch is a good listener, but she doesn't reply often. Ha, ha, ha. No, sorry. No, no, not here last week, I had a busy time, last week, legal stuff, boring. I did my walking in the evenings. Not a great idea with my eyesight. Am I right? Settling some business things but at least it's all finished now, all behind me at last. Are we ready? Am I right? Come on Patch, heel girl, HEEL!"

They set off and were soon moving at speed, stride matching stride.

'She's very well behaved, your Patch. You've done a good job with her.'

'Yes, it's the collie in her Margery says. Collies are tractable. It's a good word that, tractable. Am I right? Willing to serve, obey. And trustworthy, always! You know where you are with a dog, even if it's been mistreated, like Patch. Always ready to trust again. Two-way bargain. *Exactly!* Especially mongrels, they say. Not like some people, no not at all. It's the high-flyers you have to watch out for, in my opinion, those are the ones who'll let you down. Am I right?'

'Mmm. Maybe you're right. I'm not sure.'

'And, Sandra, after our walk, perhaps we might go to the café? Have a bite to eat? What do you say? We'll have an appetite then. Am I right? My treat, I insist.'

'No. No. Thanks. No. Really, I'm not sure. I'm on a diet, actually.'

'Oh, well, we'll see, shall we? I do like your jacket. I've not seen you in that outfit before? Am I right? It's new? Am I right? That particular shade of green suits your eyes, witch-hazel. And it fits you very nicely, shows off your figure so well. You have a good sense of colour, Sandra. I should know; I used to sell ladies clothing for a living. But without Harriet. Aaah!'

'Harriet?'

'No, well, never mind. Right. Patch, FETCH!'

Refusal

During their walk Sandra tried to stop herself, to avoid a repeat of what had happened with Bobby. But she did tell him a few things about herself, her Mum and her Dad. Unlike Bobby, Tom did not probe and she could tell her story in her own way, without being nudged off course, as had happened with Bobby. And he told her some things about himself, and so they had "proper dialogue", she thought.

When they were not talking he whistled quietly, almost under his breath. He was good, not like some people who whistle 'off key', like her Mum, driving Sandra mad. Yes, Tom was good at whistling, she thought. His whistling was "companionable", she decided.

He had been genuinely embarrassed, she thought, when he brought up the fact that she was not yet married. He had been "indiscreet" but he had apologised at once. This had been an "indiscretion" on his part. These were recent new words heard in a radio play, "The Indiscretions of Mavis Harringay".

The question of 'Harriet' hung heavy in Sandra's mind and in the silences she almost asked again, several times. But she stopped her question; now it was her who must not be indiscreet. must not pry into what was his private, personal business.

But still the thought persisted - why does he wear a wedding ring? Had Harriet been his wife who had died? Sandra knew that some men continued to wear their wedding rings out of respect, out of habit. Or was she ill, in hospital, locked up? Very clever people often went mad. Or perhaps he was divorced, or separated?

Then another thought occurred. Perhaps Harriet was still around, perhaps someone would see Sandra with Harriet's husband, and report back to her. He had said he lived alone, but she might still be around, living nearby.

Tom said he had seen her here many times before, with her dogs. But now, without her dogs, she did not have an excuse to be here. It might seem to him that she was here deliberately, trying to pick him up. What if Bobby should see them, what could she say to him?

Then yet another possibility came: perhaps Harriet had been a dog? And then another, maybe the ring had been his mother's or father's. That had been in a radio play one time and had caused confusion, until a happy ending solved everything.

And then another darker thought came to her. Tom had said he had seen her heading into the woods with Bobby. Had Tom spied on them? Did he think she was a ...! She shut that thought out at once: it did not ring true with his nature, with his "demeanour", a word she loved. Tom has a kind and open demeanour: he is a 'gentle' Gentleman, just a bit odd.

She returned from her dwam and looked around. This was the private part of the park, the part she had never been in before. It was deserted. The sped on passing the long drive with Pollok House in the distance. Then on again, still moving quickly.

ooOoo

As they approached 'her' gate, she sensed at once that he was nervous, jumpy.

If he asked again, she would not go to the café, she would refuse, but politely, steadfastly, even though she was feeling peckish, and starting to need a toilet.

'Well Sandra, how was that for you? Invigorating? Am I right? Sharpened your appetite, surely? Whetted? Am I right? What do you say? Shall we continue together, go to that café, or wherever you fancy? Am I right? My treat, I insist. Cheered me up no end, hearing all about your life. Amazing! Am I right? Oh, do say "yes", please, Sandra. Do come for a bite to eat. Oh do say "yes". Please, Sandra, please. You'll come! Am I right?'

'No. No. I'm very sorry, Tom. But I have to get home. My Mum needs some help with washing and ironing. It's my turn to do it, especially since I'm out of work. Earn my keep. So, thank you very much but no. But thanks for asking.'

'Ah. **Exactly!** Well, in that case I accept defeat. Laudable, laudable. Supporting the parent! Well, so be it. **Exactly!** Perhaps another time? Tomorrow? You are coming again tomorrow, Sandra? Am I right?'

'Well, eh, yes, I hope to be here. Yes.'

'Right. Good! So, may I presume? Same time, same place. If you can put up with me? Am I right?'

'Well, it depends. You see I'm actually expecting, hoping...'

'Ah, got it! Of course, of course. *Prince Robert* may be here, if he remembers where this place is! Sorry, sorry, Rude. Rude. Rude, Tom. Rude. Sorry. I do apologise, Sandra. Rude. Am I right?'

'Well, bye-bye, then Tom. I really must be off. Bye-bye.'

'Shall we not just say Au Revoir? Please, let's say Au Revoir? Am I right?'

'Bye-bye'

'Right, Patch, "HEEL"! Time for your dinner my girl! Am I right?'

As Sandra walked away she sensed Tom watching her. When she was about to turn the corner she looked back. He was standing where she had left him, with Patch lying at his feet. She gave him a little wave, and he waved back enthusiastically.

When she reached the Public Toilets near Shawlands Cross, she was surprised to see that it was nearly three o'clock in the afternoon. Her time walking with the odd Tom Walker had flown by.

Talking it Out

The next day, on the tram again but slightly later, she remembered that Tuesdays had been one of Bobby's favourite days and convinced herself that he would be there.

As she turned into the park she saw Tom, waiting for her near the gate, at her spot, throwing sticks for Patch. There was no sign of Bobby, but he might be hiding at their secret place, she thought. She was edgy. She did not want Bobby to see her with Tom. She tried to put on an "implacable" face, to act disinterested but not unfriendly, just neutral, "dispassionate" was the word.

Tom spotted her sham immediately.

'Hello Sandra. Oh, all right. I'm sorry, I understand. Intruding? Am I right? I'll leave you to it, just in case your handsome Prince turns up? **Exactly!** Am I right? But just to say that I've been hanging around here, hoping for you, as it were, for the last hour or so, and I've not seen him. Good luck. And again, please accept my apologies for my crassness yesterday? Am I right?'

She saw he was genuinely upset and felt bad about her play-acting. He took his glasses off and cleaned them, making him look much younger, almost handsome.

'No, sorry, Tom, don't go yet. Please. It's not his fault, Bobby can't always come, he has to help his mother, she has fits of asthma, especially when it's wet and damp.'

'Well, it's dry and sunny today? Am I right?'

'Yes. I know. It has been ages since he came. Maybe he's never coming, I don't know. I'm just not sure anymore. He did say he might be emigrating to Australia, where it's sunny and dry all the time.'

'Bit dusty too, from what I've heard. And full of sheep, millions of them. Anyway since he's not here, how about another walk? *Please.* We can watch out for him, keep this gate in sight? Now that's a plan? Am I right? And if he comes, I'll scarper, slope off, vamoose? Eh? Ha, ha, ha. Clear the coast for you two? That would work, surely? Am I right, Sandra? Good, come on, let's go, get our speed up, and get the corpuscles working. Am I right?'

'But Tom, what about your wife, you have a wedding ring?'

Immediately the words left her lips she wanted to take them back. She had promised herself a dozen times she would not ask. It really was none of her business.

Instantly his face washed out from happy to sad, tears welled up in his eyes and he took off his glasses, dangled them from his teeth, while he dragged a large hankie out of his pocket and blew his nose.

He turned to face her, square on, took a step closer to her, his long angular face near to hers, his dark brown eyes peering into hers. He closed his eyes tightly, as if suppressing tears. He put on his glasses and she saw that what she had thought were black frames were in fact a very dark blue, and that the lenses had a slight bluish tint. Slowly his head drooped forwards, his eyes still closed. His eyes and face looked tired, exhausted.

She could smell his aftershave, herbs, she thought. Not strong and spicy like Bobby. And Tom's breath, it was minty. This made Sandra self-conscious. She wondered how her own breath tasted. She should brush her teeth more, as her Mum was always reminding her. Bobby's teeth had not been perfect, a bit brown, and his breath sometimes tasted smoky, although he had said several times that he was glad he had given up.

Tom's body shuddered. His eyes opened but remained unfocused, lost. He lifted his head and drew in a deep breath, his lungs filling, his shoulders rising and then he let it all out, in one long, loud sigh of anguish.

"Aaaaaaaaaah! Oh Go-o-o-o-o-d"

It's a "massive exhalation", she thought. It might be my first ever use of that word, exhalation. It almost sounds as it means: there was a word for that but she couldn't bring it to mind. He's holding back tears: "devastated" was the word that described him.

Her hand moved by itself to rest on his arm. She squeezed. He fumbled his own hand to hers, not grasping, but in a gentle way, like touching a child, she thought. Then he searched and found her other hand with his.

'Oh, Tom! I'm sorry, but I thought...'

'No, Sandra. No, please. Let me get this off my chest, please. I *do* realise that you must think of me as just a silly old man, trying to pick you up. Am I right? I suppose I am, but Sandra, it's not like that, not sordid, not like that at all. Margery would be able to explain everything. I did ask her but she *instructed* me, told me I

must accomplish this part all by myself, or it would not work. She insisted. And Margery is always right, always. Oh dear, what have I done! No, please Sandra, don't pull away, please. Dear, dear, me. Let me try to explain myself. May I? It might be best if we walk. Am I right? Try my best to explain myself. Am I right?'

It took a few minutes of loping along together before he got started.

ooOoo

It came out in an incoherent jumble of staccato phrases. She had to work hard to sort out the jigsaw pieces that made up the picture of his life.

Sandra learned that until last week Tom Walker had owned a ladies' dress shop. It was quite a big shop, located in Shawlands, with seven ladies working for him. It was called "House of Walker". Sandra had not heard of it. The House sold exclusive and very expensive clothing and accessories of all kinds, to the ladies of nearby Newlands, Pollokshields, and other wealthy parts of Glasgow. Almost everything was hand-made, tailored to fit and flatter their ladies. The House had a large and faithful clientele. The business continued to be successful. The ladies who ran it were very capable, very nice people.

'What you have to understand is, Sandra, that it was Harriet who was the brains behind the business, the driving force, not me. She was good with everyone. It was as if she could read their thoughts. She always seemed to know what I was thinking, at any rate. She was highly intelligent, a first class mind, everyone said so.

'When she joined us - it was Mother who gave her the job - it changed everything for me. Harriet was the right type, Mother told me, a Hutchie Girl, St Andrews University, all that sort of thing. Mother gave her my job, made her Assistant Manager straight off.

Within a few weeks Harriet had re-organised everything. It was the right thing to do, taking me off the sales floor. Of course I had only ever been allowed to sell accessories, gloves, hats and the like - never the intimate items. Harriet saw right away that she had to get me out of the shop, away from our Clients. "Tom you're no salesman and you are inhibiting and off-putting to our ladies," Harriet said.

Mother was annoyed when Harriet said that, but in the end Mother had to agree. Everyone had known that, especially me. Harriet persuaded Mother that I should be put in charge of "Advertising", something we had never tried before, not seriously. And of course, Harriet was right, she always was.

'And I was reasonably good at it, preparing advertisements for all the right newspapers and magazines, the ones that our sort of clients read. Harriet even had this idea, Harrods did it, she said, showed me one of their Brochures. Harriet did all the words, of course, descriptions. I'm hopeless at that sort of thing. But we did it. We made our own Brochure! Or I did, actually, my *project*, she called it. Yes! A Brochure! The "House of Walker Brochure"! Have you heard of it? Famous. Me, famous! Imagine. Proud. Twice a year! Garments for the new seasons, you know, Spring and Summer, then Autumn and Winter. Sent direct to our Clients in their homes. Still do it, actually. Success. Happy. Happy. Happy. Margery does the words now. Good with words, is Margery.'

Tom was "chortling", yes that was the word, chortling.

'To be very truthful, Sandra, right from the start the photographs for the Brochure, took only a few days each time. I did spend some time helping the advertising people with a few other photographs, but usually just re-using the ones from the Brochure. Same thing with the words; and sometimes suggesting words and phrases, from the Brochure, Harriet's words, that sort of thing. She insisted I "expand my horizons", as she called it. And so I did.

'If you had been coming here to Pollok Estate at that time you might have seen me. I spent most of my time enjoying my hobby, photographing wild life. I had special permission, from the Stirling Maxwell family. Harriet fixed it. I became good at it, I believe, and I enjoyed the freedom. Seldom went to the shop, just a few times a year. Not wanted there, actually, I knew that. Everyone was always polite to Mr Tom, that sort of thing, humouring me. But I was happy to escape from there. Boring place, boring. A bit like you with your dogs, escaping from the heat of the bakery? Out and about all the time. Am I right? Harriet was very clever, she knew that was what I really wanted, although I had never dared to tell Mother.

'But afterwards, after Harriet, she....well there was no joy in it.

'And so when Mirabelle approached me, (her real name is Mattie - that was another thing that Harriet did: she gave all the girls fancy names, and they responded, upped their game, I believe the phrase is). Anyway, well, Mirabelle and Clarissa (Chrissy) and Margot (Maggie), the three longest serving ladies, approached me and asked if I would be willing to sell the business to them. Chrissy's husband works in a lawyer's office and they had seen his employer, and had spoken to the Bank, and so on.

'And well, that's it. Done at last! Ha, ha, ha. Escape! **Exactly!** Last week stuck in offices, speaking to boring people, reading legal stuff, mumbo jumbo! "Covenants"

mentioned a lot, stuff I didn't understand; lawyers arguing for hours. Done at last. Done. Done. Done. **Exactly!** Am I right?

'I still own the premises, of course, but I insisted that their rent must be suspended for three years, to help them find their feet. But they *will* do well. Do far, far better without me popping in and out, causing confusion. I'll still do the brochure, of course. Nice people, nice people, so, so important. Trustworthy. Am I right? Here Patch, FETCH!'

The dog raced after the stick and slithering as it flew up above her head, snatching it from the air as it bounced high, before careering round in a tight circle to return and drop it for him to throw again.

'So Sandra, that's my tale of woe. On my own again. High and dry, trying to move on, trying to make sense of it all? Am I right?'

'Well Tom, you have been turned upside down, I can see that. But...'

'Look, Sandra, I know this might sound odd, even a bit stupid, but it's the rain. The bloody, bloody rain. Without these spectacles, well I'll tell you true, I'm as blind as a bat. Worse of course, bats can squeak their way about, can't they? Ha, ha, ha! Am I right? And when it rains, it mists these things up and I have to stop and clean them every few minutes. Have you heard of contact lenses? Bloody useless! How can I get them into my eyes when I can't see without glasses? Am I right? So, I'm stuck with these! And I've had a few stumbles, sprained my right thumb here, quite badly, still aches with the damp weather. Arthritis, my Doctor says. For life he says. Runs in my family, he says. Bloody helpful that? Am I right? Doctors! Bloody useless! Am I right?'

'Mother has it too, arthritis -went to live in the Channel Isles, near her other sister and brother-in law. They say I should go there too, less rain, warmer, milder winters and all that sort of guff. Always on at me nowadays after...Aaah!

'The Doctor and my Mother, they both say it. Uncle Auden and Aunt Helen too. Ganging up on me. But not Margery, my rock. I think Mother she put the Doctor up to saying that. They're old friends, Mother and Doctor Alan B. Thomson. Never married, after Mother threw him over for Father. They had a thing before Mother married Dad. Still interested, he is, I think. Amazing, all those long years, lingering hope. Says he's going there soon too, Jersey. Amazing. Romance in retirement! **Exactly!** Never too old for romance, Margery says. I've been of course, Jersey, nice place, but not paradise. Sunny at times but dull as well, cloudy a lot, mist comes

down, day after day. Warmer though. Am I right? Good for walking, coastal paths and so on, quite hilly in parts. Am I right?

Castle

'Tom, what time is it, please?'

'Just after two, time for a bit of lunch. Am I right? So, Sandra, shall we dine like royalty, in that little café? They are very good about allowing Patch to come inside.'

'No Tom, but thanks: maybe another time. We'll see.'

Her mind was trying to sift through what he had said. Harriet had "departed", but was she dead or alive. Had he actually said she was dead? Given his reaction before, she dare not ask. But Margery was clearly not his wife either. Who was Margery?

Anyway, all of this was not her business. She had been right, she thought. Tom Walker was a lonely man with time on his hands and would probably have told his tale of woe to anyone who would listen. In fact, he probably had. Maybe everyone around Pollok Estate, the regulars, had heard it, perhaps many times. Maybe he had bored them with it? Like some of her old customers at Bertie's with their same old moans and groans every day.

'Oh dear, dear me. My ramblings have put you off? That's it? Am I right?'

'No, no, Tom. It's very interesting, I suppose. But it's all away above my head. Your life is so, well, different. But I'm sure you will do the right thing, whatever you decide. Good luck.'

'So, I can't change your mind? Had enough of me? Am I right? Fed up having a stupid old man hawing at you? Had enough for one day? And of course, you're disappointed. Yes, I can see it. *No Prince Robert!* And yet we have been in clear sight of this gate all morning. Boring, boring, boring. Walking around in the same place all morning, in one giant circle! Look! Look, Sandra, you can see the path we've made, round and round, wearing out the grass. Is he ever coming again? Well is he? **NO! NO, HE IS NOT!** Am I right?'

'Well, that's my business, Tom, not yours!'

She walked towards the gate but he caught up, tugged at her arm.

'Oh, my goodness. Again! I am so, so sorry Sandra. Don't go, *please* don't go. I don't want you to go. Please. I am rude, a rude person. It's not the first time I've

been told either. Margery has warned me, many times. It's just, that well. Look, please. Can I take back what I said a minute ago? You're angry, I see that. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry.'

His hands searched and took hers again, and she let him do it.

'Tom, please, I'm having troubles of my own and well, maybe, I don't know. Look, do you think we could leave it. I need to think things through.'

'Can I walk you to the tram stop, then? Surely you will permit me that privilege? Am I right?'

'Yes, if you want to. Yes, that would be nice, thanks.'

After a few minutes walking together in silence, just as they were about to leave the park, he stopped.

'Sandra, would you mind if we took a slight detour. I want to show you something. Perhaps you could spare another twenty minutes or so? Am I right? Patch! HEEL! Good girl.'

Tom grabbed her arm, whirled her around and they set off in a different direction, pounding away, her elbow cupped firmly in his hand, Patch trotting at his knee. They were going in the same direction that Bobby had always used.

They left by a different gate, one she had not used before. It involved going through the private grounds, quite close to Pollok House.

ooOoo

Ten minutes later Tom stopped in front of a large red sandstone villa and stood by her side, pointing.

'What do you think, Sandra? Handsome pile? Am I right? "Denholm Castle". Great-Grandpapa built it. Made his money in Shipping. Then Grandpapa came along, kept at Shipping, then went into Shipbuilding as well. Father went to University, became a Lawyer. Died of a heart attack when I was ten. Mummy's boy, I was, they all said that. Even Margery, my best cousin, says I'm soft in the head. And soft in the heart too, as a sort of joke. But she's right, in way. Always did what Mother wanted, tried to please her, jumped to her tune. Problems with things, reading poor, not stupid, just, eh, slow. Margery helped, without her, disaster.'

'You know, I think back and realise that it was Mummy that found Harriet for me. A friend of Denny's, his University days, St Andrew's - Denholm my cousin, Margery's brother. Lazy bugger he was - excuse the French. Never did a hand's

turn in his life. Bain of Margery's life. Good riddance to him. Wastrel, gold plated wastrel.'

There was more; as she listened her mind tumbled.

So this was where he lived. To her it seemed to be the biggest house in the street. There were two men working in the garden. Tom called and waved but they were too far away, with their heads down, on their knees, busy.

Parked outside the house, to the side, in front of the garage, there was a large black car; it was a Humber Super Snipe, she heard him say. He seldom drove nowadays but it had just been to the garage for a service and he needed to give it a run to check that it was in order.

He bumbled at her side, rambling in his strange way from one idea to another, imparting the skeleton of his life. He's trying to impress me, make me like him, and make me want him. Why me? Surely he could have a wide choice. Was there something even odder about him, hidden? Why had Harriet 'departed', the very clever Harriet who was so good at everything. Why would she give up a house like this? If it was divorce, then she must have been 'paid off' very well. It did happen with rich people, it was in the papers, on the wireless. A 'Settlement' it was called. Had Tom been the 'guilty party', as it was called? What was his secret?

Sandra began to listen again.

'Mother started the "House of Walker" just after Father died. At first, before Harriet, it had been more of a hobby than a business, to keep her busy. The Clients at that time were all friends, popping in for a cup of tea, checking what was new. Amateurish, Harriet said, but not to Mother. But even then it was profitable, even Harriet had to admit that. But then, under Harriet, "The House of Walker" blossomed.

'Do you like gardening, Sandra? Sorry, stupid question, I know, Oatlands. Sorry. I love gardening. Must wear gloves, essential, insist they wear gloves, Alec and Jimmy there! Me too. **Exactly!** Jimmy's wife Dotty does all my domestics, gets her sister Meg in to help with the heavy stuff. All live nearby, Govanhill, not far really, next to Oatlands, eh? Here most days. Served with both of them in the ARP. Trustworthy. Am I right?

'But when Harriet took me off Mother's hands, married me. You see it was actually Harriet who proposed to me, I would never have had the courage to ask her. Of course I said yes immediately. She was small, and pretty, piercing green eyes, looked straight into your mind, almost perfect to look at. And vivacious. Yes, I

think would be the best word. Flitted around like a little Robin. Red hair too. And yes, I know she did it for my money, at least that's what I thought at the time. But I did love her. Everyone loved her, it seems. Ha, ha, ha. Especially Denny! Oh yes, Denny loved her, alright! Ha, ha, ha. What a joke. Poor taste. Am I right?

'Mother gave over the business to us, 'jointly and severally', I think the phrase was, and then she immediately retired to Jersey. Mother said she would go, "so that Harriet and I could live in peace", in there, in Denholm Castle, alone, without the three of us annoying each other, as Mother put it. Twenty four is not enough rooms for three people it seems. Ha, ha, ha.

'It was the first time I had ever been separated from her, Mother, I mean. But later, after - Aaaah- Later, when I went over everything that happened, what was said and unsaid, after, you know, I think that this might have been part of the "deal" Harriet made with Mother, before taking me on. Margery doesn't agree, but I'm sure that was it. Mother said it was for her arthritis of course, and she was from Jersey originally, never really took to Glasgow, she often said that.

'Now that I'm rattling in there alone, Mother keeps repeating her invitation, her 'command'. Tells me to sell up and move there, to Jersey, to join her, look after her in her old age. Probably would have given in, if it were not for Margery. She is my rock, really she is. Patch was her idea, from her dog rescue centre place. You were, weren't you Patch? Eh? *Good girl*, that's it Patch, home now, aren't we? NO! STAY! SIT!

'But she's not bossy like Mother, Margery, no, and not like Harriet, not manipulative, deceitful. No, Margery is straight, trustworthy. No, Harriet and Margery never got along, never. Should have warned me, Margery, should have warned me, but kept shtum. Anyway I would simply not have believed her then, at the beginning - I was in love, still am, in a way.

'At forty-two I'm still young enough, Margery says. And so does Mother, actually. And she has a new ploy, Mother, someone called Valerie, in Jersey, a War widow, keen to meet me, Mother says, just the "*right type*." I think I've had enough of *those*, I said to Margery! **Exactly!** Am I right?'

And on and on Tom burbled and she had lost track of time. It had been hours. And he was beginning to go round and round, telling her the same things again, in different ways, confusing her. Sandra was feeling the need of a toilet. And she was getting hungry. Perhaps soon, after she left, she could find a café.

'Tom, eh, sorry to interrupt, but I need to go, I need to get my chores done before Mum gets back. And get something for get our Tea. I usually do the cooking on Tuesdays, when Mum has her day off and goes into town. So...'

'Sorry, "Rabbit Brain"! That's what Margery calls me. Hopping about from one thing to the next. Family joke. Sorry. Let me run you home, Sandra? *Please!* You like cars, don't you, you told me that. Am I right?'

'NO! No, sorry, Tom, but no. I need to do some shopping on my way home. It would be better, easier, much more convenient, to go by the tram.'

The Promise

They set off again, picked up their pace. She glanced over her shoulder for a last look at Denholm Castle. The gardeners were still there, with their heads down. The house was enormous, and so were the grounds. Tom was talking but she was only half listening. "Envisioning" was a word that Sandra had been carrying in her head for ages and now she was envisioning what it would be like to go inside Denholm Castle with its twenty four rooms. Wandering from room to room, she felt she was in a film.

'I understand, Sandra. You're right of course. Supporting the parent must come first, above all things? Ha, ha, ha. Am I right?'

'Mmm. Not really, not all of the time, though, I could...'

'But perhaps we could try a different café, was that it?'

'Eh, well Tom if...'

'No you don't need to say it again. I know, "**not now!**" That opportunity is gone, I realise that. My fault. Blew it. Blew it. Another time? How about tomorrow, after our walk? You are coming back? Am I right? And afterwards, we could take a drive; find somewhere else, have a light lunch? Would you like that? Am I right?'

'Yes. I planned to go to the park every day this week. Just in case. I promised myself. It's my last chance, before I start back at Uncle Bertie's next Monday.'

'Good. Good. So, tomorrow is a definite yes? Am I right? Is that a promise, Sandra? You said you've promised yourself! I know you would never break a promise? Am I right? And maybe, if I bring the car, we can go for a short drive too? After our walk, I mean, after our walk, when we are sure, that 'you know who' isn't coming? Am I right?'

'Yes, that would be nice, Tom. Thank you. And yes, a drive too, that would be very nice, I love cars.'

'Yes, but *you* could drive us, couldn't you? Am I right?'

'Did I tell you that, Tom? Did I say that I can drive?'

'Yes, actually, you did, on Monday, which was actually yesterday, but it seems like years ago, doesn't it? Am I right? You love driving, Uncle Bertie's van, you told me

on Monday - van sales girl, and all that. To tell you the truth, Sandra, that's why she's out, in the drive. I had her serviced, just in case. Insisted they work on her at once. She's not been out for ages. Not since Mother's last visit. I'm not great at driving, the old eyes again, I'm afraid. But you will drive us? **Exactly!** Am I right?'

Pal Joey

Tom was whistling, as before, happy.

And Sandra was happy, dreaming, not about Bobby, whose memory was fading.

'Well, here we are at your tram stop, Sandra. Did you notice that, when we passed the Waverley, that *Pal Joey* is showing? A great film, I hear. Am I right? Did you see that the last showing is tonight, that tomorrow the programme changes?'

His eyes pleaded.

'Yes, I've wanted to see it for ages.'

'Well then, so do I! What if we meet again, right here, tonight, say five o'clock? We can have an early meal at that fancy place over there and then watch it together? Would you like that? Am I right?'

'Yes, Tom, yes, that would be great.'

As the tram arrived, suddenly, why she could not explain, she leaned forward and kissed his cheek, whispered:

'Five o'clock, here, tonight. Thanks, Tom, thanks for everything.'

Sandra had never done anything like that in her life. It was 'out of character', a phrase she loved. Watching for other people to 'act out of character' was one of her favourite past-times. She had always been the passive receiver of kisses, touches. It was the way she was. Talkative but shy at the same time. Self-contained was how she thought of herself, but not withdrawn.

She rushed upstairs and looked from the back section of the tram. She saw him waving. She waved back. He was still waving as the tram turned a corner. Then she went back downstairs, away from the smokers. She got off at the next stop to find a café with a toilet.

Hussy

Sitting alone she was mixed up, confused, uncertain: "perturbed" was the word for her. Why did she kiss him? Her Mum would have called her a shameless hussy. Was he trying to pick her up, thinking that she was 'easy'? How many times had Tom seen her make these visits to the woods with Bobby? Had he seen, or heard anything else? She had been quite noisy, she blushed. Did Tom think that she was 'available' to men? That she was trying to entice him?

But when she pictured his face, his pleading eyes, his mannerisms, his gentleness, she knew she was wrong. He was just a lonely man, and not *that* old, and very rich. And if he had a problem, didn't everyone? Like her Mum had with her Dad? Clearly Tom had a mental limp of some kind, just like everyone else!

He said he was forty-two. Thirteen years older. But not too old, she hoped.

Wearing his hat, with his glasses, made him look older, she thought. But he was certainly fit, a quick walker: "sprightly", was the word that came to her. And his long face was nice, kindly, not pretty and persuasive like Bobby or handsome and bold like her Dad. Yes, she confirmed to herself, Tom's face is kindly and comfortable to look at, especially without his glasses. If someone helped him to put on his contact lenses, well....

She found herself smiling, already looking forward to meeting him again.

ooOoo

They had a nice evening.

In the restaurant he had smiled when she opened her purse, offering to pay half, go Dutch, and showing him that she had enough money, that she was not a gold-digger or a

'No, Sandra, my treat, my privilege. Dining out with a beautiful young woman like you, how could I possibly let you pay? Am I right?'

He had reached across their table, closing her purse gently. His fingers were soft, warm, dry.

They sat in the best seats, sharing a golden divan. He gave her a two pound box of chocolates, the biggest, fanciest box she had ever seen. He never ate chocolates, he said, when she offered. She ate two chocolates and then managed

to stop. I am acting with self-restraint, she told herself, amazed that she could leave them uneaten. But later, when she got home, well that might be harder.

Under their coats draped across their legs, she took hold of his hand and squeezed. He squeezed back, but he did not try anything.

She relaxed and tried to enjoy the film. When she looked across, his head was drooping, his glasses almost falling off. She eased them away and held them for him. Snoozing, almost asleep, he looked boyish in the flickering light. He started to snore she squeezed his hand. He shook his head, smiled, and squeezed back. They giggled.

He watched the rest of both films without his glasses. Each time she glanced round, he was looking at her with a small self-satisfied smile on his lips. He looks smug she thought. She began to float.

Afterwards Tom ran her home, driving very, very slowly, like a hearse, she thought: a "funereal procession" was the phrase. He stopped at her corner, across from Richmond Park. The car had everything, including leather seats and an auto-box, something she had no experience of. He said he would teach her how to use it, explain all the controls. It was easier than a manual, much easier, he said. And then she would drive it for them, he insisted.

Sandra stretched over and pecked his cheek, hoping that she would not be seen by anyone who knew her. He did not say anything, did not grab at her, just closed his eyes and began nodding his head, with a wide grin on his face. She sped out of the car, scuttled round the corner to her close and raced upstairs, to escape the thoughts that sprang into her mind.

Promotion

Sandra eased the front door closed quietly and slid down the snib gently, preventing its tell-tale click. She stood in the hallway and waited in silence. There was no tell-tale pool of light escaping the kitchen door and no sound of voices. Thank goodness, they must be having an early night, she thought. She did not want her Mum to see her new clothes and the large box of chocolates. It was too late at night for that encounter.

She crept into her room quietly, stealthily, eased the door closed. She left the light off and closed the curtains before undressing and hiding her illicit clothes and the last of her chocolates. In her nightgown she set about making up her bed. Sandra "compelled herself" to do everything slowly and as quietly as possible, conjuring an image of herself as a wraith in the night, moving silently, unseen. Her plan was sabotaged by the spring mechanism of the bed settee, which creaked then zinged as it sprang into its unfolded shape. When the dreaded noise came she froze, waited. After a delay she carried on and lowered the feet carefully onto the floor.

Sandra lay on her back under her bedclothes and stared up at the shapes and shadows which invaded the room through the gaps and splits in the thin curtains, patterning the ceiling and walls. Some of these images flitted and flashed to disappear in an instant, while others moved and distorted, at a snail's pace, to linger then fade away as a new brighter shape appeared, the process repeating anew. The sequence of her nightly grey and white picture show was soothing, iterating endlessly, lulling her towards sleep.

The familiar and comforting sounds of communal living were all around her; the trudge of tired feet climbing the stairs; the muffled conversations and clip-clopping of heels rising from the street below; the screech of a tram in the distance as it negotiated a corner; and, from the nearby marshalling yard, the shuddering rattle, rumble and sudden clang of carriages and wagons colliding and ricocheting, with the sporadic short sharp warning whistle of the shunting engines stabbing through the background of these other sounds.

From above and below her came the thumps and thuds of furniture being heaved around to set up sleeping arrangements; the scrape of chairs being dragged across linoleum or bare floorboards; the unexpected bang of doors being kicked by an

impatient foot or nudged by an irate elbow, punctuated by the strident and disturbing cry of a voice raised in anger or protest.

This familiar concerto of urban living was played against the deep rhythmic bass drone of her Dad's loud snore, his head only inches from hers, on the far side of the thin dividing wall.

Sandra began to think that everything from her day must have happened in a dream. Then it came to her: how did he know where to drop her, right at her corner, without once asking directions. What else did he know about her? It was impossible! It must have all been a dream, she had imagined everything. Soon she would waken up to her own dull world again.

Suddenly she felt sad; "bereft" was the word she chose. This cold, damp room crowded with old furniture and cheap nick-knacks was her reality, not the romantic world of *Pal Joey* or the grandeur of Denholm Castle.

Eventually her thoughts slowed, subsided, as if she was walking through treacle. She turned onto her side and pulled the sheet over her head to shut out everything but Tom.

Her eyes drooped then closed, and Denholm Castle shimmered into view, sitting resplendent in its large and well-tended grounds. There were birds flitting, Patch was running around barking, but there were no sounds. She was high above the scene looking through the lens of the camera, making a silent film, but in full colour.

She saw a tall buxom girl standing on the pavement outside Denholm Castle. The girl had shoulder-length curly dark brown hair which obscured her face. She stood in black shiny wellies, wearing a too-short night-gown.

And now she was the girl, Sandra Bletcher, from Oatlands, one of the poorer parts of Glasgow, standing in the street outside one of the biggest, richest houses in Pollokshields. Despite the blustery wind she wasn't cold, just aware that she was 'improperly dressed', as Miss Hassard would have said.

At first Tom was at her side, talking, describing everything, explaining. As she watched, everything seemed to get bigger.

This image faded out and a new scene emerged.

A girl appeared, standing in front of the door of Denholm Castle, at the top of the flight of steps that led down to the sweeping driveway and the garden below.

Her face hidden by a black veil and she wore a figure-hugging red dress. Her legs were long and slim. Her hair was blowing out behind her, impossibly long strands of bright red hair twisting and disappearing into the blackness of her veil.

Sandra felt embarrassed by her own appearance, her lack of clothing. Although she had not cried for years, apart from when Trump died, she was crying now, in her sleep, standing on the pavement, weeping for her new loss.

The girl seemed to glide without moving her legs; "gracefully" was the word that Sandra dreamed.

Now the girl stood beside the gardeners, Alec and Jimmy, who stopped working, looked up, doffed their caps and nodded their heads. The girl pointed at various parts of the garden and again they nodded.

Then the girl in the red dress pointed at Sandra.

The men held their hands to their brows and peered at the poor girl on the far-away pavement, then looked up at the girl and shook their heads.

Her Mum shook her awake.

'Sandra, what is it? What's wrong? It's the dog, isn't it? Your Daddy's right, Sandra, you have to let him go. Now, sit up, that's it. Here, my darling, let me give your face a wipe. Shush, shush now. Don't wake yer Daddy, girl, or I'll have him pawing at me again. I'm tired out, not in the mood for it twice in the one night, not nowadays. Once was enough. Do you hear him? Snoring his big handsome head off. He's had quite a few whiskies too. Not like him to drink more than one, I'll give him that.'

'Oh, Mum, please...'

'Shush! Don't wake him. When did you get back in, Sandra? I was lying there listening for you, to be sure you got back safe and sound. You saw the Kitchen light was out, did you? Good of you to leave us to it. Did you hear us? He's always noisy in it, as you know. Full of himself, tonight. The big guy again. Frisky as a spring lamb.

'And Sandra, you'll never guess, not in one million years! He gave me twenty pounds! Can you believe it? He was at Perth, with young Denny, in his car. Young Denny is moving up, up into the horses, at last. Into the big league. He's made your Daddy an 'Associate Partner'. Young Denny's wee brother, Tony, he's going up on the box, but yer Daddy will be in charge, running it. What do you think of that?

'But, Sandra, I'm frightened for him. What if he has one of his mad turns and uses young Denny's bag to punt on the horses himself? Oh God, Sandra, young Denny will kill him, he surely will.'

'Mum, my dream, well, tonight, I...'

'Shush, Sandra. Just let it be, darling. And thanks for listening. You are always good with him, Sandra. You'll need to make sure that we keep him right. All right? Now back to sleep, darling. Oh, I nearly forgot? Your Daddy wants to tell you himself. But that guy who bought Wilson's dogs? Well, it was with young Denny's money. But don't tell anyone. Well, your Daddy wants you to start out there, at Carntyne, instead of at Bertie's. Young Denny has agreed. The Owner's a Mr Henshaw, or something like that I think Wilf said. They've not had a winner out of him yet. Your Daddy had a 'stern word' with him, you know what I mean. It's not his fault, this Henshaw says, it's his kennel man, he's hopeless. Asked for you by name, this Henshaw did, asked if you were still available, says he knows you, this Henshaw. Your Daddy was well gone, but I managed to sober him up, and then it was the other. Anyway, your back in business as a kennel maid, that's what you wanted, isn't it?'

'But MUM!'

'No Sandra, and keep your voice down. Look, your Daddy was right, Sandra, everybody knows how good you are with the dogs. Everybody likes you Sandra. This Henshaw is up and coming, your Daddy says, a good talker, a bit like Eddie, our Edward, if you please, but posher, and better looking, a smart dresser. And not married, it seems, could be a wee chance for you, Sandra, stranger things have happened.

'But it's still up to you, Sandra. You can still start at Uncle Bertie's on Monday morning. That was a promise, and he can't go back on it. But I'm sure Bertie'll be alright about it if you go back to the dogs. That's what you really want, isn't it?'

'But Mum, things have *changed*, I need to tell you something, everything is different. You see I ...'

'Shush yourself now Sandra; I'm worn out by all that's happened. He was bleezin', talking at me like a train, for hours and then, well, you know the rest. Did you hear us? I'm not used to all this late night romance, what with me out in a few hours.'

'But Mum, please, I have to ...'

'No, not now girl, shush yourself. There you are Sandra, that's it girl, lie down now, cuddle in and slip back to sleep. That's it. Shush, shush.

'And, remember; keep it a surprise for your Daddy, when he tells you all his news in the morning. He's so proud of himself. Please God he doesn't blow it up in our faces.

'Now, listen, Sandra, I'll be away first thing, so I'll not see you till I get back. Ah, here's your Teddy. Cuddle in.

'Nighty-nighty, Mrs McTighty.'

Discovery

The next morning, as soon as her Mum closed the door, Sandra crept through to the Kitchen. Her father was snoring loudly. The room stank of stale whisky and tobacco. She filled the basin with cold water and crept back to the front room, her bedroom.

Washed and dressed, she left the house before her Dad could influence her.

She took the tram to Carntyne.

She knew the place; she had walked a dog out to it, on stud duties, under its previous Owner.

There was a new sign over the entrance, fresh paint.

"R. Henshaw, Racing Greyhounds."

Just before ten o'clock a grey Ford Popular car drove up. It stopped directly outside the cafe. Up close Sandra could see that the car was old, rusty. She could only see the man, on the passenger side nearest to her, obscuring a blonde woman. They were smoking and kissing at the same time.

It was what Sandra had feared, even worse.

Sandra had seen enough.

She walked past the grey car and kept going until she saw a black taxi, hailed it and gave her destination. The taxi driver, whistled, said the approximate price, asked if she could afford it. She showed him a ten shilling note.

In the cab she sobbed, blew her nose, and finally shrugged Bobby Shaw off.

Behind her closed eyes Tom's face smiled, reassuringly. She took a deep breath, combed her hair and sorted her make-up.

ooOoo

Sandra "alighted" from the taxi. It was only her second ever time in a taxi, the other time with Miss Hassard. She had been in Primary Three and had fallen in the playground, to be taken to hospital with a suspected broken ankle. She had heard the word alighted recently in a play, and now she was doing it.

"Twenty to eleven" the cabby answered. Sandra had never owned a watch, always using clocks in shops and on church towers to see the time. She paid him off and ran into the park, her heart thudding. She was pretty sure she could find his house if she needed to, she didn't want to.

She saw him in the distance, his back to her, throwing a stick for Patch.

'TOM! TOM!'

He turned. Patch raced towards her. Sandra kept running. Tom ran a few steps but stumbled, almost fell, then slowed to a fast walk.

'Thank goodness, here you are at last. **Exactly!** I was sure that you would come but wondered if there had been a hold-up. The trams or whatever? Am I right? But you're here now, and that's what counts. **Exactly!** Am I right?'

'Yes Tom, you are right. **Exactly** right! Ha, ha, ha. Come on, let's get walking. I'm stiff from sitting so long.'

They set off at a fast past, side by side, stride by stride, arm in arm with Patch racing ahead then trailing back to them, then circling round them, herding them.

'Tom, yesterday you mentioned gardening. I know nearly nothing about gardening. So, why not tell me what I need to know, everything. Please. What's that tree, is it a chestnut?'

ooOoo

They walked and talked for hours. But now it was different, now it was a natural two-way conversation. Sandra got opportunities to use some of her words, and she took them. Miss Hassard would be proud of me, she thought.

Tom had parked his car inside the park, at a spot she did not know existed, at the gate that led to Denholm Castle. It was a small area, with enough space for three cars, hidden from general view. The horrible memory of Eddie at Cathkin Heights flashed back. There were hundreds of cigarette ends strewn around, rotting away. Most of them were half-smoked, with red lipstick on them. It was disgusting how thoughtless and careless some smokers were, she thought.

ooOoo

They drove only around Pollokshields, staying on quiet streets, Sandra at the wheel. Tom had been right, the auto-box was easier and the brakes were sharp, not like Uncle Bertie's van.

They stopped outside a different café, on Albert Road, the only shopping area in Pollokshields, Tom explained. This café was a very fancy place. Patch slept in the car, on the back seat, on a blanket.

After lunch, now that she had gained more confidence, and following Tom's directions, Sandra drove to the outskirts of Glasgow, to Rouken Glen Park, where they had another walk with Patch; then back to their friendly café for a fish tea, chatting their way through two large pots of tea and several rounds of empire biscuits.

It was late when Tom ran her home again, just beginning to get dark. As they drove into Oatlands he made no mention of the poor surroundings, so different from Pollokshields, Giffnock and Shawlands that they had passed through on their journeys.

He stopped outside her close, peering up at the number, checking it was the correct one, even though she knew she hadn't told him her address. How did he know? It worried her. Maybe asking would break the spell and she would learn something she didn't want to know. Everything else seemed perfect. Sandra let it go. Surely Tom could not be bad; "sinister" might be the word: his face and his words were true, she could *feel* it; she knew was good at reading people, most of the time.

To confirm her judgement about him to herself, she leaned across and pecked his cheek again, thanked him for a lovely day. She did not care who saw them. Let them talk, she thought, knowing that if she had been seen, her Mum would be the first to hear.

On her way upstairs a neighbour stopped her.

'Sandra hen, yer Ma an Da are awaa oot. Tae the Alhambra, ah think she sayed. "Hittin the High Spots", is whit she sayed. Thur's a mince roond in the oven fur ye, but ye huv tae dae yer ain totties and veggies, a'right?'

'Thanks, Mrs McClusky.'

'Aye, an Sandra, yer secret's safe wi me, hen. Heh, heh, heh. Ye've goat tae grab wit wee bit pleashur while ye kin get it, eh? Nae metter if he's meririt. Ye'll be auld soon enough, take ma word fur it, hen. At least ye've the sense to grab wan that's goat a caur. Beats staunin in cauld back closes wi' yer knickers at yer ankles, eh? Heh, heh, heh.'

'Thanks, Mrs McClusky.'

ooOoo

Sandra went to bed early, tried to listen to the wireless, willing Thursday morning to come as soon as possible. As soon as she heard the key in the lock she snapped off the light, dived under the covers and feigned sleep.

She was still avoiding the chat with her Dad.

Tom was the one in her dreams. Bobby was no more. The girl in the red dress was gone too.

Whistle while You Walk

On Thursday as she sat in the tram, convinced Tom would be there, even though it was raining quite heavily. "Dependable" was the word that came to her. Tom is dependable.

And people had said that of her, in her hearing and sometimes to her face. "You are a good girl Sandra, dependable, always trying your best, for everybody", Miss Hassard had said, and Sandra had tried to live up to that praise. It was getting up so early to go to Bertie's that had been so hard, especially during the dark winter months. Even worse was going there on beautiful summer mornings, when the birds were singing and she was being forced to stand behind the counter listening to the same boring old tales.

And Tom was there, of course, as she had predicted. They set off in the rain, at first at their usual high speed lollop. Because of the problem with his glasses Tom had to stop every few minutes to clean them, breaking their rhythm. Eventually she took his arm offering to steer him. He stopped, smiled broadly, nodded vigorously. He took off his glasses, and put them inside their case, then into his pocket. They set off again and after a few strides to get used to their closeness, they were striding out, their steps matching each other.

We are walking with the same "cadence", she thought, as she held his arm, placing her palm above his wrist, using slight pressure to point him left or right, as the woman had done with her blind father in the play a few years before. She glanced across and he was smiling and nodding, not peering forward but holding his chin up, looking up into the rain. He has placed his trust in me, she thought.

After they had talked themselves dry Tom began to whistle, under his breath, as before. He was good. She joined in.

'Ah, Miss Sandra Bletcher, yet another hitherto hidden attribute. **Exactly!** Am I right?'

He smiled and nodded his head, then joined her, whistling louder.

She realised that it had stopped raining, and the Sun was out, shining brightly.

They moved easily from one tune to the next, the words filling her head: seamlessly was the word that came to her mind. At secondary school she had been

in the choir, an alto, but since then she had only sung in secret, to her dogs, when she was sure no one was around.

They went to their old café. Patch slept at their feet.

In the afternoon she drove them to the Gorbals Waterworks near Barrhead, and they walked over every path, making two huge figures of eight. Later Tom directed her and they drove to a small family Italian restaurant in Giffnock, near the Tudor Picture House. Sandra ate her first ever lasagne, while the Proprietor's wife Gina, fussed over Patch, providing her with a large plate of scrapings.

They sat through a first house, a double bill of "Funny Face" and "Pal Joey".

As Tom snoozed, Sandra became Audrey Hepburn and Tom became Fred Astaire. Tom had done only country dancing at school, he had said earlier. Margery was an expert, and would be pleased to show Sandra, if she would like to try it.

He ran her home, only slightly quicker than before, deferring to every other vehicle or tram they met. They ignored the hoots from behind and eventually arrived at her close.

She pecked his cheek, and then pecked it again, pressing harder. As on Wednesday he nodded his head. She heard him say to himself, under his breath, "Yes, Tom, yes. At last. At last. Margery was right."

Sandra floated upstairs. The house was empty. She decided she did not want to let this moment end and pulled down the settee and lay on it fully clothed. She closed her eyes and drifted into a dancing daydream.

She watched herself and Tom lead a group in some strange Scottish dance. They were both dressed in tartan, with their hands held above their heads. The onlookers were smiling and clapping politely.

Then everyone else flooded onto the dance floor. Her whole family were there, even Edward and Arlene and their children. There were many others that she did not know. Some were rather po-faced but most were happy; "jovial" was the word. The most surprising figure was young Denny, standing beside her Dad, and both of them were dressed in Top Hat and Tails, like Fred Astaire.

The dream moved on.

There was no black-veiled widow wearing a red dress in this dream.

Just Tom and Sandra skipping arm in arm through the Pollok Estate, chatting although she could not hear their words, with Patch herding them, silently. It was like an old black and white silent film.

Over and over in her dream, every time she looked at him, she kept asking herself, "Why me? Why has he chosen me? Why?"

ooOoo

Sandra sensed her Mum throwing the blanket over her and drawing the curtains, but kept her eyes closed until she was alone again, used her potty, undressed and went to bed properly.

Within minutes she was fast asleep again, smiling in her dream - back in dancing paradise.

An Uncertain Future

The next morning was Friday 12th of April, two weeks since the Gala Final. It was nearly eight o'clock. Sandra was alone in the house, in her room, still in her pyjamas, finishing her make-up before leaving for the park. She heard the key turn, the door slam and her Mum thundering along the hall.

'Sandra, I'm glad I caught you. You're needed. You have to come and help at the shop. Right away, come on now, get moving. Bertie's got two girls off with the flu, I have to go into the bakery and you have to take my place on the counter. Come ON, Sandra! Look, girl, get your togs on. Hurry up now, the queue's right round the corner and folk are getting angry. Sandra, are you listening to me? Don't bother with make-up, come on!'

'No! No Mum, I'm not coming. I've arranged to meet a friend and, well, I don't want to work at Bertie's anyway.'

'For goodness sake girl! So, did you speak to your Daddy yet? He's desperate to tell you.'

'No, and Mum, I don't want to work in dog racing anymore, it's completely sordid, corrupt, horrible. You've said it yourself, Mum.'

'But Sandra, you have to do *something*. And your Daddy is so keen that you do it, you're good at it, everyone knows that. And this Henshaw's keen to get his hands on you.'

'Yes, I know he is! He is horrible too, just like Eddie. You can tell Dad that he's untrustworthy, so far as I can tell.'

'Oh? And how do *you* know so much about this Henshaw? Tell me that! What have you been playing at? Is he the posh man with the big fancy car that Edna McClusky has been rabbiting on about? It's all over the street. Well, is it? Sandra Bletcher, look at me! What have you been doing behind my back?'

'Nothing! Nothing, Mum, honest. It's just that I met him a few times, when I was out walking my dogs, that's all. And I can just *tell* about people. And I did go to have a look at his kennels, and they are horrible, horrible. I could never work in a place like that. Please Mum, just tell Dad, thanks but no thanks. And I don't want to speak to him, you know what Dad's like, he'll nearly talk me into it and then when I say no,

he'll get angry. You know what will happen. And then you'll fly into one of your rages and then, well, you KNOW what will happen. Don't you?"

'Look, Sandra, I've got to get back to the shop. But I tell you one thing - Bertie'll not let you back in the door if you don't come right now. This is it. Final chance.'

'Mum, no, no, no. No!'

'This is not finished Sandra Bletcher. We'll have to have a pow-wow tonight, the three of us. And make up your mind to it Sandra, I'll want every detail of this man Edna McClusky is talking about. Somebody saw him close up. He's got a wedding ring, a married a man! NO Sandra, are you listening to me? It'll only lead to tears and well, the last thing we need is a baby without a Look, there's no need to spell it out! Oh Sandra, you'll never find a decent man, not after this! What are we going to do with you? And you can't go on swanning about doing nothing. I can't afford it, even with the big money your Daddy keeps talking about, saying now that he's earning big, he'll never gamble again. God, Sandra, look at the time. I've got to run. Your Uncle Bertie'll blow up at this, you know he will. You've burned your bridges. Are you sure you'll not come, Sandra, even just for today. We'll try the van driver thing on him again? Eh?'

'No Mum, thanks, but no. And tell Uncle Bertie thanks too, and that I'll always be grateful to him, especially for teaching me to drive.'

'Right Sandra Bletcher. So be it! But you get you're thinking cap on, my girl, and figure out what it is you're going to do to earn a penny. Because I'll tell you this for true, no job - no digs. That's the way it works, girl. You'll be out of here inside a week. Understand?'

The door banged shut and feet scurried down two flights, leaving Sandra alone, and smiling. Her Mum always blew up like this, just like Uncle Bertie, but she didn't mean it. She never did. Sandra opened the drawer and took out her best clothes. Thank goodness her Mum had not seen these, she thought, popping the last chocolate into her mouth.

ooOoo

Sitting on the tram Sandra was thinking only of Tom.

On Tuesday night, when he had worn a very smart suit, he looked handsome, elegant; the word "debonair" came to her. She thought of him snoring in the cinema and laughed aloud, followed by a fit of giggling. The fussy lady sitting next to her rose and moved to another seat, making Sandra's giggles worse. The conductress

fixed Sandra with a hard stare and this made her even worse. Everyone was turning to look at her. She found her hankie and buried her face in it, big heaving giggles rippling up from the pit of her stomach, her happiness now out of control.

The Whole Truth

They walked, arm in arm, even though it was not raining. She poured out her story. It came out jumbled. She tried again, slowed down. Her tummy was leaping and fluttering, her throat was dry and everything kept going out of focus. But eventually she got it out, told him what her Mum had said, not everything, just about Uncle Bertie, and then made her request.

'So Tom, I seem to have burned my boats. I don't have arguments with people, not normally. I give in mostly, too soft. But I was all set to come here and I didn't want to disappoint you. I was late for you once, Tom, and once is more than enough. In future I intend to be punctual, or even early. But is it possible, Tom, do you think, that there might be an opening suitable for me at "House of Walker"? Do you think I could do it?'

'Sandra, is that what you really want? You really want to work in a ladies' fashion shop? Am I right?'

'Well, to be honest, Tom, no, not really. It's just, well... I don't know what I could do. Well, it's just that, well, I'm not all that clever. And I don't have any qualifications, no gifts, nothing really. I'm just ordinary.'

'You mentioned this van sales thing? Surely that is *not* the sort of thing you really want to do with your life? Am I right?'

'Well, not really. I don't know what I want, not really. I'm not sure about anything. But I do like driving, that's true. I love it.'

'What about marriage, raising a family, do you think that could be a worthwhile career? Am I right?'

'Oh, you're talking about me with Bobby. I think he's moved on, found someone else.'

'Australia? He's gone to Australia. Some bloody Prince Charming he turned out to be...OOOPS, Sorry, sorry. Sandra I'm so sorry. I promised myself I would never, ever... Am I right?'

'Well no, not Australia. Ha, ha, ha. Actually he's moved to Carntyne, sort of. Not Australia, where it would be far too dusty for him and his Mum. Ha, ha, ha. And all those sheep. No Carntyne is where he wants to be, it seems.'

'And good bloody riddance. Making me wait so long! Am I right?'

'Making you wait? What do you mean, Tom, making you wait?'

'Look, look, Sandra, let's stop. I want to ask you something. Important this goes right, Warned. Margery. Warned. Big chance. **Exactly!** Am I right?'

He stood close to her, as before. Their minty breaths mingled. She had put one tiny drop of her Mum's best perfume behind her ears. Lavender was supposed to be calming she had heard in a play, relaxing. He fumbled for her hands. Patch whined for her stick to be thrown. Sandra felt suddenly as if she would boil over, like a pot of potatoes on too high a gas. She must be as red as a beetroot, she thought.

'SIT! STAY! That's a good girl. Quiet now, Patch, quiet. LIE DOWN! Good girl.'

'Aaah! Goodness, Sandra, where to start. Yes. Yes. Got it!

'Right. Afterwards, if I get this right, I have something I want you to, eh, eh, say, to answer. Just one word, that's all, one word and that will settle it, one way or the other. But first, please, just listen? Am I right?'

She nodded. Her blood was pounding at her brain and a million thoughts rushed through her mind at once. This must be another dream.

'Right. Right. Now, here goes.

'Sandra, I was thinking of you marrying someone more trustworthy, someone who actually wants you. Someone who comes to meet you when he says he'll come. Someone who thinks that you are very, very special.'

'Who, Tom? Do you mean you? Are you asking me to marry you? Really?'

'**WAIT!** Sorry, sorry, please wait. Rude. Rude. Sorry. Sorry.'

The veins on his neck were throbbing and he was wheezing, swallowing. His eyes were closed. He's marshalling his thoughts, she thought, like the shunting engine at Polmadie yard.

She squeezed his hands and he changed, smiled, and seemed to relax. But then he frowned, nervous, worried, and could not look at her face, casting his eyes first down, at her chest then immediately up to a point high above her head. She felt him tense up again. She used her thumbs to caress his hands. She had never actually caressed another human being, only her dogs. It was the way she was, passive.

'What if we walked, would that help, Tom?'

'WAIT! Right. Right. Now if I was to ask you my question, then I know you will want to ask "Why me, Tom?" Am I right? Girl like you, from Oatlands. Rich man like me. Lonely, big house, Mummy's boy. "Pushover", I think they say in those American films sometimes? Am I right? Why has he not been snapped up by someone else? What *is* his problem? He *must* have a problem? Am I right?'

'Tom, please....'

'Wait. Wait. Please wait? Am I right?'

She bit her tongue and waited.

'Right. Right. Not a fairy story. I mean it. Am I right?'

'But first, here me out. Margery said, "tell it all, Tom, everything, or you will not...".

'Aaah. Right. Right. Here goes, wait, no questions, please. Wait.

She looped her arm into his and eased him forward.

'YES! Yes. Let's walk? *Exactly!* Am I right? Let's walk and talk. Walking is the best medicine in world. Aristotle? Am I right?'

'Look Sandra, I'm afraid I didn't tell you *everything* about my life, you know, my life before. Margery annoyed, very. But Sandra, please, before you consider my offer, I want to be completely open with you, if I can face it.

'My Doctor says I've been supressing the truth, running away from it. So, best to get it all out, no skeletons left to rattle about in the night? Am I right, Sandra?'

ooOoo

Tom told her everything, in one big rush of words, like an avalanche, she thought. As she listened, pounding alongside him, her arm hooked into his she felt his tension: his upper body was rigid, his neck muscles standing out. She worried he might have a stroke, a breakdown.

She eased her index finger forward from his wrist onto the back of his hand. Pressing quite firmly, she moved it slowly from side to side. She watched his face and the throbbing of the vein in his neck lessened. He's like a greyhound! He needs re-assurance, to be as good as he can be! And this discovery made her sure that this would turn out all right.

ooOoo

'Harriet! High IQ. Clever, clever, clever. Exceptional. Gifted. But she liked to drink. And powders, she had a lot of headaches, she said. Pills, powders, potions, special boxes, hidden, whatever. But alcohol was the main thing. But poor dim, dim Tom did not see it. Learned later alcohol was the love of her life; that it was part of her life long before me. Everybody seemed to know, everybody except Mother and me. A 'functioning alcoholic' is the phrase someone coined. An illness they say. And so Harriet and I went on, me in complete ignorance. Years of lost happiness, for me, for Harriet, for everyone.

'Oh and Sandra, please, you must swear to secrecy on all this? You must, please. So far as I know, Mother knows virtually none of all this, unless Cat told her. Cat by name, Cat by nature. Vicious, vicious Cat. NO! Tom, no! Unfair. Wait. Wait.

'Aaah. *Harriet!* Wait. Wait.'

There was a long "wait" while he walked blind, his eyes closed, Sandra his guide. Then suddenly he returned.

'Well, anyway, I didn't learn to read the signs. We had been married for nearly five years before I found out. You see she controlled it, seeming to drink only occasionally when I was around, but hiding her bottles, wearing heavy perfume, smoking, which she knew I disliked. And she always used a minty mouthwash, which I thought was a good thing, and so I started to do it too. I still do, but let me assure you I am **not** a drinker. Nor are you? Am I right?'

'No, Tom, I hate whisky and I hate smoking too. My Mum and Dad smoke all the time, even when they're eating. It's disgusting. I think...'

'Right. Right. Wait, please. Please. Aaah! Aaah!

'Move on, **MOVE ON TOM!** *Harriet!* Aaah!

'Right. I came to the realisation that Harriet had sought me out. I know I'm not handsome, not exactly film star material. Buck teeth and all that, heh, heh, heh. Yes, you've guessed, at school, "Bucky Walker". Cruel, children are, very cruel. Am I right? Aaah! Digress.

'Harriet had been into the shop a few times, browsing, not buying - we are very expensive - before she 'agreed' to take the job. That's my version, anyway. She was already very well dressed, everything new, top drawer. Sizing me up, I'm sure that what it was. Margery says no, but she would, siding with Mother. Harriet kept smiling at me, the first woman ever to do so. Knees wobbled. Literally wobbled. Things happened, down below, and, so obvious.... Embarrassing! Not polite.

'And Harriet said all the right words, in the right accent? Am I right? I fell for her on the first visit. Mother saw it. Everyone saw it. Anyway, Mother hired her: she was fooled by Harriet too.'

He stopped talking and Sandra waited. He is gathering his thoughts, girding his loins, she thought.

'Aaah. Margery, what? Margery? Right. Right. Got it! Me. Me next. Right.

'I'd always worked part-time, in the shop, on and off, but secretly trying to pursue a proper career as a photographer, one of the few things I seemed to be good at. I take mostly wildlife pictures, but you haven't had a chance to see any of that yet. I've sold a few photographs to magazines, amazingly. Taken right here, in Pollok Estate, alive with wildlife, if you know where to look? Am I right? Sit or stand still for long enough. Digress. Digress. Oh, and I like cooking too. I'm good at that, sorry to boast, but everyone says I am.

'I was 'alright' at school, but not brilliant, not clever like Harriet. Not fit for University or anything like that, they told Mother. Fette's. Sent home. Glad to get rid of me. Mummy's boy. Bucky Walker. Bullied. And before you say it, Sandra, I know I've been lucky, to always have money, never needing to *strive* to make a living. Harriet always cast that up to me, if we had a disagreement. I know that it's an old cliché, but money of itself doesn't make one happy, trust me, I know. Am I right? Margery says you have to work at happiness, not wait for it to fall out of the sky and drop on your plate! Am I right? Am I?'

Was he expecting an answer this time? Sandra had decided to "wait", as he kept asking her to do, but she also wanted to help him, to offer re-assurance. Before she could find the words, he began again.

'Good. **Exactly!** Good so far, Tom. Good. Right. Me, two things. Photography, cooking. Enough of me. Oh, and gardening. Love it. Good for the soul, if we have one.'

'Tom, I've always been poor. And I when I do get any money saved, or Dad gives me a surprise from his winnings, I seem to be able to spend it very easily. I have to warn you about that. But I don't gamble, if that's what you might be thinking. You don't need to worry on that front.'

'Right. Right. You *told* me this *before*, Sandra. Wait. Wait. Please wait. Anyway, let me get it *all* out, please.

'Harriet soon took over, ran the place, much better than Mother. Even Mother could see that. She was good, very good, was Harriet, right from the start. And she played up to me and Mother encouraged her. I thought about her every waking minute and dreamed of her every night. Besotted. Fixated, might be a better word. She was very pretty, alluring, captivating. She turned heads everywhere.

She was a few years older than me, I discovered later, and was very secretive, evasive about her past. Did I tell you that? Said she had been travelling in England for a while, before coming back to Glasgow. That might have been part of it. But you knew not to probe, from her eyes, daring you, ready to strike with her sharp tongue, almost expecting a challenge, I came to realise. A hurt, I thought, some great hurt that she must not be asked about, or reminded of. But, when such moments of impasse were allowed to pass unchallenged, she would be sweet again.

'It was her words, always her words that made Harriet special. She had a gift of always finding the right words, for me, for everybody. And she made you want to tell her everything. She loved being flattered, just as we all do, and she gave it out too, in clever measure. The upshot was that we got married within six months of that first day, in the shop when...I disgraced myself.

'I couldn't risk losing her, I told Mother. But there was no argument there.

'Mother was delighted to have found someone that "took to me", as she put it. After the wedding, before actually, Mother decided to retire. And straight from the Reception, Mother moved to Jersey, near to Uncle Auden, her brother-in-law, and his wife Aunt Helen, her other sister. Uncle Auden is, or rather was, a Banker. Sir Auden Hassard? From Glasgow, originally. Heard of him at all? Big wig in the Treasury and all that?'

He stopped talking and threw a stick for Patch.

"Hassard"! Sandra wanted to ask but he had said wait. He called Patch to "heel". In silence they navigated past a group of people with their dogs racing round in circles, chasing each other, barking wildly. Patch ignored them, and soon they were free again.

'Right. Right. Though never discussed, I had assumed that we would try for children, but well, that side of things, well.... Aaah! Well, it was a great disappointment, perhaps the best way to put it. I doubt if I was any good, hopeless really. But right from our wedding night, Harriet seemed disinterested. I had no prior experience and felt it must be my fault. We soon came to a sort of 'truce' about it. She had her bedroom, and I had mine. Obviously alcohol was part of it: she

had gin bottles by the dozen hidden all over the house. So I discovered, after, Aaah, she, eh, departed.

'Good. Said it aloud. Good. Aaah. Right.

'Bridge. Harriet played Bridge, various private clubs. Her main passion, even before we met. One time she tried to teach me, but Bridge is a game I just cannot fathom. I understand that she was considered very good, as she was at most things, perhaps even world class, some people said. I heard later, afterwards, from Cat, that there was money involved, gambling if you like. It seems she almost always won. Perhaps that's where her money came from, for her clothes and such like, before we met. She always avoided her background. Secretive. No record. Perhaps adopted? Love child of an affair? But went to the right school, all that, all that? Am I right?

'Bridge. After we married, became obsessed by it. Bridge, bloody, bloody Bridge! Aaah! She went to her Bridge matches, tournaments, straight from the shop, sometimes four or even five nights a week. Me here, lonely, angry. Arguments. Slamming doors. All that nonsense. Found some bottles. And then I gradually realised. Alcohol!

'Afterwards, when she was gone, when people were free to talk, I pieced it together. Bridge was another way of escaping from me, and being able to drink freely.

'Right. Right. *Get it all out*, Tom. Next.

'Crisp! Perhaps the most hurtful part of it all was that she had a lover, a married man whom she had been with before we even met. He was her main Bridge partner. He also happened to be my cousin, Crispin. Aaah! Right. Right.

'I hold the view that it was Crisp who suggested to Harriet that she marry me. Margery thinks not, but well, as his older sister she has spent her life covering up for him. His wife Catriona (yes, yes, the vicious Cat), she knew all about it. And Cat had her own lover. Apparently this was mutually acceptable to Crisp and Cat. Like that "Peyton Place" thing they go on about, but here, in Pollokshields! Diabolical! Cat was the one who spilled the beans, saying that Crisp had told her that I knew about them, and that I didn't mind. Cuckold! Dim, dim Tom!

They stopped, so that he could blow his nose, wipe away the tears.

'Done! DONE! *Exactly!*

They walked in silence until he had calmed down, until he could go on. She gave his arm a squeeze and he sighed.

'Sandra, you're the first person that I've ever told everything to. Not even Margery. Obviously Cat knows some of it. She has now married her lover, making him dump his wife and children. They live in Fife somewhere, near St Andrews where she's from originally. Good riddance. I never really took to her, if the truth be told. And she seemed to enjoy spilling the beans on Harriet, after she lost Crisp.'

Sandra tugged him closer, as they pounded on along the path.

'Oh, Tom, Tom, I don't know what to say.'

'Sandra, you must promise, please. Please don't tell anyone else, please? Am I right?'

'Oh Tom, poor, poor you. No, of course I'll never tell anyone. But how did Harriet die, if she died? Or did she leave you, was it divorce?'

'No, no, she died. Can one say "Thank God" in such circumstances? Not religious. Not religious. You? Don't mind. Be what you are, I always say. Margery, yes. Me, no.

'Aaah! Harriet had a car, a powerful sports car. Present, asked me for it, outright, just asked. Odd. Only thing she ever asked for, never explained. Gave me hope, thought she might let me into her world. But she never asked for anything else after that. Always had money of her own.

'She and Crisp. Crossing Fenwick Moor, Bridge club in Ayr, big tournament. Won it. Celebrating.

'Midnight, deserted, icy, Police said, very icy. Car spun off, at bend, high speed, drunk. Aaah! Right. Right. Aaah!

'Farmer, wreckage, next day. Both dead.

'Coroner, Crisp instant, Harriet *lingered*, he said. Hours, hours, hours. Trapped under car. Alone. Freezing. Bitter. Died of cold. Could have survived? Am I right? Aaah!'

He stopped, looked up and shouted, 'DONE! At last! *Everything!*'

She moved to face him, taking his hands in hers. She did not flinch from his anxious, searching eyes. He's like Trump, looking for assurance. She smiled with her eyes.

'Oh Tom, Tom. How horrible for you. Devastating.'

'Sandra, why did I have to know this? Why? Why? Ignorance is bliss! I believe it.

'Insomnia. Sleep. Nightmares. Harriet's face. Screaming at me. "Help, help, help!" Stuck. Her. Me. Patch upset. Need help. Aaah!

'But Sandra, me, I'm not a bad person. Margery will tell you, Sandra, trust me. *I'm normal*. Want you, Sandra. Want you. Please?'

'Oh Tom, Tom, poor you. I...'

'Wait! Sandra, not a fairy tale. Margery said to tell you. I'm getting better. Am I right? Insomnia. *Normal*. Not alone, others have it too.'

'Oh Tom, how terrible for you - absolutely awful.'

His hands tensed, squeezing hers hard; his body rigid. There must be more to come, even though he had shouted "Done". She squeezed in return and watched his face. His eyes were closed, he wants to know he can depend on me, put his trust in me. She searched for words to re-assure him but was afraid of those that came and could not say them.

They stood in silence for a long time, waiting, as he had told her to do so many times.

She felt the tension pass and he opened his eyes. He looked around, as if returning from a journey, waking from a dream, almost surprised to see her, then gave her a wan smile.

'Done, all over now. Not so bad? Am I right?'

'No, good to get it off your chest. Next time will be easier.'

'Next time?'

'Yes, I heard about it on the wireless, Tom. 'Release therapy', I think they called it. But really, it's just common sense. A trouble shared is a trouble halved. And when the trouble is very painful, it needs to be talked out. That's what Mum always says. Don't sweep it under the carpet, sweep it out! That's what we have to do, walk and talk it away. What do you think, Tom?'

'You know? Aaah. Yes, Sandra, there is more. The *Whole Truth*!

'Sandra, even though we did not make a proper marriage, the truth is that most of the time she was very nice to me, truly. She was nice to everyone, actually,

Charming, mother called her, "A very charming girl". She *wasn't* an ogre. I actually loved her, always, even after our fights. And in truth, I loved her even more, if that is possible, after she died. Am I right? I used to meet her, all over the house. Just standing or sitting there, smiling at me, never speaking. And then it started, she came to my bed every night and we, you know, we made...love. Dreadful, disgraceful.... Madness? I had stay awake to keep her from me.

'Who could I tell? Margery? No? Tell Old Frosty, sorry, Alan Thomson? No, he would have been on the telephone to Mother, get me locked up?

'But then, that day, last year, when I saw you, heard you talking to your dogs, it started to change. I started to think about you, and me, and it was then Harriet changed. When she came, less and less, it was to taunt me, not to make

'And then she started to fade. But Sandra, I must tell you the whole truth, Harriet is still there, in my head and in a way, and I still love her. Am I right?

'But I'm not mad, Sandra. I'm normal. Am I right?

'Getting better, Sandra. Near you, getting better. Poor Harriet, even though she betrayed me, fading. You see, Sandra, I can see now that Harriet betrayed herself. But then I knew, someone, before me, someone else had betrayed her, cast her aside. Her mother? Her father? Was that why she put her trust in alcohol? Was that why she could not, would not trust me, in case I let her down? Or did she really love Crisp? Am I right?

'Sandra, Harriet and me, it could have been perfect, we could have had a family, everything. But I realise now that she never really wanted me, used me, perhaps a cover her affair with Crisp? Am I right?

'I kept thinking, why? It must have been my money, had she stolen it from me and I did not know? Checked, checked. Felt furtive, unclean, disloyal. Nothing. So it wasn't really my money. In any case Harriet always had money, her own money, always in cash.

'Just that one time she asked, for the car. I have no idea where her money came from. Not one iota of an idea. I've wracked my brains, checked everywhere. No bank account, nothing like that. It remains a mystery to all of us. Even Cat said that Denny had no idea. There was more than two thousand pounds in her handbag, at the crash. And another fifteen thousand, hidden in various caches around the house? Does that make any sense to you? Gave it to Margery, for her 'good works'.

'Yes, Tom. She felt that money made her safe. When you are poor, or have been poor, you want money you can touch, your own money. But you have to let Harriet go now, Tom. She's dead. She'll never come back. You must move on, make a new life without her.'

'Exactly!' That's exactly what Margery says, over and over. Sandra, when I saw you with your dogs, saw how they adored you, I knew that you could be trusted. And that first time I saw you, I was physically attracted to you. That's what started it. 'And you're an outdoor girl, just as I'm an outdoor man. I began to hope that somehow we could meet. But every time I got near to you, came towards you, trying for a chance encounter, hoping to have a word with you, well, you seemed to speed up, to avoid me.

'It all fell into place that day when Margery saw you. That's when it became real for me, not a fantasy? Am I right? I was certain because of Margery. I knew you were the one I wanted. We shouted to you but you were with 'you know who'. You went into the woods with him again, and I knew there was no chance.

'But Margery told me, "No, Tom, you must still hope. He's not right for her, she'll find out soon enough, you'll see". Because Margery knew him too! He was one of her pupils from her Dowanhill days. Clever child but devious, she said, unreliable, she said, "a 'schemer', like his mother and his 'uncle', if that's what he was".

'Amazing that, truly amazing. How lucky for me. But she's like that, Margery, a truly amazing person. Margery is my rock.'

'Tom, who is Margery? I don't know anyone called Margery.'

'Margery McPhail. But of course you'll know her as Margery Hassard, your teacher. She used my stuff with you, my special stuff, for reading. And it worked for you too! Am I right?'

'Miss Hassard! Is she still alive?'

'Yes, of course! Margery lives not far from me. Moved into a flat now, uses my garden whenever she has time to "indulge", as she calls it. Stays over with me, when I'm at my worst. Donald is dead, of course. He was much older than her when she finally "gave up her independence", as she puts it. No children, but hundreds, in way, she says, like you. But now it's her charities. Salt of the earth. Pillar of the Church. Prays a lot. For me, and recently for you. Sorry, no offence. You see why I couldn't tell her about Harriet coming to....

'Anyway, Sandra, watch out! Margery will rope you in. She's good at it. Always looking for drivers. Margery is my rock. Shall we invite her round for dinner, tonight. You two could catch up, maybe she'll tell you the truth about 'you know who', if you ask her. I asked, but she wouldn't tell me. Just says, "never poke the Devil in the eye", that's all.'

'Miss Hassard is Margery! That is amazing, Tom! Yes, amazing *is* the word. Yes, Miss Hassard is an amazing person. I agree. She has lived in my head all of my life. I think about her almost every day. But Tom, I warn you, I'm still not that great at reading. I still struggle.'

'Ha, ha, ha. Join the club. You, me and Patch. We're radio people, not readers. Am I right? Oh, of course I do have a television now, what do you think of that!

Horrible thing! Takes away the imagination, Margery says. Am I right?'

'So, Tom, what was that thing you were going to ask, that I had to settle with one word?'

'Sandra, will you trust me to love you to the best of my ability? Will you have me, with all my faults? All my problems?'

'Yes, Tom. Yes please.'

'And if I become difficult, if the night-mares come, and I call out her name, you will understand? Am I right?'

'Tom, I'm sure from what you've told me that Harriet will leave us alone. When she comes to you in the night I'll send her away. She had her chance with you, didn't she? It's my turn now. Yes?'

'YES! Now let's go and tell Margery. She'll be waiting by her telephone, if I know her. You see, I've kept her posted, every move, every word. Was that all right?'

'Of course. Yes, let's go. Did you bring the car?'

'Yes, in that place, as before.'

'Shall we go and surprise Margery? Visit her. Please?'

'Exactly!'

ooOoo

Later, while Tom prepared dinner and Margery slept off her two sweet sherries, Sandra rang her Mum at Uncle Bertie's shop. She explained that she would not be

home for a few days, that she was staying over with a friend, placing the telephone back on the cradle before her Mum could ask for details.

ooOoo

Margery had suggested that she stay over for a while, as a chaperone. Although with her stiff legs she would not be climbing any stairs, she would sleep downstairs, in her own room, as usual. They would have to 'behave or not', as they wished.

For the time being Sandra could be her driver, save on taxis, and help with the dog rescue centre, drive for the WRVS. But only until 'possible developments' on the family front. And there was a wedding to plan, so Margery would help Sandra get 'sorted out', arrange for her to have accounts in the proper establishments, ease her path into the social round, that sort of thing.

At every minute during the next few months, Sandra expected to wake up from a wonderful dream, to stare at the night ceiling in Oatlands.

Tailpiece

One afternoon in May, while Tom and Margery were visiting a friend in hospital, Sandra made a visit to the offices of the Daily Record. She parked the Humber at the Visitor's section, directly outside Reception. There was a rusting grey Ford Popular in the Staff parking area nearby.

ooOoo

Sandra sat in the Humber to compose herself before the possible encounter. She had taken extra special care with her appearance. She pulled down the visor, to check her make-up in the mirror. It was perfect, she thought.

Her outfit, a new woollen suit in a muted green check, had been hand-tailored by the "House of Walker" to fit exactly her now slimmer body. A 'day wear ensemble', Mirabelle had called it. 'Casual elegance' was the phrase used in Tom's brochure.

That morning Sandra had spent two hours at "Vittorio Emmanuelle", where her hair, brows, nails and make-up had been professionally 'attended to'. The salon was located in "The Chambers", in St Enoch's Square, on the first floor, amid similar exclusive establishments patronised by those who could afford to pay. At the Ground Floor entrance stood Edwin, a uniformed doorman, dapper and deferential were the words, Sandra chose. His job was to welcome those he recognised and accept a sixpence for opening and closing the lift gates. Edwin would also deter, politely, those enquirers that he did not recognise and who did not have an appointment. Margery had taken Sandra to the salon that first week of her sojourn at Denholm Castle, as part of a round of similar introductions. Otherwise she would have been 'wait listed'.

Earlier, over lunch at the Central Hotel, Tom had been very complimentary. Effusive, was the word that brought a tiny smile to her lips as the memory of it returned.

Tom Walker was a very surprising and gentle lover, she had discovered, and very energetic and enthusiastic, like one of her high performance dogs, she had secretly giggled afterwards, watching him snoring soundly.

Sandra had wanted to wait for "consummation" until after they were married, but "Harriet must be dispelled", Margery had said, giving her blessing to their pre-marital liaison. "Tom needs proper encouragement, he's been mistreated for far too long", was the phrase that Margery had used, several times.

Margery had been a great help to Sandra with everything in her new life, explaining what was needed, what she should do and say, and helping her overcome her inhibitions, now that she was to be a woman with wealth. And with Tom: "Tom needs managed, for his own good", Margery had explained, "he always has, from a child."

After lunch in the mirror in the Ladies' Powder Room, after Tom and Margery had left, Sandra had studied herself. Dispassionately, she hoped. She had to agree with Tom, she was looking 'tip-top', the very best she had ever looked in her life. She hoped it would be good enough. Despite Margery's warning about eye-poking, Sandra was determined to try.

ooOoo

As Sandra opened the door to the Reception area, a soft melodic chime continued for many seconds. The blonde girl's pale blue eyes flashed up, made a quick assessment, and then fluttered back to her magazine. A strand of hair from her bouffant hairdo fell unheeded onto her long slim neck.

Sandra moved across the gap. The girl remained seated behind a large modern reception desk, made of glass and steel. Danish was the word that sprang to Sandra's mind. She looks Danish, and so does the desk. A small sign sat on the desk, stating the girl's name in gold lettering against an ebony background.

Sandra focused hard and sounded out the name in her head, waiting.

It was who she thought it was. Sandra knew quite a lot about her because her Dad and Mum had been at her wedding.

The girl was reading a copy of *Woman's Own*, scanning, flicking. From time to time she sighed at something she had seen, letting out a short puff of annoyance or perhaps of longing. Boredom, exasperation and dissatisfaction were the words that came to Sandra.

The Danish girl was very pretty, like a model, with a perfect body, and long slim legs ending at dark blue stilettos. Her face was her best feature. Good bone structure, Sandra thought, she might be beautiful all of her life, if she looks after herself. She might be twenty or she might be twenty-five, or even older. Ageless beauty came to mind.

She knows she is stunning, used to being admired, sought after. She will be hard to please.

Sadly this girl betrayed her gift, Sandra thought, by using unnecessarily heavy make-up and by the deep plunging neckline of her beautiful dark blue dress, which combined to make her seem like a tart, Sandra thought.

The girl's wrists jangled with many silver bangles. She wore a dark blue stone at her throat, with matching dark blue earrings, dangling, to emphasise the length of her neck. The colour of these stones matched the colour of her dress exactly. They must be of paste, costume jewellery, Sandra thought, bought with the dress, and the shoes, as an ensemble, from the same shop. The echo pinged back from that long-ago Saturday when she had frittered away Wilson Young's payoff- Sandra had seen this dress in C&A, one from their top "Exclusivity" range. It fitted this girl like a sheath.

The girl twiddled repeatedly with her wedding ring, which might be too large, slack, Sandra thought. Her engagement ring sparkled with a single diamond, if it was a diamond.

The ashtray was almost full of crushed, half-smoked cigarette ends, all encrusted with dark purple-red lipstick which did shade well with her dress. The first and second fingers of both hands were nicotine stained. Her nails were garnished with bright pink which clashed with her dress.

The girl reluctantly dragged her eyes from the magazine, but half way to looking up at Sandra the girl changed her mind, and paused to admire her rings: she smiled a thin smile: self-satisfied, assured, victorious were the words that came to Sandra. Eventually the girl's focus drifted upwards to Sandra, looking her up and down in complete silence, taking in every detail. Sandra saw her eyes widen - she is envious, Sandra hoped.

'Yes, can Ah be of any assistance?'

This revealed that she was not Danish but from somewhere in Glasgow, not a cultured voice, but pretending. Sandra decided to be deferential, as if serving a customer at Bertie's Bakery.

'Sorry to trouble you, but I was hoping it might be possible to speak to a friend who works here, a Mr Robert Shaw, please?'

'And you are?'

'Sorry, my name is Sandra Bletcher, from Shawfield Stadium.'

The girl's right hand fluttered her to cover her left, to conceal her rings. Her eyes flashed with apprehension, anxiety.

She knows my name, she was part of it, Sandra thought. Or was it the mention of Shawfield Stadium?

'No, Ah assure you, madam, there is no one o' that name in this organisation!'

'Oh, are you *absolutely* sure?'

'How dare you! It is ma job to know who and whom duznae work here.'

'Sorry, of course. What about a Mr John Robertson, may I speak to him.'

'HIM! Try Australia! He left ages ago, well afore Christmas. Now, is there anything else? Ah have lots of telephone calls tae make.'

'No, that's all. And good luck.'

'Whit exactly dae ye mean by that rimark? Who ur you to wish *me* good luck?'

'Oh, sorry, no offence intended. But good luck with him anyway, Mrs Henshaw. Or perhaps you prefer Mrs Shaw? Am I right?'

Sandra slowly removed the dark green leather driving glove from her left hand, finger by finger, and then extended her wrist, making a show of checking the time on her gold watch, another recent gift from Tom.

Sandra's engagement ring was much more impressive: three very large diamonds set in a cluster of green emeralds. Tom had had her ring designed especially for her, at H. Samuels, Jewellers, in the Argyle Arcade, sitting with her for several hours in the exclusive section, where rings were designed to order. The colour of the emeralds complimented Sandra's witch-hazel eyes, he had said.

ooOoo

In the Humber, Sandra looked in the mirror behind the visor, and smiled. Her make-up was still perfect. Just before she drove off, she tooted and waved cheerily to Bobby who it seemed had been summonsed. He stood framed by the open doorway, staring at her in disbelief. The girl stood at her Danish desk, a lighted cigarette in her left hand, the telephone pressed to her very pretty right ear, talking to someone, perhaps young Denny, her brother. Neither Bobby nor his new wife waved back.

Sandra would pick up Tom and Margery soon. Together they had an appointment to finalise details with the Manager at Marlborough House, in Shawlands, where the Wedding Reception would take place on Saturday 28 June, her birthday. Initially Tom had been keen on the Sherbrooke Castle Hotel, in Pollokshields, but Margery

had prevailed, explaining that accessibility for Sandra's family was an important consideration, as most of her side would travel by tram.

Not mentioned was that using the same location as his previous wedding might encourage an unwelcome ghost to attend.