

Harmful Inheritance

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JOHN T. PETERS



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Harmful Inheritance

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE	Pg1
CHAPTER TWO	Pg 35
CHAPTER THREE	Pg 48
CHAPTER FOUR	Pg 68
CHAPTER FIVE	Pg 89
CHAPTER SIX	Pg 101
CHAPTER SEVEN	Pg 117
CHAPTER EIGHT	Pg 132
CHAPTER NINE	Pg 147
CHAPTER TEN	Pg 172
CHAPTER ELEVEN	Pg 199
CHAPTER TWELVE	Pg 221
CHAPTER THIRTEEN	Pg 230
CHAPTER FOURTEEN	Pg 235
CHAPTER FIFTEEN	Pg 273
CHAPTER SIXTEEN	Pg 301
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN	Pg 319

CHAPTER ONE



Blue lights flashing and police tape obstructed my path to enter my brother Peter's flat above his antique and furniture restoration business in West Hampstead, London. He had kindly rescued me from unemployment and offered me a job as his assistant.

I tried to gain entrance by the side door, but a stern-looking police constable stopped me. 'You are not allowed to enter. There has been a shooting.' He must have realised I was no casual spectator from my suitcase and immediately asked. 'Who are you, and what do you want?'

I explained, flashing my passport. 'I am Peter's brother from South Africa. I am coming to stay with him.'

The constable asked me to wait while he reported to his senior officer. A somewhat friendlier man dressed in a plain suit came over and introduced himself. 'I am Chief Inspector Metcalfe. I am sorry to inform you that someone murdered your brother last night. You better come in. Please be careful of the areas taped off. We are still doing a thorough search.'

I placed my suitcase in the spare bedroom. The whole apartment was in shambles, but there was no point in tidying up until the police had completed the forensic work. The intruder was looking for something. I wondered what it was and who would want to murder my brother; he was the kindest and friendliest person I knew. It must have been a burglary gone wrong.

I arrived earlier that day on Flight BA054 at Heathrow Airport, London. It was my first trip to England—to anywhere, for that matter. I felt exhausted and needed a shave. My battery razor was on the brink.

After leaving the plane, my first stop was immigration. Thanks to my father, who comes from Llansteffan in Wales, I had a British passport and did not have to join the queue for foreign travellers.

Next was customs clearance. I had a single suitcase and walked through the green exit as I had nothing to declare.

I lost my job with Telkom in South Africa at thirty. They laid off twenty per cent of the workforce.

Finding decent work was nearly impossible for white South Africans due to a new policy aimed at

rectifying past apartheid wrongs called Black Economic Empowerment.

My brother Peter who owned an antique business in London, rescued me from this plight and offered me a job as his assistant.

Realising I was getting nowhere in South Africa, I accepted with gratitude. I was excited about a new country and adventure to start this new millennium.

Utterly unprepared and feeling crushed by the number of people in the arrivals hall where Peter was to meet me, I wondered how I would find my brother in this crowd.

Waves of panic made me feel a sense of dread. *'Peter promised to meet me. I hope he has not forgotten me,'* I thought, worrying about what I would do. *'I don't even have the cash for a night in a hotel.'*

After searching and waiting for an hour at the information desk, I explained my predicament to a police officer. I was scared to take a taxi to my brother's address as I did not have a lot of cash.

I was amazed at his friendliness in comparison to the South African police. The police officer explained that the cheapest method was to take the underground to Green Park. Then I must change to the Jubilee line

for West Hampstead, where my brother lived above his business.

The underground was a new experience, but I found my way to West Hampstead. The shop was within walking distance from the underground station, and a local policeman directed me to the front of the store.

Now finding myself in this precarious situation, not allowed to move about in the flat as instructed by the police, I decided to go downstairs, introduce myself to Peter's staff, and find out what would happen next.

In the business, I met five employees. A girl named Mary ran the sales, and four people in the workshop did restoration work.

Fortunately, the staff knew I was coming to work there. The group looked miserable, all concerned with their future in the business and wondering what would happen next. I felt confused and saddened by the loss of my brother, even scarred; I was unsure how to appease the staff. I called them together and announced. 'I think the best we can do is to carry on the business. I have no idea what to do, but I am sure with your help, I will soon learn. First, does any of you know about the accounts?'

Mary, with dark brown curly hair, responded, looking frightened. ‘I have kept books for Peter and have most of his contact details. His lawyer, accountant and business associates.’

Trying to look encouraging, I continued. ‘I think the first thing to establish is the business’s financial health and Peter’s will. Do you guys have enough work to continue until I have sorted out the financial status and learned the best way to proceed? I assure you that if it is my decision, I will try to continue the business on the same terms as it was operating under Peter.’

I followed Mary to the office. She did not seem to be a happy bunny. I tried to ignore her mannerisms and continued with the priorities, even though emotionally, Peter’s death shattered me. First, I contacted Peter’s lawyer regarding who would be the beneficiary of his will, explaining that the business needed to continue as there were staff to consider. The lawyer asked me to hold on while he consulted with his senior partner.

Five minutes later, he returned, sounding pompous and in charge. ‘According to our records, Peter made no will. Legally, all his assets will go to his next of kin, his brother Stephen. Therefore, if you have proof that you are Stephen Jones, then it seems you are the sole beneficiary.’

‘I have my passport to verify my identity. What happens next? Peter was trading as self-employed. I need access to his business bank account to make certain payments.’

The lawyer, Mr Turnbull, now a little less arrogant, responded. ‘As soon as you can produce your brother’s death certificate, we could issue you a power of attorney. In the meantime, contact his accountant, who could arrange temporary payments from the Bank. Ask them to contact me if there are any problems.’

I then contacted Peter’s accountant, a friendly Mrs Brown and explained what had happened. ‘I would like to continue the business, providing you feel it made enough profit to warrant me to continue.’

Mrs Brown assured me it was a healthy business making good profits as far as she could tell. The bank balance was in credit, enough to carry the company for at least six months.

She believes Peter had some other investments, which he made from the profits. She stated, ‘I will arrange with the bank manager to help you continue the business. Particularly making payments for goods and staff salaries until we can produce a death certificate for Peter.’

I then asked Mary to give me a guided tour and explain how the shop and workshop operate.

Mary, somewhat reluctant, started in the showroom. 'Here we sell all the items Peter bought at auction and restored. You will note that they all have white stock labels. Further back, you will notice articles with red tags. These items have been fixed on behalf of customers and are ready for collection.'

Mary, still a bit nervous, continued. 'You will also notice that we keep all the small items, such as porcelain and precious metals, on shelves with locked glass doors to prevent shoplifting.'

'The expensive stuff we keep upstairs. Peter used to accompany customers to view his collection. We did not allow the general public upstairs. Most viewings are by appointment. Come, let me show you.' Mary led me upstairs and proudly showed me the paintings and objects in glass. There were several objects hallmarked silver and gold. I was impressed and thought, 'This lot must be worth much money. I have a lot to learn about the value of antiques. I can tell if it is a valued item, but I have no idea its actual worth.'

I wandered about, amazed at the price tags and asked Mary. 'Do you sell a lot of this stuff?'

Mary, now noticeably more relaxed, responded. 'It is not our bread and butter, but selling one of these articles makes much profit. I think Peter also liked the prestige of having them.'

I noticed a door in the upstairs gallery. I stepped towards it and enquired from Mary. 'Where does this lead to?'

'That leads to the flat. Peter kept it locked, and only he had a key. We also keep the entrance from the showroom locked, but Peter and I both had keys for that door.'

I tried the door but found it securely locked.

Mary then took me to the workshop and introduced the staff, which mainly looked hostile at me. 'This is Fred. He is an artist mixing his colours and paints the grains on the wood to disguise repairs. Peter said his title is finishing hand.' Fred was the oldest member of staff, well past retirement age. Then there was Graham, our joiner, who concentrated on furniture repairs. Shaun was responsible for porcelain and glasswork. He made ornaments to sell in the showroom when he was not busy with repairs. Lastly, there was Simon, who specialised in upholstery and restoring paintings.

I noticed a furnace, an industrial sewing machine and a lathe among the usual tools in a wood workshop.

Mary continued. Sarah would come in for particular art jobs to help restore paintings. Sue, we would call to help with complicated porcelain work.

‘Well, that is all of us,’ Mary declared, relieved that her ordeal was over. ‘I don’t know where you plan to sleep tonight, but we have a room with a bed, a shower and a toilet back here that the staff use to clean up before going home. You are welcome to stay there until the police have done all their examinations and fingerprint tests in the flat. If you prefer a hotel, I can arrange that for you.’

I hastily answered. ‘The room will be perfect. Thank you. I don’t think the police will finish upstairs today. I wonder who shot Peter. Do any of you have an idea?’

A strange quietness came over the group. There was no response from anyone. I decided to collect my suitcase from upstairs while Mary tidied the room. It has been a long day.

Upstairs, a friendly Chief Inspector Metcalf informed me that their search for clues would continue for at least another day. The coroner had

removed Peter's body, and he was sure the death certificate would be available the following day.

I liked the Chief Inspector. He seemed a kind and friendly man.

I returned to the room in the workshop, finding Mary still cleaning. I deposited my suitcase and declared, 'Thank you, Mary, this is perfect. I am not going to entertain anyone in here. It is to sleep in for one or two nights. You have done a marvellous job.'

I continued, 'Before you go, please show me how to lock up and where we keep the keys. How do I get out of the building if I want to go out for a bite to eat?'

For the first time, Mary laughed; it brightened up her face and made her look friendlier. 'The room you are sleeping in has an outside door,' she handed me a key. 'It would be easier to use that door until you move into the flat. I have a set of keys for the shop, and so does Peter. You better rescue Peter's keys from the police upstairs before they rob us blind.'

I laughed. I don't think the police will steal from us. I thanked Mary and asked, 'Where do I go for something to eat?'

Mary seemed a lot more relaxed. It must have been a hard day for her, with the police everywhere. With

a sigh, she responded. 'There is a restaurant down the road. It is not far away, or you can try fish and chips from the chip shop before you get to the restaurant. I would recommend the fish and chips. It is excellent.'

I returned upstairs and asked Chief Inspector Metcalfe for Peter's keys. He duly locked up and handed me the bunch of keys. 'Please refrain from entering the maisonette tonight. The fingerprint team is coming tomorrow. We should have finished after that, and you can have the flat.'

I thanked the Chief Inspector and enquired, 'Do you have any clues yet?'

Chief Inspector Metcalf replied. 'You know, I have no idea where to go with this one. I hope someone gives us a tip-off, but nothing so far.'

I accompanied the police downstairs and locked the main entrance door to the maisonette. I said goodbye and returned to the shop, where Mary patiently awaited me.

I apologised for keeping Mary waiting and went to my room while she locked up.

I removed the bottle of whisky I had purchased duty-free at the airport from my bag. I thought, 'If I ever needed a drink, it is today. Starting with the death

of Peter and then having to take over his business, it has been an eventful day, to say the least.'

I relaxed with the glass of whisky, trying to prioritise my priorities. I had never been in business before and realised I had a steep learning curve ahead of me. Then, I must uncover why someone killed my brother. 'Firstly, I have to get a grip on how to run the business. Perhaps tomorrow, when the police doctor signs the death certificate, things will become clearer. Then I can access Peter's bank accounts and other investments.'

The police, hopefully, would have finished with Peter's flat. Then I could search through his belongings to try and understand what he was up to that got him killed.

Even though I was hungry and had not eaten all day, I decided to have another whisky and turn it in for the night, and maybe I would wake up refreshed in the morning.

The following morning I was up early, showered and changed into fresh clothing. I walked down the road and found a café where I had breakfast and coffee. After that, I felt prepared for the day.

I returned to the shop and studied the stock and prices. Peter must have bought from an auction and

then restored the articles in the workshop. The first thing I would have to work out was our labour cost, and then I could decide what price to pay at auction. It was going to be a lot of guesswork in the beginning. Perhaps I would have to take Mary to the auctions to help me until I knew what price the restored articles would fetch.

Mary was the first to arrive and made us tea. I explained to her that it would be a good idea if she first accompanied me to the auctions to guide me in what to buy. 'Perhaps we should get a part-time assistant to watch the shop while you show me the ropes. Do you know anyone that might be interested? We will probably need them for a month. I have so much to learn.'

Mary, a different person today, beamed. 'I will ask my mother. She will be delighted. She has been complaining that she is bored staying alone all day.' Mary phoned her mother, who promised to be there in an hour.

The staff arrived, still a bit sullen; I entered the workshop to greet them. I tried to show interest in the jobs they were busy with, realising not to get too involved as my priority was to learn the business's financial side first.

I loved arts and crafts but thought it best to leave that for later.

Chief Inspector Metcalfe puffing away on his pipe, arrived, demanding the keys to the flat. He also informed me that he was sure the coroner's doctor had made out the death certificate and gave me a phone number to check.

Thankfully, I phoned the lawyer. I gave him the information and asked him to issue a power of attorney for me to sign on behalf of my brother until the courts finalised Peter's estate.

The lawyer promised to phone me when I could collect my power of attorney.

Mary's mother arrived and made herself comfortable in Mary's office. Mary took me to three local auction houses Peter frequented regularly. It seems that Peter did not attend the auctions but made advance bids of what he would pay for the items he selected. He had accounts with these auction houses and would win the auction, provided the article went below his bid. In most cases, the auctioneer told us what to bid.

Mary kept a record of what customers were looking for, and if they found any such items, they would offer a bid. I thought it was a sound system and would

follow it until he felt more comfortable with the demand and pricing structure.

Mary explained that Peter did this once a week and occasionally visited the more upmarket auctions.

A lot of customers would also bring items to the shop. Peter used to offer these sellers ridiculous prices as he declared that you never knew if they stole the article.

Mary assured me, 'We keep a record of the seller's name and address. In addition, they must sign a certificate that they have the right to sell the items. Products brought in this manner were always bargains as these sellers needed cash. The police confiscated items a few times after we paid for them, so you have to be careful.'

Mary and I returned to the shop for tea but had to leave to visit Mr Turnbull, the lawyer. He had phoned in our absence. A power of attorney was ready to collect.

After I proved my identity with my passport, the lawyer handed me three copies of Peter's death certificate and power of attorney. Next, Mary and I visited the accountant, who accepted the paperwork and made an appointment for me to see the bank manager immediately.

The bank manager studied the death certificate and power of attorney. He made me sign several specimen signature forms. He then gave me a bank statement of the business account and Peter's private account. To my amazement, the business account had a healthy credit of thirty thousand pounds, and his account was over twenty thousand pounds in credit. I found it strange, however, that the business was in such a healthy position. The turnover was not that good during the last two days. Perhaps it was an accumulation over a long period.

It cheered me up considerably, knowing that I now had a fair chance to make the business succeed. I was worried about how to continue had there been a cash shortage. With the cash available, I was sure that the company could carry itself while I was learning.

Later that day, Chief Inspector Metcalfe returned the flat keys and announced with a smile. 'We have finished our forensic search and our checks for fingerprints. The flat is all yours, and you may move in.'

I thanked the chief and, with Mary's help, went upstairs to clean and tidy the place. The police had left the flat precisely as they found it, a total mess. There were even blood stains on the entrance hall floor where the intruder shot Peter.

Fortunately, that area was tiled and mopped up quickly enough. After Mary and I sorted the flat out to some semblance of order, she arranged for a cleaning company to visit the following day to clean the flat thoroughly.

That evening I wandered through the flat, checking each room. I noticed that Mary had changed the bedding in Peter's old room and smiled.

I also found the keys to the upstairs gallery and admired the displayed paintings and objects. None of them had prices on them, but they looked valuable.

I felt uncomfortable sleeping in the same bed as my dead brother. I had a few whiskies and slept in the spare room, thinking I would feel more comfortable after spring cleaning the apartment.

The following day the cleaning company arrived, and I left them to their task. I spent the day in Peter's office with Mary going through each file and the number of gadgets Peter had acquired.

There were many phone numbers and names that Mary did not know, making me realise that Peter had a separate private life away from his work.

I was getting nowhere in finding clues as to why they killed Peter. The answer had to be somewhere in

the flat. I will start my search tonight. I had to concentrate on the business before getting into trouble.

A customer came in to sell her gold bracelet. I observed every process Mary followed, from weighing the object and checking the gold content from the hallmark to checking today's gold price.

Mary then made the offer, and the customer completed the forms stating that she had the right to sell the bracelet with her contact details.

I was amazed at how low the price was that Mary paid for the bracelet. Mary admitted, 'Peter always told us to forget what the article looks like and offer twenty-five per cent below the gold value. Remember, she may have stolen the bracelet. In this case, I would not be surprised. I am sure she is a druggie and needs money for a fix.'

I asked. 'What happens now to the bracelet? I do not see any gold articles on display in the showroom.'

'First, I would enter the purchase details in my stock book. After that, I would hand Peter all the gold or precious metal objects. Peter would then hand some of the items to Shaun for melting into bars. After that, I think Peter would sell the bars and the remaining jewellery items to his jeweller friend who

cared for all these objects,' Mary added, feeling knowledgeable.

'Do you know this jeweller friend of Peter? How do I contact him?' I asked.

Looking frightened again, Mary admitted, 'I don't have a clue. I did not get involved with Peter's private life. I think you best ask Shaun. He might know.'

I continued. 'How do you value a diamond ring? That must be tricky.'

'We ignore the diamond and pay only for the gold content. We would not know if it is a genuine diamond.'

I groaned. 'The poor people must be desperate to offer to sell their jewellery at such ludicrously low prices.'

Buying furniture was a lot easier. You offered ten per cent of what you think you could sell the article. That is usually a fair price for a second-hand piece, as we must bear the restoration cost.

I went to my office and thought. *'I need to list all Peter's friends and notify them of the funeral. I bet some of them are not aware that he died.'*

I started to search Peter's office for a list of all his contacts but could not find anything, not even a diary. *'I am sure it will be on his phone. The police have it for their investigation. Without a doubt, he kept a backup somewhere. But what if his phone was lost or stolen?'* I thought.

My thoughts were interrupted by the cleaners. They had finished and needed payment.

I gave them one of Peter's cheques and signed it on his behalf.

On inspection, I found the apartment spotless, and the carpet looked brand new. You could not tell there was a fatal shooting a few days ago.

'I can live here now. All the ghosts have gone.'

Satisfied, I returned to my office, where Mary was waiting for me with a cup of tea. 'The auction house phoned, saying we have won several items that did not meet the reserved price. We can collect and pay for these items as soon as possible.'

'Who does the collections? I don't even know if we have a delivery vehicle,' I inquired.

Mary smiled. 'Graham in the warehouse usually does all our collections and deliveries. The van is in the back car park.'

I went to the workshop to see when it would be convenient for Graham to pick up the purchases from the auction house. Graham, a despondent-looking man in his twenties with curly brown hair, was happy to go straight away. Mary accompanied us, carrying the chequebook. She was enjoying her role of teaching me, giving her all this authority.

The auctioneer gave us a list of what price the items reached and added on his ten per cent commission.

I thought that we had bought all the objects at a reasonable price. I was pleased with my first purchase. Graham was also happy with the purchase. He stated that they had to make minimal repairs. Mary wrote out a cheque, and I signed it while the auction staff, with the help of Graham, loaded the van.

Back at the shop, a customer wanted to sell an old wingback chair. We needed some sales. One could not only buy, as you would run out of money. I was happy when a young couple entered, wanting to furnish their first house. Mary handled the sale, and I gave them an ornament for their new home.

That evening I felt more relaxed in Peter's flat now that the cleaners had done their job. I was relaxing with a glass of whisky when the doorbell sounded, and I nearly fell out of my chair.

Cautiously I approached the door, fearing that the killer might have returned. But it was an auburn-haired girl in her early twenties with hardly any makeup and torn jeans. 'Can I help you?'

The girl responded. 'I am Sarah. Is Peter here? You look like his brother; he said you were coming.'

I invited Sarah into the lounge area. 'I am sorry to bring you bad news, but somebody killed Peter the night before I arrived. I have been searching high and low for his address book of contacts to notify his friends. So far, I have found nothing. Maybe you can help me make a list of his friends, as I am sure his funeral will be soon and I should invite them.'

Sarah was a bit unsteady on her feet. I thought she might faint. 'Sorry, it is amiss of me. You are shocked. Please sit down. I will bring you a small whisky.'

I helped Sarah to a comfy chair and poured her a small glass of whisky. After taking a mouthful, Sarah asked in a croaked voice. 'What happened?'

‘I have no idea. All I know is that someone shot Peter. I don’t think the police know much, either. If they do, they have not mentioned anything to me. I, too, would like to know why somebody shot him.’

Sarah responded, a bit more relaxed, ‘It is a bit of a shock finding out that Peter is dead. My visit today is because Peter owes me a bit of money for the last artwork I did for him. With him dead, I suppose I have to forget about payment. I will happily help you with the names of some friends I think knew Peter.’

I apologised. ‘Don’t be concerned about what Peter owes you. I will see to it that you get paid. I am running the business as it was. Please resubmit your invoice, and I will pay immediately. I have not yet worked out Peter’s system and can’t find anything.’

Sarah admitted, ‘I am an artist. We don’t have invoices as we live on benefits and cannot earn extra money. Therefore, we work for cash in hand until we become famous and can charge decent money for our paintings.’

Feeling foolish, I replied, ‘Again, you have to excuse my stupidity. I do not know how the system works. Please tell me how much Peter owes you and for what work. I will pay you out of petty cash.’

Sarah took me to the gallery and showed me a landscape painting. 'I cleaned and touched up this painting for Peter, and my fee is twenty pounds.'

As it was a small amount, I paid her cash out of my pocket, making a note about the payment for Mary so the business could refund me.

I offered Sarah another drink. 'I would not mind a drink, but not whisky, please. Don't you have any wine or tea?'

I grinned. 'You are in luck. I noticed there was a bottle of white wine in the fridge. Hang on. I will fetch it with two glasses and join you.'

We soon relaxed with a glass of wine each. 'Do you know Peter's friends? I need to send invitations to all his friends for the funeral,' I asked her.

Sarah agreed to make a list of the people she thought knew Peter. 'Can't you find Peter's diary? He had one the last time he paid me. I saw him note it in a small black book,' she added.

'I have looked everywhere; either the killer or the police took it. I don't know why they killed Peter, but they were looking for something. Have you any idea what Peter was doing? I want to find out, even if it is

only for my self-protection before somebody tries to shoot me.'

Sarah frowned. 'I have no idea. I didn't think Peter had a dark side. I will ask around. Someone must know. Do you know if he had a girlfriend?'

I conceded, starting to like this girl. 'I have no clue. I would have thought that someone would have contacted me by now. You are the first person who contacted me. I thought that you might be his girlfriend. I don't know which way to turn. London is such a big city.'

Sarah acknowledged. 'Look, I would like to work with you on this problem. Do you mind if I come back tomorrow evening? I will give you whatever information I can find. Then we can go on from there. Ask Mary to place an ad in the local newspaper and list all the people she thought knew Peter.'

The following day, I asked all the staff to list people they thought knew Peter to add to the funeral invitation list.

I told Mary that I paid Sarah twenty pounds for work done on a painting. Mary immediately refunded me. I asked if this happened frequently. 'If so, please make me a list of all the cash payments Peter made in the last two months.' In addition, I asked Mary to

place an advert in the local newspaper for anyone who knew Peter to contact the store regarding funeral arrangements.

I looked forward to Sarah's visit and promptly spent the twenty pounds received from Mary on more wine.

That evening, Sarah and I filtered the names from their various lists into one, eliminating the repeated characters.

We had an enjoyable evening together. Sarah invited me to visit her the following evening to view her paintings. 'You better bring the wine because I spent the twenty pounds you gave me on electricity.'

The following day the undertaker phoned to tell me that the police had given the go-ahead for Peter's funeral and wanted to know when to book it.

I suggested a week from now to give me time to notify Peter's friends. They agreed on the following Wednesday. I went to the local stationers and bought enough cards for Peter's friends.

That evening, armed with a bottle of wine and the invitation cards, I visited Sarah. I was surprised at how good an artist Sarah was. She had several oil paintings

on display, and I remarked. 'These are exquisite paintings. You must be paid a lot for your work.'

Sarah moaned. 'Thank you, but in most cases, people don't even want to pay my cost in material, never mind my labour. I only make a bit of money when someone commissions me to paint a child or a pet, which happens only occasionally. I love painting. When I have no commission, I paint for my pleasure. That's the paintings I have on display. Sometimes I sell a painting for as little as twenty pounds when I am desperate for cash. That's why I am on benefits.'

Sarah continued, 'Benefit is a lifesaver, but it prevents me from advertising. The minute they discover I am an artist selling paintings, they would decide that I am working and cut my social security as I am no longer available for work, seeking employment.'

'It sounds like a vicious circle, but at least it is something. In South Africa, you have no security blanket. If you have no work, you also have no money. It forces people to work for little money, and there is no time to develop skills or artistic talents. Only the rich can afford that,' I remarked.

I continued. 'I think you are good enough to move away from social security. Several galleries will display your work and accept commission on your behalf for

a fee, perhaps ten per cent. What about furniture shops? Many customers like to buy a painting with their furniture.'

Sarah beamed. 'Oh, I wish. Let me pour us a glass of wine to get started with Peter's funeral invitation cards. Dreaming of becoming a full-time artist will have to wait.'

We completed the invitation cards for all of Peter's known friends, and I agreed to ask Mary to place an advert in the local newspaper in case we missed someone.

Sarah laughed. 'I hope your advert does not attract a lot of drunks, thinking they can get free booze at Peter's wake.'

Sarah had a point. I would have to appoint a doorman to keep out unwanted people.

The following day I asked Mary to place another advert in the local newspaper giving the date and time of Peter's funeral. I then spoke to Graham, the woodworker, about the problem of some drunks turning up at Peter's funeral for a free drink.

Graham grinned. 'Leave it to me. I will sort it out. I thought you made a list of Peter's friends. Putting an

ad in the newspaper is dangerous. You don't know who might turn up.'

'I know, but I think our list is incomplete. For instance, I know Peter had a girlfriend, but I don't know her name, and she has not made any contact. What am I to do? There may be other people we missed,' I responded.

Graham laughed. 'She may be a married woman.'

The attendance at Peter's funeral was far more extensive than the list Sarah, and I compiled. The advert in the newspaper worked unquestionably.

I approached an elderly lady at the funeral, wondering who she was. 'Are you family of Peter or one of his customers?'

The old lady replied, 'I don't know any, Peter. I am lonely and never get to dress up and socialise, so I come to funerals to meet people and have a day out.'

I could only respond, 'You are welcome, and I hope you have a lovely day.'

Graham did an excellent job of keeping the drunks out, and the funeral proceeded pleasantly and friendly. There were lots of flowers and cards. It touched me how many lives Peter had touched.

After the funeral, Sarah and I returned to the apartment; I sighed with relief. 'I am glad that is over. It is a bit heart-rending to bury your brother. Now I must find out who killed him and why.'

Looking concerned, Sarah responded, 'Do you want to get involved? I think it is best to leave it to the police. You might open a dangerous can of worms in the process.'

I remarked, 'I can't simply walk in here and claim everything Peter has worked for without contributing something towards his empire. I must investigate and find out what happened. I am not going to endanger myself. If I discover anything relevant, I will immediately inform the police.'

Sarah conceded, 'Please do that. You don't have to be a hero. I don't want to attend another funeral. If you promise to be careful, I will help with your investigation.'

I confessed with a smile. 'I will certainly appreciate your help. It is pleasant working with you. Tomorrow I will contact the auction houses I deal with and see if they would be willing to display your painting and sell them on a commission basis. They could also accept commissions on your behalf. My shop will certainly take some of your paintings.'

I added, 'I would also like you to come off these social security handouts. It is degrading.'

'Well, let's see what the auction houses' response is. I think you overrate my paintings. They are not that good.'

'What would be an acceptable price for a normal size, say 15 by 20 inch framed oil painting?' I inquired.

Sarah declared, 'This is the problem. My cost, including the frame, would be a hundred pounds. I have to sell for over that to live. The selling price for such a painting should be at least three hundred pounds to compensate for the labour. I am giving them away for fifty pounds, which is madness. I am painting purely for the love of it.'

I groaned. 'Tomorrow, I will discuss it with the auction houses. I think you should also have a website to showcase your work.'

The following day, I chatted with the various auction rooms with whom we dealt. The consensus was that they had tried it before. Still, the quality of the work was poor, and customers were not willing to pay a reasonable price for the paintings.

I assured them that these paintings were excellent. They would at least brighten up their salerooms. They

reluctantly agreed to try it for a month, only because they had dealings with Peter for a considerable time.

I returned to Sarah's flat and selected the best paintings, although I thought they were all nice. I asked Sarah to photograph all her pictures with her digital camera for the website.

My idea was to make a website for the antique restoration business and include Sarah's paintings until she could afford a website.

The auction houses agreed that Sarah's paintings were promising and suggested they sell for five hundred pounds. They would receive a ten per cent commission on each sale.

I discussed it with Mary and displayed a few of Sarah's paintings in the shop's showroom.

That evening I took Sarah for a meal, and we discussed the day's results over a bottle of wine. Sarah laughed. 'It sounds marvellous. I hope it works. I have never received more than three hundred pounds for a painting. If I sell one of those paintings for five hundred pounds, I could survive for a month.'

By the end of the month, they had sold all of Sarah's paintings, and the auction houses were asking for more.

I felt proud of my success. I realised I was not much of a businessman and savoured every little victory.

It is at times like this that I miss Peter. I could see his friendly face. He would be proud of my achievements if he were still with us.

Sarah was overjoyed with her achievement and felt like a proper artist. We went out for a meal to celebrate and had a lovely evening.

I felt that the business was turning over satisfactorily. At least everyone was busy. That had to be good. I was also proud of helping Sarah, but finding clues to Peter's killing was a non-starter. I searched everywhere but could not find any leads. I still did not know who Peter's girlfriend was.

I started to realise that Peter's killer also took vital documents from the apartment, wiping away all traces of Peter's private life.

To me, it meant that the killer was someone known to Peter. Maybe I should go further back into Peter's life. I also felt that I needed to learn more about his staff. I had hardly spoken two words to some of the team in the workshop.

Then there was Peter's jeweller friend. I had not even found out his name. I did not spot anyone who looked like a jeweller at the funeral either.

I seem to progress well with the business, but I promised myself. *'I will not stop until I find Peter's killer.'*

CHAPTER TWO



I had been so busy with Peter's death, his funeral and the running of Peter's business that I had no opportunity to take in the sights of London. I had not even contacted my friend, Tony, from South Africa.

I had dreamed of exploring London my whole life; I was here and had hardly stepped outside the shop premises. *'I missed Peter deeply and felt indebted to him for leaving me the business and a future. I am not making any headway with Peter's murder. My brain is too wrapped up in other things to think clearly. I will try to enjoy my stay here from now on,'* I decided.

I immediately wrote a note to my friend Tony as I did not have his phone number. I needed someone to show me around London, and Tony was the man.

Tony Wilson and I attended the same school and had been friends for a long time.

Tony lived with his parents in Wimbledon and was a male nurse at Guys Hospital in London.

Together with his parents, they relocated to England five years ago. We had not seen each other for five years, and I looked forward to seeing him

again. He used to like his beer and was a good drinking partner. I could see his chubby face now grinning at me.

A customer entered the shop two days later, and Mary jumped up immediately to serve him. It was Tony. I recognised him immediately; he had not changed a bit, somewhat plumpish with curly brown hair and a cheesy grin.

I moved towards him and gave him a warm hug. 'Tony, it is so good to see you. How are you keeping? You are looking well. Come to my office and tell me all. I will get you a cup of tea.'

Grinning like always, Tony explained how he moved with his parents to London. 'It is the best move I have ever made, with a steady job in the National Health Service. I am now studying to become a radiologist. I believe work is now hard to find in South Africa but look at you. You seem to have landed on your feet.'

I explained to Tony what had happened and my brother's murder. 'It is advantageous to inherit all this from my brother, but I feel guilty and think I must find out who and why somebody killed Peter. However, I have so much to learn about the business, and I don't know many people. I don't know where to start. I also

want to see a bit of London but need a guide and was hoping you would show me around.'

Tony looked troubled. 'I would be delighted to show you around London. I don't go out enough myself as it is. I want to visit many places but have been reluctant to go alone. As far as Peter's murder is concerned, I would tread carefully with your investigation. Can't you leave it to the police? Investigating murders is extremely dangerous. It would be best if you were thankful to Peter for what he has left you and leave it at that. I don't think he would want you killed for the inheritance. However, if you insist on finding Peter's killer, I will help you; only be careful. But never mind, let's go for a few beers this evening. I know a good pub with a decent singer.'

That evening they went for several beers and listened to a girl called Anne sing. She was outstanding. We had an excellent time but could not talk as the bar was noisy, and we had to shout to hear each other.

Tony took me to visit the most famous sights on weekends, from Westminster Abbey, the Sea Life London Aquarium, Madame Tussauds and many more.

Sarah phoned to let me know she had finished another painting to offer to the auction house. She

complained that she was running out of pictures for potential clients to show her work.

‘The auction houses are selling my work so fast. I can’t keep up and had to find some old work I have done to show my clients.’

I arrived that evening with a bottle of wine. My first remark was, ‘I think I should ask the auction house to increase the prices. You should give them all your paintings and only display prints to show your potential customers.’

Sarah led me through her studio, with now mostly empty walls except for a few remaining paintings. One of them caught my eye. ‘Now that is what I call beautiful,’ I exclaimed. It was a picture of a ginger-headed girl with blue eyes. She had a ghostly appearance; her face was so pale. Perhaps a bit anaemic, looking as if she had never seen the sun. ‘An authentic English rose,’ I thought.

Sarah laughed at me. ‘You look smitten. That is my cousin Tara Willis, and she lives in Dublin, Ireland. We are both Irish. Although she is more beautiful in real life, she looks unusual. It is one of my earlier paintings, and I could not get the translucent effect of her skin right. Looking at her chest, it is as if you could see through her skin, sort of transparent with a blueish tint.

‘What does Tara mean? It is an unusual name.’

Sarah explained. ‘Tara is a gender-neutral name of Sanskrit and Gaelic origins, meaning ‘*hill*’ and ‘*star*.’ Although a gender-neutral title, Tara is typically given to girls and is a much-loved name among Irish homes.’

‘She is beautiful. I want to buy the painting. I could look at her all day,’ I confessed.

Sarah replied. ‘I can’t sell it without Tara’s permission, but I can let you have the photograph I used to paint her picture. You can look at that all day. Better still, she is coming to visit soon. I can introduce you.’

I apologise. ‘I am sorry; I don’t know what came over me. You are also a beautiful girl, and I am behaving like a cad, admiring your cousin while visiting you. I will not mention her name again.’

I tried to steer the conversation away from Tara, but I often stole a glance at her portrait. That evening I left with all of Sarah’s paintings except Tara. I promised Sarah that I would ask the auction house to increase the selling prices of her paintings. As Sarah closed the door behind me, she handed me a photo of Tara. ‘Something for you to drool over all day.’

I did not look at the photo until I got home, then studied Tara's face. She was more beautiful than her oil painting. Putting the picture aside, I thought to myself. 'Wishful thinking, you don't stand a chance with such a beautiful girl.'

The following day I received my first clue into Peter's private life. Mary came rushing to my office. 'There is a Mr De Jong from Amsterdam on the phone wanting to speak to Peter. Shall I put him through?

'Certainly, Mary, don't keep him hanging on.' Mary rushed back to her office to transfer the call. I thought it was time we invested in a better telephone system; ours was old-fashioned.

I answered the phone. 'Good morning Mr De Jong. My name is Stephen Jones, the brother of Peter. Can I help you?' Mr De Jong insisted that he would like to speak to Peter personally. I responded. 'I am sorry, Mr De Jong, but Peter passed away several weeks ago. I am now the owner of the business. I do apologise for not contacting you before. However, due to Peter's murder, the police still have all of his list of contacts and correspondence. I am waiting for them to release it all to me. If you need proof of this and my identity, I will let my lawyers confirm this for you.'

Mr De Jong replied, 'I would appreciate some form of proof that you are who you say. It involves the payment and delivery of the cutting and polishing the last batch of diamonds we have here for you. The amount owing is fifteen thousand Pounds.'

'Mr De Jong, I will ask my lawyer to send you all the documents you may require regarding myself today. Then I will contact you tomorrow to arrange an appointment to visit you in person to clarify the situation and make payment. Please be so kind not to discuss this with anyone. It is a murder investigation, and we do not want to alert whoever is responsible.'

Mr De Jong gave me all his particulars and promised to fax me an invoice with a breakdown of their work. He also enquired if they should send the diamonds by DHL to the usual address, to which I replied. 'Not this time, as I am coming in person. I will collect the diamonds myself.'

I immediately phoned the lawyer Mr Turnbull and told him what I required for Mr De Jong. He agreed and promised to send him all the information, plus a letter explaining Peter's estate.

True to his word Mr De Jong faxed me his detailed invoice within a half hour. Mary came into the office shaking, with the invoice in hand. 'I did not know

Peter was dealing in diamonds. They are looking for a large amount of money.'

I asked Mary why she believed Peter did not deal in diamonds.

Mary was red in the face. 'I did not want to say anything, seeing that Peter was dead, but I did notice that he would receive African visitors at least once a month. They did not buy anything but sat in Peter's office all day, drinking tea while Peter went somewhere. They then left immediately on Peter's return.'

'Now, Mary, I want you to promise me that you will not mention this invoice or the word diamonds to anyone, not even your parents. Remember, someone murdered Peter, and the diamonds could be the cause. Please be careful. Tomorrow I will make arrangements to go to Amsterdam, and perhaps you should ask your mother to come in and assist you in my absence.'

Mr De Jong phoned again to let me know that he had received notice from my lawyer that I had full authority to act on behalf of the business. I was welcome to visit him any time to collect the diamonds, provided I had proof of identity, like a passport.

I phoned the bank manager and explained my need for a banker's draft of fifteen thousand pounds. He said he would have it ready for me but was unaware we dealt with diamonds.

I asked Mary to book a flight from Heathrow to Schipol Airport in Amsterdam tomorrow morning, returning the same evening.

While Mary made the arrangements, I went to the Bank and collected my banker's draft. I also bought myself a suit with matching shoes, a shirt and a tie.

Back at the shop, Mary had my flight reservations ready. I showed her my new suit and told her again not to tell anyone where I was going, not even the staff. I raided the petty cash and signed a chit for the money to protect Mary in case something might happen to me.

I invited Tony to come over for a few beers that evening. I needed to inform a trusted source of what was happening and what I was planning to do. The only person I could trust in England was Tony. I wrote it all down, including the names and telephone numbers. I sealed the details in an envelope to open if something happened to me.

Tony was proud that I trusted him with all my plans but warned me. 'Stephen, be careful. These diamond

dealers are in the top league and play a mean game. I would not mess with them.'

I explained to Tony that I had no choice but to follow this path to discover what was behind Peter's murder.

Tony remarked. 'Money is one of the main reasons for murder, and diamonds are big money.'

After a few beers, Tony left as he had to work the following day. The next day, I had an early start as my flight was early morning.

The following morning I caught the underground to Heathrow in time for my flight to Schipol, Amsterdam.

I took the train from Schipol Airport to Amsterdam Central. I took a taxi to Van Baerle Street, where De Jong Diamond Wholesalers were situated.

Johannes De Jong met me. I introduced myself and showed him my passport. He led me to his office and showed me ten brilliant diamonds—the biggest I had ever seen and placed them in a velvet pull-string black bag for me. Mr De Jong explained. 'These are the diamonds we cut and polished for you. They vary between three and five karats; if I may say so, they are beautiful examples.'

I handed Mr De Jong the banker's draft, which he accepted gracefully.

I then told Mr De Jong the whole story as I knew it regarding Peter's demise. 'Please, Mr De Jong, I need your help. The intruders who killed Peter took all his documents, diary and contact list. I did not even know that you existed until you phoned me. I would appreciate it if you could supply me with a list of Peter's transactions. Names and addresses where you delivered the diamonds and, if possible, the bank name from where Peter made his payments. The bank we are dealing with has no knowledge that Peter dealt in diamonds.'

Mr De Jong laughed. 'From what you tell me, I could have kept the diamonds if I did not phone you. In that case, the lunch is on you. I will ask the girls in the office to prepare you a list of all the information you seek while we go out for lunch.'

Mr De Jong also prepared a valuation for me, stating that he would be happy to pay that amount for the diamonds and I should not sell them for a penny less. He valued the ten diamonds at one hundred thousand Pounds.

I explained that I hoped to use the diamonds as bait to learn more from the person to whom he would

deliver the diamonds. Some information at this stage was essential to me.

We had a lovely lunch, and I promised that once I discovered Peter's supplier, I would continue to trade with him. 'I am new to this business and need all the help I can get. He gave me the list prepared by his staff, and I noticed that most of the addresses were in London.

I retraced my steps back to Schipol airport in time for my flight back. That evening I relaxed at home with a glass of whisky. I was thinking to myself, deep in thought. 'In what else did Peter get involved? I suppose one thing leads to another if you are in business.'

Studying Mr De Jong's list, I found four jewellery firms that received deliveries by them on Peter's behalf. I made a note of their addresses, and although they were nearby, I decided it was best to first investigate all about them before visiting. At least then, I would know who was in charge.

The following morning I phoned Mrs Brown, our accountant. I asked her to find me all the available details regarding the four jewellers.

Feeling that I now understood the financial side of the business, I needed to show more interest in the

practical side of things. I spent the rest of the day helping in the workshop, especially with Fred. I found his work fascinating, mixing all the colours to create the exact grain of the wood he was trying to restore.

Simon was upholstering a set of dining room chairs. I must confess that this type of work had no interest to me.

Shaun made glass ornaments, using a special furnace to smelt the glass. It was scorching hot, and although Shaun enjoyed showing me what he was doing, it looked dangerous and not for the faint-hearted.

Woodworking, I understood and helped a bit. However, Graham was unhappy with me and made me feel unwelcome.

Mary came to the rescue, telling me Mrs Brown wanted me on the phone. She asked if I could come to see her straight away. 'I have some disturbing details I need to discuss with you in person.'

CHAPTER THREE



Michelle, the receptionist, showed me to Mrs Brown's office. 'You better sit down, Stephen. I have some disturbing news for you,' she announced.

'Three of the four businesses you asked me to investigate are normal jewellers. However, the fourth jeweller, *Alexandra Morris Jewels Limited*, is a limited company. Companies House list your brother Peter as the only shareholder and director of the company. That means you are now the owner. The bad news is that someone has been draining the company's bank account, and the business is now operating on an overdraft. I am waiting for the bank manager to contact me with information about who has been withdrawing the funds. Since Peter's death, someone has withdrawn a hundred thousand pounds from the account. The bank manager tells me that up to that point. The account has always been black and has been a healthy business.'

The phone rang, and Mrs Brown answered. After a short discussion, she replaced the receiver and stated. 'The Bank manager informed me that it was Mr A. Morris. Your brother gave him signing power. What would you like me to do? Block the account?'

I thought for a moment and replied. 'Let me first visit the shop. If Mr Morris suspects something is wrong, he might raid the stock. Jewellery is small and high in value. He could take another hundred thousand in an overnight bag. Perhaps I should phone the police.'

Mrs Brown responded, 'Perhaps that is a bit harsh. Mr Morris may have an explanation. Why don't you take Chris, my partner, with you? He knows the law and can assist if Mr Morris becomes difficult.'

Mrs Brown briefed Chris, and we drove to the jewellers in Hampstead. We entered the shop, and a flamboyant man who gestured with his hands wildly while he talked greeted us. I interrupted him, saying. 'May I introduce myself? I am Stephen Jones, Peter's brother, and this is my accountant.'

Mr Morris turned white and started to stammer. 'This is my business. I created everything here. Peter gave it to me.'

Chris interrupted. 'Do you have any proof of that? According to the bank, it seems strange that you have been stealing all the cash. If it were your business, you would not have done that. Do you want me to phone the police? Mr Metcalfe, who is investigating Peter's murder, would love to meet you.'

Mr Morris panicked. 'I did not kill Peter. I loved him.'

I interrupted. 'That is strange. You did not even attend Peter's funeral or contact me at any stage. I don't call that love. We better phone Mr Metcalfe if you are going to continue lying.'

Mr Morris now panicked. 'Peter and I were in love for a long time, but then he met someone else. That is why I could not attend the funeral. I knew I would lose the business. I took the money to start somewhere else to protect myself. We had a package of diamonds with the cutters, and I was waiting for their arrival, or else I would have left a long time ago.'

I continued, 'You should not have been so greedy. Now you have only two options, return all of the money, plus whatever stock you have taken, I might give you a chance, or we contact the police immediately.'

Mr Morris took us to his office and opened the safe. He had stuffed it full of cash, diamonds and gold bars. I asked Mr Morris who Peter had met. He replied, 'It is Graham, your woodworker. He is dangerous. I am sure he killed Peter.'

I replied. 'Because you have returned the money, we will not mention your theft to the police, but we

must report your liaison with Peter. I must have his murder cleared up, and you may be an important witness,' I said to the rest of the staff, who was looking at us opened mouth. 'Please could you all come in tomorrow? We have to do a stock take and decide how we move forward. I will appreciate all the help I can get. We don't want the business to close down.'

I phoned Mr Metcalfe and explained Peter and Mr Morris's relationship and that he had information about who the killer might be.

While waiting for the police, Chris and the shop ladies counted the money and listed all the gold and diamonds we found in the safe. I collected all the keys and contacted an emergency locksmith to add new padlocks to the exterior doors. I further instructed him to change all the locks the following day.

I thanked Chris and asked if anyone in the accounting firm could help with tomorrow's stock take. He assured me someone would help first thing in the morning.

The police arrived and took Mr Morris away for questioning. I gave the staff the rest of the day off and reminded them to be here at 9 AM so that we could start a stock take.

Chris and I locked up the gold and diamonds in the safe, taking the cash to the Bank to deposit. Chris instructed the manager to cancel all signatures at the Bank for the company. Then he made me the sole signature, and I signed several specimen forms. Mrs Brown had already updated the shareholder and director details with Company House and sent copies to the bank manager.

Arriving at the shop, Mary excitedly informed me that the police had taken Graham away. ‘What do we do now? People are waiting for their furniture repairs.’

I went into the workshop and spoke to Fred. ‘Could you help with the furniture repairs? The police seem to think Graham is responsible for Peter’s murder. We will have to find a new woodworker.’

‘I can do Graham’s job with my eyes closed. We don’t want gay men working here. They create an atmosphere, and nothing gets done. We don’t need to replace him, either. I can get my grandson to help out if we have a rush. He is far more skilled than Graham,’ Fred replied.

I left it at that. *‘I don’t agree with Fred’s view on gay people, they also have a place in our society, but at the moment, it is one salary less to worry about,’* I thought.

I told Mary that Fred would be doing Graham's work and that his grandson would help if needed.

In my office, I sat thinking. 'What an eventful day. I followed in Peter's shadow throughout childhood, looking up to my elder brother. He was always a kind and gentle person. I would never have believed he was gay or dealing in stolen diamonds. Bless his soul.

It was a good thing our parents were no longer with us. My mother would have taken it in her stride. But my dad, I think, would have been disappointed.

I returned to the workshop and asked Shaun if he kept a record of the silver and gold bars Peter sold to his jeweller friend. We were taking stock and needed to know what gold quantities went to the Hampstead Jewellers. Shaun went white with shock but handed me a large book where he entered all the weights and the date that the gold and silver left the premises. That was the last time I saw Shaun at work.

I helped Mary close that afternoon and noticed that Shaun had disappeared. Old Fred grinned. 'Looks like you will need someone to work the furnaces.'

'Why did you not tell me that Peter was gay and that he owned the jewellers in Hampstead?' I asked Mary.

Mary, looking sheepishly, replied. 'I did not think being gay was a crime. I did not think I should interfere with Peter's private life.'

'You are correct. Being gay is not a crime, but it is essential to know when everyone is looking for a girlfriend to help with a murder enquiry. Chief Inspector Metcalfe may not be amused.'

Mary looked flush. 'I was only trying to protect Peter's reputation.'

'Do not be concerned. I don't think the Chief Inspector is any wiser. I will be away tomorrow taking stock in Peter's jewellery business that nobody knew existed. Please ask your mother to help you watch the shop.'

The following morning I was at the jeweller's to open up for the staff and the locksmith. I instructed the locksmith to change every lock on the premises, including the desk and cash drawers.

Mrs Brown was there to take personal charge of the stocktake. The girls put a sign on the door 'Closed for StockTake.'

I left Mrs Brown to take charge of the stocktake while I took Shaun's stock book to the workshop,

where I spoke with Paul King, Mr Morris's assistant. 'Do you record all the gold bars you received?'

Paul had a similar book listing everything that they had received from Peter. 'You will find it in order. It is something that I did myself. Mr Morris was not keen on the admin side of the business. Your brother used to bring the old rings to me. I would tell him what is worth keeping, clean them up and then enter them as stock for sale. For the remainder of the rings, I would remove the stone, note the weight of the gold settings, and then return the gold to him for melting. The old stone is all kept in these drawers.' He showed me a cabinet with small draws labelled for the different stones.

We checked the last six months' deliveries, and they tallied roughly with the gold bars in stock. There were more gold bars, but Paul put that down to remains from the period before. As far as I was concerned, he had done an excellent job.

I asked him to help me with Peter's stock book of what gold he handed to Shaun and subsequently delivered to Paul. Vast quantities are missing. Paul assured me that losing such amounts in the melting and making bars would be unusual.

I asked Paul, 'Do you think you could successfully manage this business without Mr Morris?'

Paul's face brightened up. 'I have been well trained in all aspects of the business and would be proud to take over.'

I continued, taking the pouch of diamonds out of my pockets. 'These ten diamonds are worth more than a hundred thousand Pounds. Could you set them in gold and sell them at a profit?'

Paul opened the pouch and poured the diamonds on the workbench. He studied them individually with his magnifying glass. 'I will sell them for double that amount in one month.'

I shook his hand. 'You're on. Don't let me down.'

I returned to the showroom to check on the locksmith and the stocktake process. The ladies were progressing well. I called Mrs Brown to one side. 'I would like to change the company's name to something else. Either Stephen Jones Jewellers or Jones Jewellers, or Jones of London, jewellers. Any combination of the above or similar, whatever Companies House permits. I would also like you to introduce a computerised stock control system so that you can immediately check how many of a particular item is in stock.'

Mrs Brown agreed and promised to let me have Companies House's choices as soon as we had completed the stocktake.

The locksmith reported that he had replaced every lock in the building and handed me many keys. He had also removed the sign with the business name from the front of the store.

I called the two women, Susan and Yvonne, to join me in the workshop with Paul, and announced, 'I have decided to give the business management over to Paul. He will be in charge. It is essential and in your interest that you all work together to make it successful. If you have any misgivings, please tell me so we can sort it out.'

I continued. 'Seeing that we are moving into a new millennium, I have asked Mrs Brown to introduce a computerised stock control system. You must now add everything you have listed to the computer software. The same applies to new stock, and you must deduct all sales. The computer input work might increase your workload at first. If you struggle, I am happy to increase the staff. See how it goes; it might even make it easier.'

I excused myself from the jewellers and returned to the furniture business. I had to sort out the Shaun problem. I discussed the issue with Simon. 'You

realise that Shaun is not coming back. We can ask Sue Kemp to come in more regularly, but I would be grateful if you could take over Shaun's long-term duties. If you have any problems with any aspects of his work, I am happy to pay for any classes or courses you may wish to attend.'

Simon assured me that he could cope with most of Shaun's work. 'I would like to learn more about the glasswork and the melting of gold and silver. The rest Sue could show me.'

I returned to my office and phoned Chief Inspector Metcalfe. I explained Shaun's thieving, pointing out that he could be another suspect in Peter's murder, as it involved large sums of money.

Chief Inspector Metcalfe promised to see me the following morning. I asked Mary to lock up if I didn't return in time and rushed back to the jewellery store to help complete the stocktake. On my way, I also decided to introduce a computerised stock control system in the furniture store. '*Mary will have to learn,*' I thought.

They had finished the stocktake, and Mrs Brown was doing spot checks to ascertain if there were any losses. I asked Mrs Brown if she could order two new computers from her IT supplier with the necessary

software. I explained my plan to introduce stock control in the furniture store.

Mrs Brown handed me the stock sheets, stating that after stock checks, it did not seem that there had been any severe stock losses. The IT man will deliver the two computers this afternoon. Tomorrow one of my ladies, Tracy will spend the day here to show the ladies how to input the stock from the new stock sheets.

At that moment Mr Morris walked into the shop. 'I have come to check if my position is still secure. I told you that I did not murder Peter. The court believed me and allowed parole.'

I smiled. 'The police are unaware of how much you planned to steal from the business. There is no position here for you. If you come near this shop again, I might change my mind and tell the police what you plan to steal. That would be the end of your parole.'

Mr Morris insisted. 'I only want to talk to my friends.'

'You can do it off the premises and out of working hours.' I turned to the staff and informed them that Mr Morris was not welcome in the shop and they

should inform the police the moment he entered the door.

Mr Morris left with an angry look, slamming the door behind him.

The IT man arrived a few moments before closing and showed us how to install the computer. I explained to Susan and Yvonne that a girl called Tracy would spend tomorrow with them to teach them the stock control system. They were impressed that they could even surf the internet with the new computer.

I asked the IT man if he could visit the furniture store the following morning to install their computer. He agreed with a smile and gave me his card. I paid him by check from the jeweller's account, promising to pay him for the second computer at the furniture store.

The following morning after opening the furniture restoration business, I greeted Mary with a smile. 'There is a surprise for you today; I hope you will be pleased.'

I could see the excitement in Mary's eyes. She followed me around like a child, asking questions. 'What time is it coming?' and 'How big is it?'

I tried to ignore her and went to the workshop to talk to Simon and Fred. They assured me that the two of them would cope.

‘They were surplus to requirements. They were concentrating on what they could steal instead of on the job. Did you know they were both homosexuals? That is why they got the job in the first place,’ Fred stated.

Mary came running into the workshop, shouting excitedly. ‘You bought me a computer! The computer man is outside. What should I do?’

I followed Mary back into the showroom and advised. ‘Mary, show the man where you want your new computer installed. It should be near the counter where you serve the customers.’

Mary moved her desk closer to the counter. ‘The counter is too high for comfort. The desk should be fine.’

‘I will make the cable long enough for you to use in either setting if you change your mind,’ the IT man suggested.

Mary beamed. ‘Oh, you clever man. That is kind of you.’

Turning to me, Mary thanked me. 'I have wanted a computer for such a long time. Peter did not believe in them. I think they are marvellous. They could help with stock control, even replace the customer enquiry book and be used to calculate the exact cost of labour for repairs. After a while, you will wonder how we coped without a computer.'

I was amazed. 'I did not realise you were into computers. I am happy to pay you to attend evening classes to get you up to speed.'

Mary smiled. 'I only know the basics to get by. Evening classes would be a fantastic idea. Are we going to be connected to the internet?'

'Naturally, we will, and tomorrow a girl from the accountant's office will show you the stock control software.'

I turned to the IT man. 'Before I forget, could I please have two portable, external hard drives to backup all our files in case the computers crash?'

The IT man stated that it was a good idea, although it was hardly likely that the hard drive would fail during a crash. 'However, it is best to be safe than sorry.'

I left Mary to oversee the computer installation and drove to the jewellery shop to see how they were coping.

Paul had started with his first diamond ring, claiming he had ready buyers for all ten diamonds, filling me with confidence.

Susan and Yvonne were doing great with entering the stock on the computer. They took turns serving customers and seemed comfortable running the showroom.

I asked Tracy if she could come to the furniture shop the following day to help Mary with the stock control software.

The phone rang, and Susan called me. 'It is Mrs Brown looking for you.'

Mrs Brown informed me that Companies House approved *Jones of London Limited*. I asked Mrs Brown to proceed with the registration and advised the Bank of the name change.

I then phoned the sign writer and asked him to make the sign with the words *Fine Jewellers* underneath.

I asked Susan to phone the printers and change our stationery accordingly.

Tracy volunteered to update the name on the computer where needed. I went to the workroom and told Paul about the changes. He was delighted. 'It is time we remove Mr Morris's name good and proper.'

Returning to the furniture store, I found Mary in her element, checking all the files on her computer. 'It has all the office software installed and stock control software.'

I told Mary to note Keith, the IT man's address and telephone number, in case she required more software. I gave Keith a cheque for the computer and the two portable hard drives.

Keeping one portable hard drive for the jewellery store, I gave the second one to Mary and asked her to save and update all her files at least once a week as a backup.

Mary was keen to enter the stock immediately, but I advised her to wait for Tracy tomorrow. 'It is best to control the inventory according to the accountant's system.'

'Let us work on a system to prevent gold from disappearing between the shop and the jewellers. I

thought you would lock all the rings and gold in your safe.

‘I collect all your rings and sign for them once a week. Then take them to the jewellers to select what they need for resale.

‘For the balance of the rings, Paul removed the stones and returned the gold blanks to me on a signature. I will then give these back to you. It should be the same quantity I took from you, minus the rings the jewellery shop kept for resale.

‘You then calculate the amount of gold on your scales and let Simon sign for that weight. A similar weight in gold bars should then be available for the jeweller shop.

‘There will always be a slight difference we will have to allow for in the solid gold bars as some of the gold we buy is 9 K, and some are 18 K.

‘It is only an idea for you to study. I want everyone to be safe without being tempted to remove some of the gold.

‘If you approve of the idea, try to work out a system for us to implement using your new computer. The

signatures need only be on notes that you can destroy after we have completed the cycle or at the end of each month.

‘See what you can come up with, and we will test it on Tracy. She is supposed to be an expert on computers.’

I joined Tony for a few beers at his favourite pub that evening. Beer in hand, I updated him on all the news regarding Peter. ‘I have found three people with a motive for Peter’s murder. Two of them worked in the furniture workshop, stealing large amounts of gold from the business. The third ran a jewellery shop for Peter. He planned to steal loads from Peter, but I made a deal with him, and he returned everything. He stated he was in love with Peter and would not kill him. Did you know Peter was gay? I did not have a clue regarding his sexual orientation.’

Tony nearly choked on his beer. ‘We did not discuss such things in South Africa as it was illegal. A lot of people left South Africa for that reason.’

Tony, looking a lot more gleeful, continued. ‘I am glad the police have something to work with; I was afraid for your safety, what with you playing detective, trying to expose a killer.’

Tony added. 'You know, South Africa is beautiful, but we had such restricted lives. I did not even know that gay people existed. It must have been difficult for such people. England is a laid-back and forgiving society where everyone treats each other equally, no matter the defects.'

As his brother, I should have seen the signs and realised what Peter was going through. He was a stew of emotions, with all his suffering hidden from the world. His eyes were shrouded in sadness, yet he consistently put on a façade of kindness and warmth to protect those around him.

CHAPTER FOUR



The following day while Mary and Tracy were busy with the stock control program on the computer, I went to the auction houses to select a few articles and place my bid. It was the first time I did it alone without Mary's guidance. *'I had to start sometime,'* I thought.

All three auction houses I visited enquired about Sarah's paintings. I promised to call her after work to see if she had any more available.

I found Mary and Tracy in a deep discussion about computers. I decided it was the right time to visit the Jewellery store, delivering their portable hard drive to back up their stock data.

The sign writer was busy with their new name in gold lettering. Joyfully, I told Susan, 'I bet Mr Morris will be furious when he notices the new name.'

Susan laughed. 'He has already phoned to complain.'

I attended the workshop and discussed the furniture store's new procedure between stock and gold bars.

Paul thought it was a safe system. He, however, had a problem on his mind. 'What worries me every time I look at my safe is, what if Mr Morris made a copy of the safe key? He could sneak in here, steal the diamonds, and the police would suspect me.'

I acknowledged his fears and agreed. 'The thought has also occurred to me. He did give in too readily for my liking. Buy a new safe immediately for delivery today. You could put the high-value stuff in the new safe and the run-of-the-mill stuff in the old safe. Do the same for the girls. They could put cash and valuables in their new safe and use the old safe for whatever.'

Paul phoned the safe people, giving them approximate measurements. They promised to deliver them immediately as they had similar sizes in stock.

I remained at the jewellers until the new safes were delivered before I returned to the furniture store. Sitting in my office, I realised I could do with a safe and noted that I could take the jeweller's old office safe if they didn't need it.

Tracy had left, and Mary proudly explained the new software's cleverness with delight. 'You can even add details of all the work done to improve the item, giving the article an accurate cost. Tracy has also made

me a program where we can list all the customer enquiries. All you have to do is enter the item you have acquired in the search box. For instance, if a table has come in for sale. You type table in the search box, and the program will list all the customers looking for tables. Isn't it marvellous? We should have had a computer long ago.'

After we closed that afternoon, I went to Sarah's flat, as promised to the auction rooms.

I knocked on her door. I thought I had a heart attack or a stroke. Sarah did not open the door, but Sarah's painting did. I did not know what to say and could feel my face flushing. I stammered. 'I am looking for Sarah.' At that moment, Sarah appeared and noticed my predicament. 'Oh, I am sorry, Stephen. I should have warned you that Tara is staying for a while. Please come in, Stephen; I see you need a drink.'

Tara, with a twinkle in her lovely blue eyes, complained. 'This is a first for me. I have never experienced my appearance being so bad it would drive someone to drink.'

Sarah laughingly interrupted. 'On the contrary, my dear Tara. Stephen fell in love with you the first time he saw your painting. He even offered to buy your painting. I think he never expected to see you in real

life. You opening the door was too much for his little brain.'

With a blushing face, I tried to apologise. 'It was only wishful thinking. I am sorry I startled you. My name is Stephen, and I am pleased to meet you.'

'She is even more beautiful in real life,' I thought.

Tara laughed heartily. 'Never mind, I forgive you. My name is Tara, and I am pleased to meet you too. Unfortunately, you can only have my painting if you marry me,' she added jokingly.

'You are on, and I will marry you tomorrow if you want me,' I responded nervously.

Tara laughed off my response with a wave of her hand.

Trying to hide my embarrassment, I turned to Sarah and explained. 'I came over because the auction houses are screaming for more of your paintings. I think you can increase the price to a thousand pounds. Have you got any I can take? Then I will leave you girls in peace and go and sulk in a corner somewhere.'

Sarah smiled. 'You are welcome here anytime. Could you come tomorrow? I will see that I have three paintings ready for you.'

I thanked Sarah. 'By the way, the police have three people that may have a motive for killing Peter. Two stole from him, and one was in love with him. Did you know that Peter was gay?' I added.

'I am glad for your sake. I did not like you running around, looking for murderers. No, I did not know Peter was gay, which explains why I never had a chance. Without a doubt, homosexuality does not run in your family, going from your lovesick expression for Tara,' Sarah replied.

I said my farewells. 'I will see you tomorrow at the same time. Perhaps by then, I have recovered from my shock. If you like, we could go out for a meal?'

Tara, with a smile on her beautiful face, agreed. 'Yes, let's do it.'

I went home with my head in the clouds. Tara looked directly at me when she accepted. '*It is as if we are going on a date.*' She did not seem to include Sarah.

The following morning I helped Mary to make simple calculations to work out the pure gold weight of the items purchased.

If there is no stamp on the gold item, it is best to treat it as white metal with no value. Suppose the customer insists it is gold; we ask them to take the piece to our jeweller shop, and they can pay Paul to test it and certify its gold content.

Mary printed the formula and inserted it in a plastic cover beside her scales.

In the workshop, Simon happily informed me that he had enrolled in a porcelain course. Sue came in for an hour daily to teach him glasswork and melting gold for gold bars.

Fred was a bit sulky but seemed to be coping well without Graham. 'He was not a woodworker but a sheer waste of time. I used to do wood carving when I was young. Now that is woodworking,' Fred insisted.

After seeing that the staff were happy in the furniture shop, I visited the jeweller's store. They were busy with customers.

Paul thought it was due to the new sign and change of name. The customers were under the impression that we were having a sale. 'Perhaps we should get one

more staff member. I need Yvonne to help me clean rings and set up all our stones. She is artistic and a great help in the workshop.'

Susan was an expert with admin and sales, but she couldn't handle both when it got busy.

I promised Paul that I would look out for an additional saleslady. I also asked Paul if Susan needed her old safe, as I needed a safe.

Paul returned. 'Susan said you could have her old safe. It gets in her way and is too bulky and heavy to move.'

I remained a bundle of nerves the rest of the day, thinking of seeing Tara that evening. I could not understand being so nervous. I should be excited, taking such a beautiful woman out for a meal.

It crossed my mind to offer Tara work as a saleslady in the jeweller's shop. Still, I decided it was a terrible idea to employ someone I had such strong feelings for. Besides, such a beautiful woman would laugh at selling jewellery.

That evening I knocked on Sarah's door, ready with a big smile in case Tara opened the door. It was Sarah, still in her torn jeans with no makeup. 'You look disappointed. Were you expecting someone

else? Never mind, Tara is getting ready. Let me show you the paintings I have prepared.'

Sarah took me to her studio, showing me three lovely landscapes in gold-painted frames. I was pleased with her work. 'They will sell fast. We must insist on a thousand pounds each, giving you more time to build up stock. Your work is creating much excitement, and people should learn the value of it.'

Sarah, still unsure of her ability, was a bit dubious. 'You don't think I may be pricing my work out of the market? I struggled to sell for fifty pounds only a few months ago.'

'Your work is lovely. You deserve success. I will keep a watch on your paintings. We will drop the price to eight hundred pounds if they are still not sold after two weeks.'

Tara entered the studio looking gorgeous, her skin like porcelain. I was scared to hug her, thinking I might bruise her.

'Oh, there you are, discussing high finance,' she announced.

'Are you two ready? I am starving. Sarah never feeds me. She is too busy making money,' Tara pleaded.

I greeted Tara with a smile. 'You look beautiful. We are also ready. Only need to wrap these paintings in a sheet or something to lock in the boot of my car.'

Sarah gave me a sheet. 'Could you do that while I put on a bit of makeup?'

Tara offered to help. 'Let me wrap the paintings, and you can carry them to your car.'

I was going to joke that she should not bruise her skin but thought better of it and helped her cover the paintings with a sheet.

Tara joked. 'I bet that is my sheet. Sarah has no mercy for anything besides her paintings.'

I smiled. 'Never mind, I have some clean sheets you can have at home.'

Sarah reappeared, makeup applied and in a lovely figure-hugging red dress. I remarked. 'Now I have two beautiful women to take for a meal. Where should we go, Sarah? You know all the best restaurants.'

'The only thing I could afford up to now was burger joints. Sorry, you will have to decide,' Sarah replied.

I locked the paintings in the boot and answered. 'The staff tells me that there is a decent restaurant near the Jeweller shop. Let's try that. I can show you the new sign; I have never seen the shop at night.'

We first visited the jeweller's store and were impressed with the gold sign *Jones of London Limited* with *Fine Jewellers* underneath.

Sarah, with surprise, commented. 'I did not even know this shop existed. Your brother was a dark horse.'

'I love diamonds. Are those real diamonds in the window?'' Tara asked.

'The ones you are looking at are second-hand or fake diamonds and not worth much money. The genuine articles are locked up in a safe.'

We tried Côte Hampstead. Their notice read, 'Inspired by the brasseries of Paris, serving authentic French dishes all day in our classically designed restaurants. We are committed to producing genuine French classics, freshly cooked to order, from the highest quality sourced ingredients.'

The food was as advertised, fantastic, and the house wine was excellent. We had a lovely evening, spoiled by the friendly staff.

Sarah suggested we go to my flat for a nightcap and to show Tara the furniture side of the business.

‘We can also look to see if we can find a clean sheet for Tara,’ I joked.

Sarah was unsure what I was referring to until Tara laughed. ‘I told Stephen you used my sheet to wrap up your paintings.’

Sarah showed Tara my apartment while I poured each a glass of wine. I then unlocked the gallery door and showed them my treasures. ‘I sell these special items to collectors, and they are off limits to the general public.’

Tara admired the glasswork and paintings but was not interested in the antique furniture. I showed her down the stairs. ‘This leads to the showroom and the restoration workshop.’

Tara looked around, unimpressed at all the items on sale and the workshop. ‘It is all industries, but not for me. I prefer more feminine objects like jewellery. I could spend all day amongst and working with them. I like bling.’

I smiled. ‘There is a vacancy in the jewellery store for a sales lady if you are interested.’

Tara turned towards me. ‘Are you serious? I would be highly interested. I have had sales experience, working in a boutique in Dublin and enjoyed serving customers.’

‘Well, if you want the job, it is yours. I will discuss it with Paul in the morning. He is the manager and will have the final say and decide on your salary. I am sure we could enrol you in evening classes to learn about gemstones, to help customers make their choices.’

Tara was excited. ‘Do you sell diamonds? I can’t wait to start. I love diamonds.’

I explained that I would arrange an interview with Paul King, the manager and phone her in the morning. ‘Do not worry; the job is yours. It is for Paul to decide your salary. I do not know the current salary rates.’

Tara remained in a state of excitement for the rest of the evening. When leaving for home, she even gave me a friendly kiss goodbye.

The following day I went to see Paul at the jewellery store. ‘I found a saleslady for you. Her name is Tara Willis. She is a friend of mine, a special friend. Please be gentle with her and show her the ropes. I think she would complement your staff; she is beautiful and has previous sales experience in a

boutique in Dublin. I have also promised that we would enrol her in evening classes to learn about gemstones. You have the final decision and will have to decide on her salary. What time would suit you to see her? I will arrange it.'

Paul smiled. 'That was quick work from you. I have not had time to think about a new sales lady, but we need one. Tell her to come in at eleven this morning, and we can give her a three-month trial and see if we all get on. In a small business like this, it is important.'

I phoned Tara and arranged her interview with Paul. I could hear the excitement in her voice and wondered if I had blown my chances of ever having a relationship with her. It was never advisable to date your staff.

I returned to the furniture store to arrange with Simon and Fred to collect the items I won the bids on at the auction rooms and to collect my safe from the jewellery shop. It was a ploy to be absent when Tara arrived for her interview. However, I had to deliver Sarah's three paintings.

Mary was proud of her new computer showing all the forms she had devised for the jewellery and restoration work the workshop staff had to complete. 'We never knew the exact cost of restoring items. It was always guesswork,' she stated.

Paul phoned me moments before lunch. 'Tara has been for her interview and will start work tomorrow. I must congratulate you on your choices. She is beautiful, and the customers will love her. Susan and Yvonne agreed on her appearance, and then she started talking. She has the loveliest Irish accent, so refreshing to what we are used to here in London. On top of it, she is so humble, and I would say she will be a winner with the customers and staff.'

I replied to Paul. 'I hope you are right. I was worried about offering her the job without consulting you, but one thing led to another.'

'I know, I am right. Tara is already serving customers and loving it.'

That evening after work, I went to Sarah's apartment to inform her of the remarks made by the auction house regarding the price increase.

'All three auction houses agreed that the increase is necessary as the paintings sold so fast at the old price,' I informed her.

I asked Tara how her day was at the jeweller's.

With a big smile, Tara beamed. 'It was amazing. I even served a few customers and had a sale.'

‘Well, the staff certainly liked you, and Paul thinks you will be a hit with the customers. Are you happy with your salary?’

Tara agreed. ‘The salary is fine, and Paul said he would revise my salary in three months.’

I told her that I had to go. ‘I will not keep you up tonight. Before your first day at work, you need an early night.’

Tara disagreed. ‘Please stay, at least for a cup of tea. I don’t want you to leave.’

‘Yes, please stay for a cup of tea,’ Sarah joined in.

‘I will get the tea if you look after Stephen,’ Tara told her.

Tara disappeared to the kitchen, and Sarah looked at me. ‘I don’t want to play cupid, but you must do something with that girl. I told her how you felt towards her, and she felt the same for you. It has nothing to do about you giving her a job. She expressed her feelings to me the first time you met.’

While having my tea, I remarked in conversation with Tara. ‘Would you like to come for a meal on Saturday? We could visit the same restaurant we went to last time. The service and food were excellent.’

Sarah interrupted. 'I can't come this Saturday, but please don't mind me. You two go ahead and enjoy yourselves.'

Tara confirmed. 'I would love to. That is a date then, Saturday at seven.'

I went home that night in a state of excitement, my first date with Tara.

The rest of the week moved at a snail's pace and uneventfully. I was dreaming too much about Saturday evening, which started with an explosion.

I picked Tara up at seven, and she kissed me hello. I don't know where I got the courage, but I kissed her back. We kissed passionately, open-mouthed, my hands all over her for over a minute.

Tara eventually pulled away. 'We better stop, or else we will go hungry. We can pick up where we left off later. Dammit, I must redo my makeup again before we go,' she laughed.

We had a lovely meal, our legs and feet touching under the table, and now and then, our hands touched, sending electric shocks through my body.

After the meal, it was natural for us to go to my apartment. We had hardly closed the front door. On

the way to my bedroom, our clothes were littered all over the floor. We could not wait.

We must have made passionate love several times that night. Fortunately, the following morning was Sunday, and we could stay in bed late, which led to more lovemaking. Tara fetched me a cup of tea from the kitchen; I was exhausted.

Cuddling Tara, I confessed. 'That was the best night of my life. I don't want it to end. Please move in with me permanently. I need you beside me.'

Tara agreed and smiled. 'I would truly like that. I loved you, Stephen Jones, from when you first knocked on Sarah's door.' Tara accepted, cuddling closer to me.

Perhaps we better let Sarah and my mother know. 'They may be concerned about me not coming home last night. I have never done this before. I call my mother every night. Last night I forgot. She will be pleased if we are together. She knows all about you; Sarah is such a telltale.'

Pulling Tara towards me for another kiss, I added. 'You can tell her that we are engaged. I have a beautiful diamond for this purpose. I will tell Paul to set it in a gold ring of your choice. That will also stop

all the speculation about us. My intentions were always honourable. I would do anything to get your painting.'

Tara burst out laughing. 'You are a crazy man. I love you. Is this a marriage proposal? My mother will be ecstatic. I better take you to Dublin for her approval.'

Tara called Sarah and told Sarah about the engagement. Sarah insisted on coming around with a bottle of champagne. 'Your mother and I have been up all night, worried that nothing had happened; she will be delighted.'

'You better get dressed. Sarah is coming to congratulate us, and then I must call my mother. The two of them have been speculating what we were up to all night.'

Tara phoned her mother to give her the news, but Sarah had already told her. Even so, she was delighted and demanded to see the ring and me as soon as possible.

Sarah arrived with the champagne, her eyes sparkling with excitement. 'I am so pleased for the two of you. It could not happen to a nicer couple. What are you going to do about an engagement ring?'

Tara explained that I had several diamonds ready for fitting and that we would choose one tomorrow. They varied between three and five karats. 'I think we will select a three-karat diamond. The five karate stone sounds too big and flashy to me.'

'I have never seen a three-karat diamond before, never mind a five-karat stone. One-karat is about my dream size,' Sarah responded.

Tara continued. 'My mother wants me to take Stephen back home. You will have to come with for support.'

Sarah grimaced. 'Do you realise how the family will humiliate me for not yet being married? They already think I must be a criminal because I am an artist. They are forever saying get a proper job and get married, but I would love to see all of them again.'

I interrupted. 'Then we will have to find you a partner. You found me the girl of my dreams. Now it is my turn. I have a good friend called Tony.' We could make a foursome and go out for a meal next weekend.

'I guarantee you would like him. He works at Guy's hospital and is studying to become a radiologist.'

Sarah objected obstinately. ‘I don’t want you to find me a partner. I am not that desperate. The right man will come along when the time is right.’

‘Well then, think of him as only a friend. I will not try to select a partner for you; that you must do yourself. I reflected that he is my friend, and I think he could be your friend too.’

We moved Tara’s possessions to my apartment during the rest of the day, including Tara’s painting.

The following day at the jewellery store, I told Paul and the staff that Tara and I were engaged. ‘We will have a celebrating meal at the Côte Restaurant Hampstead on Saturday, and you are welcome.’

I took Tara to Paul’s workshop and asked him to show Tara the selection of diamonds I brought from Amsterdam. Tara immediately went for a three-karat diamond.

That is precisely the stone I had in mind. ‘What do you think, Paul?’

Paul smiled. ‘In the right setting, I think it would look beautiful on Tara’s finger.’

‘Could you make the right setting to fit this stone on Tara’s finger by Friday? She will need it for our celebration dinner.’

‘It will be my pleasure. It will be ready tomorrow,’ Paul assured me.

I was pleased that it was a Monday and not our busiest day, as I doubted the staff would do any work that day. I could see the entire team concentrating and giving advice on Tara’s ring.

Returning to the Furniture store, I nearly shouted out our engagement news. My excitement was palpable as I begged them to celebrate with us on Saturday. Nothing could make me happier than Tara’s acceptance of my proposal. I would do anything to commemorate the joyous occasion.

CHAPTER FIVE



Fred, at first, declined vehemently. ‘I don’t go to posh places like the Côte Restaurant. I would not know which fork or knife to use and what clothes to wear to such a place. What about Mrs Smith? She will need a new dress and her hair done. We can’t afford these posh places.’

I interrupted. ‘If you need any money for clothing and your wife's hair styling, ask Mary, and she will pay for it out of petty cash. Tara and I would appreciate it if you could attend. It would not be the same without you. I confirmed that everyone should bring their partners. They are welcome; meeting everyone would be a nice occasion.’

I realised that I did not mention it at the jewellery store. I immediately phoned Susan and informed her that partners were welcome and would be nice to meet them.

Adding up, the number of people I had invited came to sixteen. I thought it best to make a reservation as it would fill half the restaurant. I explained to the Côte Restaurant the occasion and what I was planning. They confirmed the booking and assured me they could accommodate my tally. Even a few more

people, if needed. They immediately knew who I was and made me feel most welcome, not even asking for a deposit.

I phoned Tony, told him the news, and invited him to meet Tara for a few drinks that evening.

Trying to get any work done was impossible. Mary could not stop talking about the engagement and the party on Saturday. She even asked for time off to buy a new dress and if she could use petty cash.

I thought, 'What the hell. If you do it for one, you might as well do it for everyone,' and I agreed.

That afternoon I returned to the jewellery store to collect Tara. I found the staff around her, admiring her hand. Paul had completed her ring, and it looked fantastic. I noticed Yvonne not fully joining in the excitement. I did not want to say anything, and Tara was so proud. 'I feel like a film star,' she exploded.

I thanked Paul. 'You have done a magnificent job. It is the best ring I have seen.'

Before going home, I explained to Susan. 'If any staff member needs clothing or hair styling for Saturday, pay for it out of petty cash. I don't want anyone out of pocket because of the party.'

On the way home, I told Tara I had invited Tony for a few drinks and to meet her.

Tara gulped. 'I have invited Sarah over to see my ring. She is going to think we are matchmaking. I better warn her; it was not the intention. We had better consult with each other in future before we invite people. Living together is new to me, but I will learn.'

'For me too, I thought I was doing the right thing inviting Tony. Maybe we should stay in bed for a month and speak to no one, only live on sex and champagne.'

Tara called Sarah and explained what had happened. Sarah countered. 'I am coming anyway. I will not let some jumped-up nurse put me off seeing your ring.'

Tony arrived first, proceeding to admire Tara and her ring. 'Where did you get her? She is beautiful, you lucky sod,' he remarked.

'From the jeweller's shop,' I replied.

Tony pulled a face. 'I meant Tara. Not the ring.'

Tara was laughing. 'I work in the jeweller's shop.'

After that, Tara and Tony were friends. The doorbell sounded, and Tara, still laughing, opened the door for Sarah, showing off her hand.

‘Oh my God, it is huge,’ Sarah beamed.

Tara agreed. ‘It is incredible. I am too scared to ask Stephen what it costs. It looks so expensive.’

Tony stood up as they entered the sitting room. ‘This is Tony. He thinks I am beautiful as well as the ring.’

Sarah smiled and shook his hand. ‘I am the ugly cousin called Sarah.’

Tony, blushing. ‘I don’t think you are ugly. You are beautiful, too; you must come from a princely family that produces such beautiful daughters.’

Sarah laughed. ‘We are common Irish girls from Dublin.’

Tony could make friends easily, and we laughed and joked. It was not difficult to persuade Sarah and Tony to come to the party on Saturday evening.

It was a lovely evening; Tony and Sarah seemed to get on well. He even offered to give Sarah a lift home, and Sarah accepted readily. After they left, we were

speculating if Sarah would invite Tony into her home for a nightcap.

With their visitors gone, I reflected on how lovely it would have been if Peter was still with us. He would have been so proud of me. A shame I had not gotten any further in resolving his murder. I would have to make an effort to resolve the problem.

Tara embraced me. 'Thank you for the most beautiful ring in the world. I will always love you; this ring will remind me of my love for you.'

Tara added. 'Bye the way, I will have to take a few hours of work to purchase a new dress for the party on Saturday. I have asked Paul, but he is too scared to say no to the boss's future wife. Therefore I thought it was best to ask you. The girls at work tell me there is a good dress shop in Hampstead.'

'I will have to speak to Paul. He is your manager and should decide no matter who you marry. I am sure you can have some time off; I will cover for you.'

Tara looked alarmed. 'I have forgotten to feed you. You must think I am the laziest fiancée in the world, but I have truly forgotten, with such a lot happening today. How about toasted cheese and tomato sandwich, and then we can go to bed and make love.'

‘I hope food won’t jeopardise our lovemaking every night,’ I said jokingly.

Tara responded with a smile. ‘I know what I am doing. Food gives you strength for better lovemaking.’

The following morning, I went with Tara to the jeweller’s shop to speak with Paul, making it clear to him that he was the store manager and in charge. If he felt he had to say no to Tara or any of the girls, then that is final, and he should not be concerned about what I might think of his decision.

I apologised to Paul for telling Susan to give the ladies money from petty cash to pay for dresses. ‘I was unaware they would need new dresses, which surprised me. I should have told you instead. Please let me know if you need me to cover while the ladies buy new dresses one at a time.

Paul enquired, ‘How much should I allow them to spend?’

‘I have no idea. Perhaps you should ask the shop; they have in mind to open an account for us, and we will pay on invoice. We could then try and say it is advertising. I will have to ask the accountant. Oh my goodness, I have forgotten to invite Mrs Brown.’

On the way to the furniture store, I thought *this engagement party was getting out of hand. It is going to cost a fortune.*

Sarah was waiting in my office before I could say she looked radiant. ‘Can I have a five-hundred-pound advance on the three paintings you took?’ She asked.

‘No problem.’ I responded. ‘Why the emergency? Is there something wrong?’

Sarah giggled. ‘It is your fault. I need a new dress for the party. Tony is taking me, and I better dress up to look like a girl instead of my dirty jeans convict look and embarrass him.’

‘Tara is also buying a new dress. I believe she is going to some shop in Hampstead,’ I remarked. ‘I better let her have some money. I did not think it would be that expensive.’

Sarah responded with a smile. ‘It should not be, but my problem is that I need a complete overhaul; dress, hair, shoes, stockings and handbag. We artists neglect the finer things, and I have not been out with a man in ages.

I asked Mary for the money and made Sarah sign for it. ‘Good luck with Tony,’ I added. ‘He is a lucky guy.’

I returned Sarah's signed chit to Mary. 'How much am I allowed to spend on my dress?' She asked sweetly.

I explained to her. 'The girls from the jewellery store are buying their dresses from a shop in Hampstead. You better find out from Susan.'

'Most important, I would be enormously grateful if you help Fred. The purpose behind helping staff with clothing was for Fred and his wife. They are so old-fashioned. I did not want them to feel left out.'

After that, I phoned Chief Inspector Metcalfe and Mrs Brown and invited them to the engagement party. To my dismay, Chief Inspector Metcalfe informed me that the police had not found Peter's murderer.

The workshop looked busy, but Fred said he was coping well. Sue had come in and was helping Simon make glass ornaments. I looked at a few. 'Did you make these yourself, Simon? They are brilliant. I particularly like the elephant,' I said.

'Yes, I am slowly getting there. Sue has been a great teacher,' Simon replied.

'I think these are already saleable. May I take a few to get Paul's opinion? You guys are coming to the party, I hope.'

They both nodded in agreement. Sue laughed. 'Do I get a new dress too, or is that only for permanent staff?'

I grinned. 'You may as well while I am in a good mood. Speak to Mary.'

I turned back to Fred. 'Have you discussed the party with Mrs Smith? It would make me happy if you both came.'

'Yes, we are coming. It is all that is talked about in our house at the moment. The party and a new dress,' Fred replied.

I laughed. 'Thank you, Fred. Your presence will be welcome.'

I was driving to Hampstead to collect Tara. I felt satisfied that I had finally taken care of the engagement, but a thought struck me; what about Tara's family and friends? I had not given them a thought.

Tara was busy serving a couple. I walked to Paul's workshop and showed him the glass animals that Simon had made. He studied them intently. 'They are saleable. Simon seems to have a knack for this kind of work. It is far better quality than the ones Shaun made. I want to give them a try in the shop. What sort

of price would you like for them? And can he make different sizes?

‘I think it is best if you decide on a price. We can always increase it if the demand grows,’ I decided.

Tara was now ready to go home. In the car, I kissed her and apologised. ‘I have been so busy arranging this party that I have forgotten about your family and friends. They must also attend. The party is for you and is not a staff party.’

Tara smiled. ‘I have been reluctant to invite anyone, as I can see the engagement party will cost a lot of money. The only people I want to attend are my mum and dad.’

‘Well, phone and invite them. We can fly them over, no problem, and they can stay with us.’

At home, Tara phoned her mum. She immediately agreed without hesitation, providing Tara would collect them at Heathrow airport. They had never been to England before and did not want to get lost.

I gave Tara my credit card and said. ‘Use my card to pay for your parent's flight, dress and anything else you may need for the party as you will be the centre of attraction. Money is not a problem, so buy the best

dress. Would your parents mind staying with us when we share a bed under the same roof?’

‘Certainly not. I have told my parents that we are living together,’ Tara confirmed.

The following day Tara confirmed that her parents would be arriving on Friday and returning to Ireland on Monday. Tara asked if I would help her select a dress. ‘I want you to be happy with my appearance. These shop assistants always praise you, no matter which dresses you choose.’

‘All I need to know is how easy it is to remove the dress after the party,’ I responded.

‘Stephen, be serious,’ Tara laughingly reprimanded me.

We selected a pale pink dress for Tara, matching shoes and a handbag. The pink showed off her pale complexion and her ginger hair. She looked beautiful.

With Paul's permission, Tara took time off work on Friday, Saturday and Monday. She made an appointment for Saturday morning for her mother and herself with a local hairdresser.

‘Everyone is sorted except me. I need a suit,’ I thought.

I bought myself an off-the-peg dark suit at a local clothing store. 'The job is done.'

Tara's heart raced as she spotted her mother at Heathrow Airport on Friday afternoon. Overwhelmed with emotion, Tara sprinted over and enveloped her in a tight embrace, tears rolling down her cheeks. 'Welcome to England, Mum. You look breathtaking!' she cried out. Meanwhile, her father trudged slowly after them, weighed down by all the suitcases and bags.

CHAPTER SIX



Tara introduced me to her parents. They insisted on me calling them Mum and Dad, especially when they learned that I was from South Africa. They still had some reservations about the English. The Welsh were not such an awful lot either, and we got on like a house on fire.

Mrs Willis examined Tara's ring, and you could see from the sparkle in her eyes that she was impressed. She turned to her husband. 'Why did you not buy me a diamond ring like Tara's?'

Mr Willis looked crestfallen but responded. 'Diamonds is Stephen's business. My business is building, so I built you a house instead.'

Tara hugged her father and laughed. 'You two are like children. It is not a contest.'

We reached the car, and Tara asked. 'Do you want to go straight home or see my workplace first? We live above the restoration business, and you can see that at any time.'

Mr and Mr Willis agreed to see the jewellery shop first and then home.

Tara proudly showed them around the jewellery shop and introduced them to Susan, Yvonne and Paul. Mrs Willis liked the glass animal figures and was impressed to discover that a staff member made them in our restoration workshop.

Arriving home, Tara showed her mother the apartment. Mr Willis was keen to see the workshop. I took him downstairs through the showroom, introduced him to the staff, and showed him the machinery. He and Fred chatted for a while about wood carving and polishing. It was a hobby of Tara's dad. He was also intrigued at how Simon was finishing off some glass elephants and asked me if he could buy one for Mrs Willis. I agreed but insisted that I would pay for it.

Simon gave us an elephant that had cooled down to room temperature and wrapped it in some tissue paper for Mr Willis.

We returned upstairs, where Mr Willis presented Mrs Willis with the elephant. She was delighted and insisted that she wanted to see how Simon made them.

I had to explain to her that it was sheer luck that we caught him making the elephants. 'He only makes them after he has melted gold and the oven is red hot. Firing up the ovens for only small glass items is costly.'

Mr Willis looking intrigued, interrupted. ‘What gold do you smelt?’

‘We buy used jewellery and fancy goods from customers and restore some of them. A lot of the jewellery contains gold. Simon smelts them into gold bars for the jewellery shop. Paul then shapes them into rings and jewellery. He is a goldsmith who made Tara’s ring, for instance.’

I continued. ‘We also buy from auctions and restore items for collectors. Come, I will show you the special items for collectors,’ I said, leading them to the upstairs showroom.

Mr and Mrs Willis wandered in amazement through all the items on display. ‘The general public is not allowed in here. It is for selected buyers and by appointment only,’ Tara declared.

‘I can see why you don’t allow the general public. You have some expensive stuff in here. I am impressed. You have a nice operation going here,’ Mr Willis remarked.

I thanked Mr and Mrs Willis. ‘That is the end of the tour. I suggest we have a nice drink and relax a bit.’

Tara showed her mother her dress while Mr Willis and I relaxed with a cold beer.

‘It must have taken you years of hard work to build this business,’ Mr Willis told me.

I then explained to Mr Willis how I came to own the business. ‘My brother must have worked hard building the company, but unfortunately, he allowed awful people to get involved. They steered him into illegal activities. He was gay and naive, allowing the wrong people to manipulate him. Nobody knew he was gay in South Africa, and I don’t think he knew himself. It was against the law. Nor did the Defence force or the Church tolerate homosexuality. Therefore it was never openly discussed. Coming to England was so different to him. All of a sudden, the feelings he had suppressed his whole life, he was allowed to exploit. I don’t think he knew what he was doing, having affairs with more than one man and getting himself in trouble. That’s why I think he asked me to come and help.’

I continued. ‘It was a complete disaster. The jewellery shop was not even listed. I discovered it by chance. The workshop was in a state. The staff stole half of the melted gold. I had to have most of the staff arrested. The police are still not sure who killed Peter. However, I will get to the bottom of his murder, somehow.’

‘Your life may be in danger with a murderer still out there,’ Mr Willis responded.

‘I am aware of that. I keep the police informed of every clue I uncover to avoid confrontation with the murderer and to remain safe. You will meet Chief Inspector Metcalfe at the party. He has become part of the family. I also realise we must finalise this case before Tara and I marry and start a family.’

‘There is no easy route to success.’

‘It is true. That is why I feel I must uncover my brother's killer. For all his shortcomings, he worked hard to set up the foundations of this business. We are steering the business in the right direction and will succeed. It is only Peter's killer. These crooks are greedy, and soon they will make a mistake. I am busy plugging every hole that they used to steal money.’

‘I think the thieves used the jewellery shop as a front to steal large sums of money. But it is now under new management and a new owner. The police arrested the previous manager. With the help of our accountant, we have set up a new computerised stock control system, making cheating difficult. However, there is still one problem to discover: the source of the diamonds.

‘I discovered the existence of the jewellery store from a phone call from a diamond-cutting firm in Amsterdam. They were advising me that my diamonds were now ready for delivery. They are

worth over two-hundred-thousand pounds, with no trace from where they came. Somebody will emerge out of the woodwork with that kind of money concerned and give the game away.'

The ladies rejoined us, and we changed the subject, discussing Tara's dress. The front doorbell chimed; it was Tony and Sarah.

I introduced Tony to Mr and Mrs Willis. Mrs Willis hugged Sarah. 'I like your new man; when is it your turn?'

Sarah blushed, changing the subject immediately. 'Please, Tara, show us your new dress. I am dying to see it.'

'I would like to see it on, too; put it on and show us,' Mr Willis added. With that, the women left the room.

A bit bewildered, Tony asked, 'Did you buy a new suit? I think I will have to; mine is a bit worn.'

'I don't think anyone will examine us, men. We are there to show off the women. I bought a cheap off-the-peg suit from the clothing store down the road. Nothing fancy.'

Tony nodded. 'I will do the same in the morning.'

Tara entered the room, looking like a film star. Mr Willis acknowledged. 'You make me feel proud, and you look beautiful. I would never have thought of light pink. It suits your skin tone and hair perfectly. Any man will pay a fortune to have you as a bride.'

I laughed. 'Where I come from, the Zulu men must pay for their brides. They call it *lobola*, and it is normally seven cows. Tara is worth at least twenty.'

Tara elbowed me in the ribs, laughing. 'Don't compare me to cattle.'

Sarah laughed. 'Do you think your hairdresser could fit me in tomorrow? I better have my hair done, or else I won't be worth one cow for my *lobola*.'

I addressed Sarah with a smile. 'If you are in the area, you can collect the rest of your money from Mary. They have sold all three of your paintings at the full price.'

Sarah, clearly delighted, turned to Tony. 'Tomorrow we party.'

We had a few more drinks, but Tara insisted we have an early night. 'Tomorrow is a big day.'

We did not make love that night because of respect for Tara's parents. She whispered, 'I am not letting

you off. You must compensate for our lost time when they are gone.'

The following morning I helped Tara make a full English breakfast for us. Tara and her mother had an appointment with the hairdresser, and Mr Willis and I would spend the morning in the store.

Saturday was always busy with customers selling jewellery. We were hardly seated in my office, and Mary entered with a ring and a bill of sale. I introduced her to Mr Willis. 'If you have time, could we have some tea?'

I showed Mr Willis the bill of sale and the ring and placed them in the safe. He questioned me. 'Is that all you paid for it?'

I acknowledged his concern. 'It also worried me at first. Mary tells me that most people offering jewellery are drug addicts, and you don't know if they stole the item. We keep them in the safe for a couple of weeks. The police come around to check if they match the description of any stolen jewellery and confiscate them if they fit the description. That is why we offer so little. If the item is saleable, we let the jeweller clean and polish it for resale. Otherwise, we remove the stone and smelt the gold into bars for assaying. It is sad making money from people's misery.

Mary brought our tea, and before we finished drinking it, she returned with rings to put in the safe four times.

‘In addition to them getting little for their jewellery, we take a photo of the person selling the item. If it turns out stolen, they are reported to the police and arrested.

We pay the gold value minus twenty-five per cent if we know the customer is genuine. We do not pay for the stone in the item. We only buy gold.

Mr Willis remarked, ‘It is a good profit if you consider that gold is about a thousand pounds per ounce.’

‘We certainly don’t lose money on it. We have sophisticated software now that automatically compares the client’s photo with our database of known thieves. You will be surprised at how often the same person would try and sell stolen items.’

Sarah and Tony arrived to collect Sarah’s money. ‘Thanks, I got my suit. I am now completely kitted out for your wedding, my wedding and any funeral I must attend. That is, providing I don’t put on any more weight,’ Tony said.

I explained to Tony, 'Tomorrow we plan to show Mr and Mrs Willis a few sights in London. You and Sarah are welcome to come. You know London far better than Tara and I.'

Tony grinned. 'It is okay, but I must check with Sarah, as you heard last night. She wants to party tonight. She is so excited by the amount of money her paintings are fetching. She feels like a millionaire.'

Mr Willis interrupted, 'How much does she get per painting now? The last time I heard, she was only getting about fifty pounds.'

Tony remarked. 'It is all Stephen's fault. Her last three paintings sold for a thousand pounds each.'

'That is fantastic. Why is it Stephen's fault?' Mr Willis asked.

I interrupted, 'I have nothing to do with it. Sarah has the ability, and I deal with a few auction houses who agreed to sell them on commission. The public love her paintings, and they are in demand.'

Mr Willis agreed. 'I have always admired Sarah's paintings. Getting the auction houses to display her artwork was good of you. We all need that little push sometimes.'

Mary entered the office. 'May I go now to have my hair done?'

I exclaimed, 'Sorry, Mary. Sure, you can go. I have forgotten all about your appointment.'

Mary rushed out of the store, and I remarked jokingly to Mr Willis and Tony. 'I am glad that I am not a Mormon. I could not cope with more than one wife at a time.'

A lady customer came in, and I had to attend. She wanted to sell a late Victorian rosewood chiffonier with inlays. 'It is on the back of the pickup van,' she said.'

I went outside to have a look. It was in two pieces in disrepair, with a broken mirror and the wood darkened over the years. You could hardly see the inlays. 'What price were you looking to achieve? It needs a lot of work,' I asked her.

Her husband joined us. She stated five hundred pounds.

I explained to her, 'A chiffonier of this age in mint condition is worth a thousand pounds. We cannot restore your chiffonier for five hundred pounds. I am sorry, but I cannot offer more than one hundred pounds. I suggest you take it to an auction. A do-it-

yourself enthusiast might pay you more and restore it himself.'

The husband remarked, 'We tried that. But the auction house insisted our reserve must not exceed fifty pounds. I feel we should let you have it for one hundred pounds.'

The wife agreed. 'Okay then. One hundred pounds it is. What a pity. It is such a lovely piece.'

I called Tony to help me offload the item. We carried it straight to the workshop, and I returned to complete the necessary forms and pay the lady.

Later I showed Mr Willis the chiffonier. 'This is a present for Tara. It needs a lot of work, but it will be beautiful when finished.'

'What is a chiffonier? What are you going to use it for?' Mr Willis asked.

I explained, 'A chiffonier is a piece of furniture differentiated from a sideboard by its smaller size. Doors enclose the front. Its name comes from the French for a rag-picker. That suggests that initially, it was a receptacle for odds and ends which had no place elsewhere. It will make a lovely drinks cabinet.'

I tried to explain to Tara about the chiffonier I bought, but she was uninterested. All she had on her mind was the evening's engagement party.

It took time for the ladies to prepare for Tara's engagement party. Still, at seven that evening, we arrived at the restaurant.

Tara's entrance was magnificent. She looked beautiful, and the staff treated her like royalty, admiring her ring and dress. The manager held her chair back to ease her sitting down. I could see in Tara's eyes that she was ecstatic; this was her proudest moment. The food was lovely, followed by toast and speeches complementing Tara and me. Even Chief Inspector Metcalfe made a speech. I noticed that he was seated next to Mr Willis.

We carried on till late. The restaurant staff cleared an area for couples to dance. Everyone wanted to dance with Tara. By the night's end, her feet were sore, and she was ready for bed.

Before we left, I thanked the manager and staff of the restaurant and paid the bill. On our way home, Tara beamed. 'That was the most exciting evening I have ever had. Everyone made me feel so special and admired my ring and dress. I felt like a princess.'

‘You are my princess, and you looked beautiful,’ I added.

Tara’s mother commented from the back seat, ‘You certainly looked stunning tonight. Everyone admired you. I was so proud. Congratulations, both of you, it was a wonderful evening, and I am grateful I could attend.’

‘Thank you for coming. It would not have been the same without you,’ Tara replied.

We opened a bottle of champagne at home for a nightcap and then retired.

Sunday, we walked for miles. Tony and Sarah led us to the main tourist attractions to show Mr and Mrs Willis.

It included Buckingham Palace, The tower of London, St Paul’s to Westminster Abbey. We stopped for lunch, not because we were hungry but to give our feet a rest. We visited Kew Gardens and the National History Museum that afternoon and marvelled at the exhibitions and displays.

I think we were all glad to be home that evening. We ordered a takeaway as nobody was in the mood for cooking. Sarah and Tony left after several glasses

of wine, and we could not wait to retire to our bedrooms.

I woke with a start during the night, concerned about the value of the gold and diamonds kept in the jewellery shop safe. I decided we should keep the bulk of the safe contents in a safety deposit box in the bank.

The following morning while waiting for Mr and Mrs Willis to complete their packing, I called the bank manager and explained what I had in mind. He agreed and said he would arrange a safety deposit box big enough for our purpose. Then I called Paul, explained what I wanted, and asked him to negotiate with Securicor to collect the gold at three that afternoon. I would accompany them to the bank.

Mr and Mrs Willis's flight was at eleven that morning, giving us plenty of time to have breakfast and drive them to the airport. We had to provide them with one of our cases. They seemed to be leaving with more than they came. Mr Willis complained. 'It is all the souvenirs and clothing we bought. The only thing that shrunk in size is my credit card.'

Mr and Mrs Willis thanked us for a lovely weekend, reminding us that we were expected soon in Dublin. Mrs Willis looked at Tara's ring, 'I am proud of you,' and kissed her.

With a final glance, she sternly warned Tara, 'I want you to make sure Sarah brings her new suitor when you come for a visit. Her mother will be delighted that she has outgrown her tomboyish ways and is ready to marry.'

CHAPTER SEVEN



Driving back to Hampstead, I praised Tara. ‘You looked wonderful last night. Every man at the restaurant was envious of me. I felt proud that it was me taking you home.’

At the Jewellers, I helped Paul pack the gold bars he did not need immediately in a wooden crate for the security firm to collect. Paul remarked, ‘I agree that keeping the gold we are not using in the bank vault is a good idea, but you picked the wrong day. Yvonne has not turned up for work today, and we are short-staffed. It must be due to Tara’s party on Saturday.’

I looked at Paul, concerned. ‘I think not. Today feels like the right day to me. I noticed that Yvonne was not at the party.’

Securicor arrived on time, and soon we were at the bank, packing the gold bars and the diamonds into a steel safety deposit box. I sighed with relief, explaining to Paul, ‘I hardly slept last night, worrying about all that gold in the safe. I am sure we will have a burglary, and the insurance would not cover such a large amount.’

At the jewellery shop, I noticed Paul was working on three big diamonds from Amsterdam. 'Is the rest of the diamonds in the bank? I thought all the diamonds from Amsterdam were in the bank,' I asked.

'I must have these in the shop, preparing them for a customer,' Paul remarked.

I apologised. 'Sorry, you are right. Forgive me; I am not thinking straight. My nerves are playing up. 'Do you mind if I lock them in my safe tonight?' Picking up the three stones and putting them in my pocket.

Paul looked concerned. 'What is going on? Why are you so concerned? If you know something, please let me know. It is important to me; I love my job.'

I tried to reassure Paul. 'Please ignore me. I have the *heebie-jeebies* for no reason at all. It probably is nothing. I will see you in the morning.'

That night Tara and I made love to make up for the lost time when her parents were visiting. I kept thinking. My mind was not on Tara as it should be. 'Have I remembered everything? Did I lock up everything?' Eventually, we both fell asleep.

I woke up with a start the following morning. Tara was still fast asleep, and I went to the kitchen to make tea. Tara woke up sleepily, and I kissed her gently. 'You are the most beautiful woman in the world, and I love you the most in the world.'

Tara looked at me. 'I love you too. What is wrong? I could feel your worry all last night. Is it about us?'

'No, my darling, it is nothing like that,' I reassured her. 'I had this premonition that something will happen, and I don't know what it is.'

Tara pulled me towards her and hugged me. 'You poor baby. Remember, whatever happens, I am beside you, and we will sort it together.'

We were interrupted by the phone ringing. It was Chief Inspector Metcalfe. 'Sorry to wake you, but someone broke into your jewellery shop last night. You better come over straight away.'

I thanked the Chief Inspector and hung up the phone. Turning to Tara, I said. 'That was the police. Someone broke into the jewellery shop. We better get over there.'

Half an hour later, we arrived at the shop without having breakfast. Chief Inspector guided me into the shop. 'I am sorry, but they cleared out your safe.'

Paul's safe was standing ajar and empty. They did not touch Susan's safe. I told Chief Inspector Metcalfe, 'This is an inside job; somebody had keys. It does not look like they took much.'

Chief Inspector looked at me questioningly. 'How can you say that? The safe is empty.'

'Yesterday, I had a hunch that something like this might happen and moved the safe contents, taking five one-ounce gold bars to a safety deposit box in the bank. Your burglar is Mr Alexandra Morris, assisted by Miss Yvonne Richards; she works for me. I want them both arrested, even if they stole only a pin. Susan will give you their addresses.'

I continued, 'As a personal favour, could you investigate my entire staff? Some are related, and I don't want something like this to happen again.'

The police allowed us to enter the shop but not near the workshop as the forensic team was still gathering evidence. I asked Tara to make us tea and spoke to the rest of the staff. 'If I did not remove the contents from the safe to the bank, we would have all been without a job today. You all knew that Yvonne could not be trusted, but none of you thought it was necessary to tell me. Don't you want to work here? What is the problem?'

Susan replied, 'I am speaking for myself. I enjoy working here. Mr Morris convinced me that you would not stay here for long. You are only here to take as much money as possible and then disappear to South Africa. Then you employed Tara, and I started to doubt him but still did not know what to do. Follow you and lose my job when Mr Morris takes over, or say nothing and wait for Mr Morris to take over and continue working here.'

'The decision is yours. You can go home now. Then wait for the prison authorities to release Mr Morris. He can then steal some money somewhere to start a new jewellery shop. Still, I assure you, he won't steal from me and take over this shop,' I promised them.

Paul responded, 'Mr Morris promised me the same. I did not believe him or like working under him. I was glad when you removed the contents of the safe. If I wanted to follow him, I would have warned him that the safe was empty. What I did wrong was not report Yvonne to you. I thought she was up to something, but I was not sure. Mr Morris is her uncle, and he spreads many lies.'

'I have an idea that will allow you to decide on your own what you want to do, without putting you under any pressure. I want you both to go home and decide. You don't ever have to return. I will make up your

wages until the end of the week and post them to you. However, if you want to work here, come back tomorrow morning with your CV and a letter explaining why you want the job. In addition, I want all your background information and a statement allowing me to hire a Private Investigator to investigate your background. You will also have to make a statement to the police regarding Mr Morris and his intimidations. It is important because I have to trust you. We deal in valuable merchandise.'

Paul was about to protest, but I interrupted. 'That is the only way we can continue to work together. I have to trust you unequivocally and remember I put my fiancée in your care daily. I will not endanger her life in any way.'

Paul and Susan left somewhat meekly. I turned to Tara and asked, 'Was I too hard on them? I don't think either of them is responsible. I like them both, but they kept quiet about Yvonne. They should have told me.'

'I think you did the right thing. You have to trust your staff as you are not always here, and I don't want to play police person and watch them all day. You will have to change the safe key and lock-up arrangements. It is annoying to have the locks changed so frequently,' Tara responded.

‘That reminds me, I better phone the locksmith immediately.’

The locksmith agreed to change all the locks immediately, and the safe company would deliver a new safe today. We placed the new safe in the office area to store the gold bars and diamonds. The old safe would remain in the workshop, and the jeweller would use it to store items in the cleaning or repair process.

I told Tara, ‘You will have to be in charge of all keys from now on. If Paul and Susan return, they might not like the arrangement as they may feel more senior, but they will have to either accept it or leave. I will ask Mrs Brown to appoint you as a director of the company, giving you some authority.’

I called Mary to explain that I couldn’t help in the furniture store as I had to remain in the jewellery section. She already knew what had happened. It sounded like all of London knew.

She even informed me that the police had arrested Mr Morris and Yvonne and that Paul and Susan were helping them with their enquiries.

We did not have many customers. The nosey neighbours trying to find out what happened put them off. Even the manager of the restaurant came to visit.

The locksmith came and changed all the locks again. He laughed and remarked, 'I might as well come and work for you full-time.' I grinned. 'I hope this is the last time.'

I gave Tara one set of keys and kept one for myself. I had already given Susan and Paul's safe keys to Tara. 'I feel like a prison warden with all these keys,' she remarked.

The new safe arrived, another key for Tara, my beautiful prison warden.

That evening Chief Inspector Metcalfe visited us at the apartment. I explained to him what I had done to the staff.

He smiled. 'I think you did the right thing. They need a reprimand for not warning you.'

'Both of them have made a statement against Mr Morris. I feel that they are not guilty of theft. They are guilty of being weak and allowing Mr Morris to bully them.'

Chief Inspector continued. 'The girl Yvonne was also intimidated by Mr Morris, but she went further and made copies of the keys for Mr Morris. The court will probably give her a suspended sentence for that. Mr Morris will go to prison. We found the gold bars

you mentioned at his house. Mr King identified them for us.'

'I hope that this is now the end of that. I have made Tara a director and given her the responsibility of the keys,' I added.

Chief Inspector continued. 'How did you know that this burglary was going to happen?'

'I did not know, but Yvonne's aloofness and not being at the party must have registered in my subconscious mind. Sunday night, I woke up panicking about the many gold bars in Mr King's safe and realised I must move them immediately,' I replied.

'Well, you were lucky. How many gold bars are you talking about?' The Chief asked.

'Twelve one Kilo bars of pure gold worth thirty-five thousand pounds each, and about a hundred thousand pounds of diamonds.'

'No wonder you were worried about it. I would be as well. I hope you have taken precautions so that it never happens again. It is a big temptation for young staff members,' Chief Inspector Metcalfe warned.

I explained to the Chief that it was an accumulation of gold over a long period and that I only became aware of its value lately. 'I will now have it assayed and sold. We don't need such an amount of gold for repairs and making rings. The five one-ounce wafers they stole are more than enough stock. We will store all superfluous gold in my safe until we are ready to sell.'

We spent the rest of the evening wondering if our staff would turn up tomorrow. We felt punished for the staff's wrongdoings.

The following morning both Paul and Susan were waiting for us in front of the shop. Tara and I sighed with relief. I greeted them while Tara unlocked the front door. 'I am happy to see the two of you. Welcome back.'

Susan handed me her CV. 'I have made a statement with the police and would like to start again if you forgive me.'

'I never wanted you to leave. I only wanted you to realise how serious such an error of judgement could be.'

Paul handed me his CV and, in turn, apologised. 'I will never allow anyone to convince me to allow such a thing to happen again.'

Welcome back, and I am happy for us to start again. However, I must take some precautions until I am satisfied with your loyalty to the business. Yesterday I made Tara a company director, and she will be the key holder of the safe and doors. Otherwise, we will carry on as usual. You will notice that I had all the locks replaced again, and I had to buy a new safe to replace the one that now has duplicate keys.

Last night I spoke to Chief Inspector Metcalfe, and we both agreed not to take your error in judgement any further. The police will charge Yvonne. We feel that she will most likely receive a suspended sentence. Mr Morris will go to prison.

‘What did you do with gold bars in the past? To who did you sell them?’ I asked Paul.

Paul stated that he could not remember Mr Morris ever selling them.

‘Never mind, I will find out to who we should sell. Maybe the gold bars were another perk. It explains why Mr Morris was so intent on stealing them,’ I replied.

I phoned a bullion direct company, who agreed to buy them, providing I had them assayed first. They gave me the details of the assay office to contact.

I arranged with Securicor to collect the gold from the bank that afternoon at two. Paul and I would supervise the loading at the bank and accompany them to the assay office, where the gold would be tested and marked according to its purity and weight.

The delivery to the Assay office went smoothly, and they gave me a signed receipt of the gold, stating that it would be ready in one week for collection.

The gentleman at the Assay office enquired whether I intended to sell the gold, as they had a ready buyer who would pay the current gold price minus five per cent. 'We would handle the transaction for you and would not release the gold until the money is in your bank account.'

I agreed and gave him my bank details.

'That was easy. I wonder why Mr Morris did not do this before. He always claimed that it is complicated,' Paul remarked.

'The gold does not belong to the jewellery business. Mr Morris would have to sell without any trace, or the sale would be linked to him, which would be theft. He has been planning this for a long time. I explained that he would probably offer to buy the business and plan to pay for it with Peter's money.

We returned to the jeweller's shop and found Tara and Susan laughing at something. I was pleased that there was no animosity between them.

Chief Inspector Metcalfe arrived with a bag of articles found in Mr Morris's house, suspected to be stolen from the shop. I called Paul over to help identify the pieces. There were several diamonds, gold ring blanks, five one-ounce gold wafers and several keys.

Paul announced, 'I think that is all we are missing. Can we keep them as I am busy with most pieces?'

'Forensic have finished identifying the items. Mr Morris has pleaded guilty, so I can safely say you can continue your work,' the Inspector answered.

After Chief Inspector Metcalfe left, Paul selected a few items. 'This is what I am working on; the rest Tara can lock in her safe.'

That is a good idea, but do you not have a metal box to keep your work pieces separate for easy identification?'

Paul returned to his workshop with a small metal box and placed the items inside.

‘What we need now is to get you an assistant. If you know of someone, it would be a great help.’

Paul agreed to ask his friends and let me know.

That evening I asked Tara if there was any unhappiness among the staff. She assured me that Susan and Paul were happy, but they seemed nervous in her presence. ‘I think they are still happy to have their jobs and regret what happened.’

‘Well, if they show animosity towards you, let me know. It is best to sort out resentments immediately.’

The following day I spoke to Fred and Simon and explained what had happened in the jeweller shop. They seem shocked. ‘I beg of you that if anyone approaches you to assist them with something illegal aimed at the business, please let me know, even if they are blackmailing you about something personal. I will try my best to help. We must work together as a team.’

The jewellery and restoration business both ran smoothly for the next month. Even the payment for the gold bars from the Assay office went off uneventfully, leaving me with a fat bank balance in my private account.

Tara and I loved each other more and more each day. It was like a continuous honeymoon. Speaking of

which, I promised Tara we would go on a sea cruise for our honeymoon, and later I would take her to South Africa to show her the country.

Sarah and Tara remained inseparable, caught in a dizzying friendship that lit up the sky. They would emerge dressed to the nines for a night at the West End theatres. Tara's love for dressing up and hitting the town was contagious, imbued with a glimmering intensity each night.

CHAPTER EIGHT



Then, what I had been anticipating happened, a gentleman phoned and wanted to speak to Mr Jones. I accepted the call. He was looking for Peter, my brother. I explained to him what had happened and that I was now running the business.

He hesitated for a few moments and then asked. ‘Are you still in the market to buy diamonds? I mean uncut diamonds?’

I assured him that I was. He asked if he could come and see me the following morning. I agreed. ‘I need my jewellery staff member to help value the stones as I am still learning the diamond business. It would be helpful if we set a time.’

We agreed at 11 o’clock the following morning, and after I took his name, Mr Fowlie and his number, he rang off.

Then, I left for the jewellery store to see Paul. ‘Can you judge whether a diamond is genuine, particularly an uncut diamond? Do you need a machine of some sort?’ I asked him.

‘I can do a hardness test to identify if it is a diamond by scratching it with corundum. Corundum includes rubies and sapphires and is nine on the hardness scale. If the suspected diamond crystal can scratch corundum, there is a good chance it is a diamond. To be 100 per cent sure, it is best to use a diamond tester,’ Paul replied.

‘Can you buy a diamond tester today? We have an appointment to purchase some diamonds tomorrow at 11 AM.’

Paul got excited. ‘Give me a few moments. I will see if I can find one.’ He grabbed the phone and started dialling.’

A few moments later, Paul announced excitedly. ‘I found one, and they will show us how to work it.’

We drove immediately to a jewellery wholesaler and bought two diamond testers, one for the jewellery store and one for my use. We purchased many second-hand diamond rings, and it would be helpful to test them for authenticity.

Back in the jeweller shop, I asked Paul to be at the furniture store the following morning. ‘Bring some corundum and your tester so we can be sure. You will also have to advise me regarding the value of the stones.’

The wholesaler told us to photograph the stones to ensure they had not swapped them. You cannot trust these traders.

Fortunately, I had a decent digital camera.

The gentleman who made the appointment told me it was a similar package to the previous one.

I went to the bank and drew out fifty thousand pounds in cash. I thought that was the limit I would like to spend as Mr De Jong offered me one hundred thousand pounds for the last lot after the cutting and polishing.

After, I divided the money into packs of one thousand pounds with rubber bands. I placed them safely in my safe.

For amusement and practice, I asked Mary for second-hand rings she purchased that looked like diamonds and tested them on my machine. Two of them tested positive, but the rest were fake.

'What a lovely machine. I now have to learn how to measure the sizes of the diamonds. One of them that tested positive looked like a one-karat diamond. That is worth one thousand pounds. Indeed, we can pay the customers more than thirty pounds for such a ring,' I thought.

That evening I warned Tara that I might go to Amsterdam the following day and that she should take a taxi home as I might be late back.

Tara was concerned. 'I do not like these cloak-and-dagger deals.'

I tried to explain to her. 'It is for my safety that I am going to Amsterdam. I do not want these diamonds around for a minute more than necessary. You never know; they might not belong to this, Mr Fowlie. He said he comes from Belgium but sounds American to me.'

Tara warned, 'Please be careful. Remember, I love you.'

The following morning Paul and I readied ourselves for Mr Fowlie. I had even rigged up a camera to take photos of our visitors. Paul was to write in code what he thought the value of the package was in thousands, for instance, 50 for fifty thousand pounds.

At eleven o'clock, a gentleman with short brown hair and a boyish face introduced himself to me. I thought he was in his fifties. 'I am Dan Fowlie.'

He looked around the shop to see if it was safe, then he went to the entrance, called a second person,

and introduced him to me. ‘This is James Mthetwa, my partner. He is from the Congo.’ James was a distinguished-looking African in his late thirties.

I led them to my office and introduced them to Paul. Mr Mthetwa produced an envelope containing the uncut diamonds. It was the first time I saw uncut diamonds, and I was not impressed. They looked worthless to me. We spread them on A4 paper, and I photographed them. Paul tested them first with corundum and then with the diamond tester, confirming they were diamonds. He then studied the stones individually with his jeweller's eyepiece, wrote a hundred on paper, and slipped it to me discreetly.

‘What sort of money were you looking for?’ I enquired from Mr Mthetwa.

He replied that they wanted fifty thousand pounds.

‘I can offer you twenty thousand pounds in cash,’ I countered.

Mr Fowlie interrupted. ‘We cannot go below thirty thousand pounds.’

I accepted and took thirty thousand out of the safe, made them count it and signed a receipt for the money.

After they left, I called Mr De Jong in Amsterdam and confirmed that I was coming that afternoon. Before leaving, I promised Paul a large bonus for his help.

Without telling anybody, I booked my flight and went via the underground to Heathrow Airport. Leaving, Paul had to return to the jeweller's shop.

The second time, the journey to Mr De Jong's diamond wholesale business in Amsterdam was much more manageable. By 2 PM, I was in his office.

He accepted the diamonds gracefully and gave me a receipt, quoting fifteen thousand pounds for the cutting and polishing.

'I can't understand why these people bring the diamonds to me and not straight to you. They claim to be from Belgium,' I told Mr De Jong.

Mr De Jong explained. 'They likely know that we can immediately spot the stones' origin. For instance, your stones come from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Only registered diamond dealers are allowed to export diamonds after paying their taxes. Traders without ethics smuggled diamonds out of the country without paying taxes. Many factions buy diamonds for nothing from poor miners and try to smuggle them out of the country. Most diamond

dealers have agreed with the government of these diamond-producing countries to only purchase from registered exporters.

The smugglers would sell to an unsuspecting jewellery shop like yourself. Once it belongs to you, we are not obligated to report you to the government of origin. They have become second-hand and legal. We cannot prove that you have not paid taxes on second-hand diamonds. Many jewellers buy uncut diamonds from other dealers and ourselves to practice the cutting process but soon send them back when they discover the difficulties in cutting diamonds.'

I explained to Mr De Jong that I was willing to pay the taxes on these diamonds. 'Do you know how much it would be, and can you arrange the payment for me? I do not want to get involved with anything illegal. I am only trying to find my brother's killer, and I had to go down this path as it may be a possibility.'

Mr De Jong said it would be about ten-thousand pounds. 'Would you also be willing to give the names of the people who sold it to you?'

'No problem. It was a Mr Dan Fowlie and James Mthetwa. Could you arrange with the government to supply my name to legitimate sellers that I am in the market for uncut diamonds?'

‘Dan Fowlie is a known crook, and Mr James Mthetwa is a government official in charge of policing diamond smuggling in the Congo. I will let you know what fee to pay, but they will waive the fee for the smugglers' names. I will let you know.’

Mr De Jong said the cutting would take about one month and would call me when they were ready.

Soon I was on the plane back to Heathrow. I phoned Tara from Heathrow Airport to tell her I was safely back and advised her to take a taxi home—I would meet her there.

That evening I gave Tara a bottle of ‘Chanel No 5 perfume’, which I bought from the airport duty-free shop. Tara had never been to Amsterdam and enquired about everything. She was primarily interested in the canals and could not understand why I did not go on a boat cruise.

I promised her that when the diamonds were ready for collection, she could come with me and spend a day sightseeing on the canals.

The following day I decided to spend in the antique restoration business. The jewellery shop seemed to be running smoothly. I was particularly interested in the chiffonier I bought.

I looked for the dark-stained chiffonier and could not find it until Fred pointed it out to me. It was a beautiful natural rosewood with light oak colour inlays. It looked entirely different.

I asked Fred what he did. He replied, 'I cleaned the piece to remove dirt, debris, and grease with a fume-free oven cleaner in a dry, ventilated space. I covered the entire item with oven cleaner and waited 30 minutes before I cleaned the chiffonier.'

Fred continued, 'Then I brushed a layer of stripper on the furniture and let it sit for 15 minutes. Then I used a scrapping tool and scraped the finish off the piece. Repeating as necessary, I used an after-wash to clean the chiffonier.'

I exclaimed in amazement. 'It looks like a new piece of furniture.'

Fred grinned. 'The real work only begins now. I have to repair the inlays in many places, and I have to restore the wood. There are many cracks; you can see where I joined the two sections. It will be a lovely piece of furniture when finished.'

'That is why I bought it. I intend to use it as a drinks cabinet,' I told Fred.

I asked Fred if he knew what had happened at the jewellery shop. He nodded his head but did not look me in the eye. 'It is a sad day when you cannot trust your staff.'

I agreed. 'I hope that is the end of it. Suppose you know of any other staff member influenced by crooks and blackmailers. Please let me know. It is challenging to run a business with untrustworthy staff.'

Simon was busy upholstering a grandfather chair. I admired a group of glass animals waiting to cool down. 'You certainly have a talent for making glass animals. Your work is far superior to Shaun's, and you have only been working with glass briefly.'

'I think you should further your studies in glasswork. If you are interested, I would be happy to pay for any glasswork course that may interest you. You have a talent for it and should develop it further than Sue can teach you.'

Simon responded, 'Thank you. I like working with glass and would like to take up your offer. I will find out what courses are available tonight and let you know in the morning.'

The following morning Simon was waiting for me. 'The London Glass Academy offers evening glass-blowing classes, including glass jewellery making. I

want to enrol. It could mean I could make items other than animals for the jewellery shop.'

I nodded. 'If you feel it would help you learn more about glasswork, I am all for it. Go ahead and enrol; we will pay for the course.'

I liked Simon and did not feel that he was involved in any underhandedness against Peter. He seemed a nice, quiet person, totally engrossed in his work.

The jewellery business was running smoothly. Paul completed the fitting and selling of the diamonds from Amsterdam before I was due to collect the next batch.

Mr De Jong called me when they had completed the cutting process. He also informed me that the democratic government of the Congo had waived the duty on the diamonds. Tara had to take the day off work as I promised to take her to Amsterdam when I had to collect the next batch of diamonds.

Tara was so excited. She was up at 5 o'clock that morning getting ready for the trip. I assured her that she looked beautiful, but she insisted on checking that every makeup line was perfect.

I thought, *'I bet the underground train trip to Heathrow Airport will spoil Tara's hard work.'*

At Heathrow Airport, Tara was about to repair her makeup. I suggested that she wait till we arrived at Amsterdam railway station. 'You still look lovely,' I argued.

'Why are we going to Amsterdam railway station if we are flying?' Tara enquired.

'The airport is outside Amsterdam, and we must catch a train to Amsterdam centre,' I explained to her.

On leaving Amsterdam station on the way to the sightseeing boats, Tara spotted the picture postcard buildings on the opposite side of the canal. They painted each building in a different colour. 'Isn't this lovely? Look at the bicycles. There is a lady with two children on a bicycle. It is amazing how she copes,' Tara exclaimed.

We took a boat tour all along the canals. Tara fell in love with the canal system, surrounded by narrow houses with gabled facades.

We had to stop in the Museum District and visit the Rijksmuseum. One of the world's most famous museums is the fame of the masterpieces in its collection. Like *The Milkmaid* by Vermeer, *Self-portrait* by Van Gogh, *The Merry Family* by Jan Steen and *Rembrandt's Night Watch*.

After that, the Van Gogh Museum and modern art at the Stedelijk.

Tara had promised Sarah the grand art tour, and her camera was working overtime.

We bought a beautiful watercolour painting of a bridge over the canal with bicycles from a street vendor.

Later we stopped for lunch at a restaurant that only served pancakes, filled with whatever you liked. We both went for a curry filling and an Amstel beer each.

After lunch, we went to Mr De Jong's diamond wholesalers. He greeted me warmly and was delighted to meet Tara. I showed him Tara's engagement ring, declaring that it was one of the stones he had cut.

'It is suited only for a beautiful woman like you,' Mr De Jong complimented.

I gave Mr De Jong a banker's draft for fifteen thousand pounds as agreed. He accepted it with thanks but remarked, 'I am happy to take the ten diamonds off your hands for a hundred thousand pounds if you want to sell them.'

I hesitated but decided to sell as Tara was with me. I might be looking for trouble carrying so many

diamonds in my pocket. It could attract all sorts of villains.

Mr De Jong transferred the money immediately to my bank account. I think he was impressed with Tara. He insisted on taking her on tour through his business and showed her the cutters at work.

After that, we left for our return trip to London. 'It was a wonderful day. I love Amsterdam and can't wait to tell Sarah,' Tara announced.

Tara had called Sarah from Heathrow and was waiting for us on our arrival home. Tara was so excited that I could not get a word in as she described Amsterdam to Sarah.

They watched Tara's photos on the laptop. Sarah was delighted and demanded copies of each image.

'When we go to Dublin, you must take these photos. The folks back home will love them,' Sarah commented.

As I listened to the girls, my heart ached as I thought of my mother. She had grown up with Irish immigrant parents and had always dreamed of returning to Ireland but never did. A pang of guilt shot through me, thinking of how overjoyed she would be

if she knew I was going—let alone marrying an Irish girl.

Sometimes, Tara's gestures reminded me so much of my mom—how her eyes sparkled when she got excited or shook her hands in anticipation when telling a story. Life seemed to have that same wonderment to both my mother and Tara.

CHAPTER NINE



Tara went to work by taxi the following morning as I had to attend to some office work. I allowed her to leave before I ventured downstairs. On my way to the stairs leading down to the street door, I heard the letterbox flap sound. I thought the postman had shoved a large brown envelope through the letterbox.

But it could not have been the postman as no address was on the envelope. Someone only printed my name on the front. I was intrigued but waited to open the envelope until I entered my office.

Inside was a large piece of paper with what looked like newspaper cut-out letters pasted on it, reading.

‘WE HAVE TARA. YOU HAVE TO PAY ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND POUNDS OR THE DIAMONDS FOR HER SAFE RETURN. INSTRUCTIONS WILL FOLLOW.’

My heart skipped a beat. I immediately called the jewellery shop. Susan had opened as Tara failed to

show up. Fortunately, she still had the keys from the previous day.

Now I was starting to panic. It was far beyond my capabilities. I did not know what to do.

I phoned Chief Inspector Metcalfe and told him what had happened. He promised to come over straight away.

While waiting for the Chief Inspector, I called Sarah to keep her posted. She was shocked but also promised to come over to help find Tara. I said, 'I am happy to pay as long as she is safe. Perhaps the kidnappers thought she had the diamonds we were supposed to collect the previous day.'

Chief Inspector Metcalfe arrived. His first remark was, 'These kidnappers are not professional. They forgot to add, - do not contact the police.'

I explained to Chief Inspector Metcalfe the uncut diamonds I bought from Mr Fowlie and Mr Mthetwa. 'They smuggled the diamonds out of the Congo without paying the government taxes, but because I reported them, the government has waived the taxes. It could be them behind the abduction.'

Frustrated, I asked him, 'What do we do now?'

Looking concerned, he replied, lighting a cigarette. 'You have accumulated many enemies during your short stay in this country. My advice is, we wait. They will make another mistake. Then we will be ready for them.'

At that moment, Sarah walked in. 'Don't panic; Tara is safe. I think I know where they are holding her.'

'How could you possibly know so soon?' I stammered.

'I had a phone call from an interested party who knows that Tara and I are related. She is scared that this thing will blow up in their faces and result in murder. She has asked me not to mention her name.'

Sarah continued, addressing Chief Inspector Metcalfe. 'Could you please summon some backup so that we can rescue Tara? She must be out of her mind with fear. Then we can round up the kidnappers.'

Chief Inspector Metcalfe spoke on his phone for a minute, then asked us to join him in his car. 'The cavalry is on the way. Miss Willes, show us the way.'

Sarah gave him the address details. It sounded like Fred's address to me.

‘Is that not where Fred lives?’ I asked.

Sarah nodded. ‘I am afraid your entire staff is involved.’

I noticed a police car, with its light flashing behind us, following. Soon we arrived at Fred’s home. It was a terrace house in need of some attention.

We all got out, and Chief Inspector Metcalfe instructed the two uniformed policemen. As they approached the front door, Mrs Smith opened it and showed us an outside room in the back garden. ‘The girl is in there,’ she announced.

The abductors had locked the door, but the policemen opened it with a battering ram. Inside, Tara was tied up with a cover over her face and looked like a stuffed chicken.

I ran to her and uncovered her face, ‘Are you alright, my darling? I am so sorry that this happened to you,’ and kissed her all over.

Tara gasping for air, pleaded. ‘Please untie me so that I can recover my circulation. I think I got a cramp.’

With shaking hands of relief, I hurriedly untied Tara and helped her to her feet. She could hardly stand, clinging to me for dear life.

She urgently needed the toilet, and I asked Sarah and Mrs Smith to take her.

More police people arrived. Chief Inspector announced with a smile on his face. 'Ah, my forensic team.' They proceeded to tape off the room and began searching for evidence.

Chief Inspector Metcalfe allowed Tara, Sarah and me to go home by taxi. He insisted that we entered the flat without the staff noticing and added, 'We don't want the staff alerting anyone. I will call later to collect your statements and keep you posted on developments.'

Tara was still in shock. Sarah and I tried to comfort her. She could not understand why they wanted to kidnap her. 'I have always tried my best to be kind to them,' she stated repeatedly.

A police car arrived in front of the shop. Two policemen entered the shop and emerged with Fred and Mary. They bundled them into the car and drove away. The police were taking them in for questioning.

I explained to Tara, 'There is no one watching the business. I better go downstairs to secure everything.'

I went downstairs using the private entrance via the upstairs showroom. Downstairs, it was eerie and quiet. Fortunately, the police had locked the front doors of the shop.

However, I could hear a faint sound from the workshop and investigated. I found Simon busy upholstering a chair.

'What has happened? Where is everyone?' I asked Simon.

'The police have taken them away for questioning. They seem to be involved in attempting to kidnap Tara. Why, I don't know; they hardly knew her. To me, she was lovely, and you have always shown kindness to us,' he replied.

Simon continued. 'What I do know is that they disliked Peter. Perhaps because he was gay, it did not bother me. I always thought you live and let live. He never interfered with my work or with me. Besides, I did not know much about him; we mixed in different circles.'

'I think we are going to be short-staffed for a while. You don't know anyone who could replace Fred?'

‘Not off hand, but I will make some enquiries. Are you firing Fred?’

‘Fred and everyone that is involved in kidnapping Tara. I am sick and tired of two-faced people.’

I returned to Tara and Sarah upstairs. Tara returned to her usual self and laughed about something Sarah said.

I felt relieved. I forgot that Tara was as hard as nails underneath her porcelain-like appearance. I took her in my arms and declared, ‘I think between the two businesses, we will operate with a reduced staff, only the two of us.’

Chief Inspector Metcalfe arrived and handed me the keys to the jewellery shop and the furniture store. ‘I had to lock up your business as I have arrested your entire staff, except for a lad called Simon in the workshop. At this stage, I don’t think he was involved.’

‘I am fortunate to have such a loyal and dedicated team working for me. Perhaps it is an excellent time to start with an entirely new team,’ I beamed jokingly.

‘I seem to have in my employ London’s greatest thieves, kidnappers and probably murderers. It is an excellent track record. You could arrest me for harbouring criminals,’ I laughed.

Tara, now fully alert, panicked. ‘You mean the Jeweller shop is locked, and there is no staff? Stephen, you better take me to the shop immediately. What about my customers?’ She immediately started getting ready, checking her makeup.’

Chief Inspector Metcalfe laughed and exclaimed. ‘You see, Stephen. You can stop complaining and look on the bright side. You have at least one dedicated staff member.’

I turned to Sarah. ‘How would you like to hold the fort in the furniture division while we find replacement staff?’

Sarah accepted with excitement. ‘I will be happy to help. Please show me what to do. I might even know someone who would like to work full time.’

Even Chief Inspector Metcalfe offered to help. ‘You take Tara to open the Jeweller shop while I help Sarah with the furniture till you return.’

On the way to the jeweller shop, Tara beamed. ‘I think I am going to like running the show. A new beginning with new staff.’

‘You can create the jewellery shop to your liking and bring in your ideas, making it your pride and joy. I suggest you use Mrs Brown, our accountant, to make

your bookkeeping system foolproof. I will leave the rest to you while I search for staff to run the furniture restoration business,' I responded.

Tara frowned. 'I will also need staff, especially in the jewellery-making department.'

'You could try the London Jewellery Academy. They must have some students looking for work,' I remarked.

Tara's face lit up. Finding a jeweller had been a worry for her. 'What a good idea. I bet the Academy is bursting with talented students waiting to express their creativity in the real world.'

I added, 'Mrs Brown might be able to help with someone good at administrative work.'

We arrived at the shop, greeted by customers trying to enter. First, I helped Tara with the waiting customers. Then, as soon as we dealt with the backlog of customers, I left but promised Tara I would send Sarah to help her when I arrived at the furniture store.

Chief Inspector Metcalfe was glad to see me at the furniture store and announced, 'I have to leave; my office is looking for me. I will keep you up to date regarding the staff we arrested. The one thing that still

puzzles me is your brother's murder. We have no fresh leads.'

I explained Tara's situation and asked Sarah to help, and gave her money for a taxi. 'She is all alone in the jeweller shop. If you could help until she finds someone.'

Hoping that Tara would now be able to cope, I turned my attention to finding someone to help me. First, I called Mrs Brown and asked if she knew someone to run the furniture restoration business. I then placed a vacancy advert in the local newspaper for both the woodworking and the managerial vacancy.

I hardly had time to visit the workshop to greet Simon, my only full-time employee. Today, there seemed to be a steady string of customers not giving me a chance to think straight. I should have phoned Tony, he might have known someone who could help, but I did not get the opportunity. By the time the customer demand fell, it was closing time.

I waited for Tara and Sarah to arrive before closing. They were jubilant and, contrary to me, had a great day. Tara explained the fantastic idea of contacting the London Jewellery Academy. 'I have four girls interested in full-time work as our jeweller, and several students want me to display their work or

are happy to help part-time. The four applicants are coming tomorrow for their interviews. The head teacher at the Academy has recommended them.'

Sarah was laughing. 'I even sold some jewellery. The customers left happy, but I don't think they knew what they were buying. To me, every red stone is a Ruby and blue a Sapphire. We all know Diamonds look like glass. Only afterwards Tara explained that some diamond look-alikes are cubic zirconia. I was wondering why they were so cheap. Anyway, the customers were happy.'

Tara exclaimed. 'It was so nice working today in a happy atmosphere. I should have known something was wrong with the old staff. Nobody ever smiled. Sarah has agreed to help at work until I find a replacement for Susan.'

That evening I contacted Tony. He immediately knew a lady named June Rhyder, who had sales experience and was looking for work. I asked him to arrange an interview for the following day.

The following day with Sarah's help, Tara set off to work to conduct her interviews. She was somewhat nervous, but I pointed out that the applicants would be equally anxious. As this was their first interview, the best approach would be to not commit to anything but say, 'We will let you know.'

I also had an interview that morning and thought that I should also heed the advice I gave to Tara.

June Rhyder, an attractive-looking blonde lady in her early thirties, was waiting for me when I went downstairs to open the furniture store. She greeted me with a warm and friendly smile. Although she was older than me, I immediately liked her friendly attitude.

She offered to make us tea before the interview, which relaxed the entire process. June had worked in a furniture store and understood the basics but had no experience buying jewellery or restoration.

She understood computers, but I thought it would be wise for Tracy to spend a day with her to help her understand the stock control software.

June was happy with the salary I paid Mary and agreed to start on a three-month trial straight away. She handed me her CV and references from previous employers. I noticed that she was engaged to be married and that her fiancé worked with Tony at Guys Hospital.

I immediately contacted Mrs Brown to enquire if Tracy could spend the day showing June the workings of the stock control software.

Tracy was available and came over straight away, giving me time to try and find a woodworker.

Again Tony came in helpful. His dad was in the building trade and promised to find me a replacement for the furniture restoration. He had someone in mind whom he thought was suitable.

With Tracy busy showing the stock control software to June, I went to the workshop to see Simon. To my surprise, the workshop was dead quiet. Not a soul in sight. I wondered why Simon was not at work. I thought to myself, *'Have I lost another staff member? I don't seem to be good at keeping reliable staff. If Simon has gone, I have lost all of Peter's team. That must be some record.'* I felt I was getting the hang of the business, but I would never succeed without staff. I hoped that Tara was doing a bit better.

I returned to my office to find Chief Inspector Metcalfe chatting with June.

I interrupted their conversation. 'Good morning, chief. What brings you out to see us so early in the morning?'

He responded, giving June a big smile. 'I was telling June that your Simon is in the hospital. He received a severe beating, and they stabbed him several times. If you want to see him, he is in the Royal Free Hospital

as an emergency case. His attack directly results from his refusal to get involved in Tara's abduction.'

'Oh, my goodness. I better get over to the hospital straight away.' To June, I said, 'Please excuse me. If anyone wants to buy something and you are unsure what to do, take their details, and I will contact them on my return.'

Chief Inspector Metcalfe offered to take me. 'I need to get his statement. Last night he did not make much sense.'

We found Simon tugged up in bed with the curtains drawn around him. The ward sister allowed us five minutes but kept glaring at us. She warned, 'If you upset Mr Ward in any way, it will end your visit. He has been injured severely and needs rest.'

Simon's eyes were closed, but they flickered open as I entered. He immediately started mumbling how sorry he was not turning up for work.

I explained to him that resting and improving were more critical. I turned to the sister. 'Could Mr Ward have a private room with a TV and a telephone? I will pay any cost involved.' I asked Chief Inspector Metcalfe, 'Is it possible to post a constable at his door? I would not want him attacked here in the hospital.'

I turned to Simon. 'The only priority for you now is to get better. There is no hurry, everything can wait, and you are on full pay as long as it takes. Now, if you feel up to it, tell the Chief what happened, and I will come and see you this evening.'

With the doctor's approval, the sister helped me arrange a room in the hospital's private wing. After I told him what had happened, he thought it was the right thing to do.

Returning to Simon's bedside, I found that the Inspector's five minutes were up, and the sister demanded we leave. I promised Simon that I would visit him that evening.

On the way back, Chief Inspector Metcalfe filled me in on the details as he got them from Simon. 'To my amazement, he told me that Mary was behind the plot to blackmail me for the value of the diamond. She told them I would be too scared to do anything about the kidnap as it was illegal diamonds; therefore, I would pay up immediately.'

'Simon refused to participate in their scheme, and Mary instructed her team to beat him. Mary, Graham, and Mr Morris are related; Mary was the brains behind all the crimes. It seems a nasty gang of gay chaps manipulated your brother with Mary as their secret leader.'

I took a deep breath and was sure my mouth remained open in disbelief. 'It is hard to swallow. Mary always put herself forward as the innocent dogooder. She certainly had me fooled.'

However, Mary's involvement was speculation, and the police had no proof.

At the shop, a gentleman was waiting for me. 'A pleasure meeting you. My name is George Young; Mr Wilson sent me. I believe you have a vacancy for a furniture restorer.'

I made my excuses to Chief Inspector Metcalfe and greeted Mr Young. 'Come, I will show you our work here, and you can judge if it suits your capabilities.'

I took George to the workshop and showed him my chiffonier. 'We restore from the finest antiques to everyday furniture for resale and on behalf of customers.'

George smiled. 'I have been restoring furniture most of my life and do wood carving as a hobby. Currently, I work on a building site as a joiner. Finding full-time work in furniture restoration is hard to come by. I am originally from Jamaica, where repairing old furniture is expected.'

We discussed his salary. He was happy to work for the same wage I paid Fred and could start the following day. We agreed on a three-month trial, and that was that. I silently hoped that I had done the right thing and that he would be a loyal employee.

I started to take down his particulars, but he gave me his CV and passport copy, showing he had permission to work and remain in the UK indefinitely.

George seemed friendly enough; according to his CV, he was married with three children. Still, I was nervous about my choice; my staff management seemed somewhat of a disaster. I hoped that Tara had also managed to fill her vacancies at the jewellers.

I decided to see how June and Tracy got on with the computer software. As I approached, I could hear laughter, and I immediately relaxed, knowing that the two of them got along fine.

June beamed. 'I had my first sale this morning. Tracy showed me how to handle the transaction. In addition, a customer came to sell her ring because Tracy did not know how to calculate the price. I told them to return this afternoon.'

I complimented June. 'You did well on your first day. I will show you the buying process; it is easy. You will pick it up straight away.'

June proved extremely bright, picking up the buying process after I showed her by serving her customer who returned from her visit earlier that day. I explained to her how we intended to control the inventory of second-hand gold for everyone's protection. 'Because the value of gold is so high, we had severe theft of gold in the past. It is in your interest to ensure that no gold leaves your office without a signature or proof of delivery. Please let me know if you think of any additional precautions we can implement, and we will introduce them.'

Again Tara and Sarah arrived from work in a jubilant mood. 'We had a super fun day with loads of sales, and the four girls that came for their interviews were brilliant. We tested all of them with real customers sizing their rings and bracelets. We chose purely based on personality as they were all equally professional in their work,' Tara explained.

Tara continued. 'I phoned the girl we selected. Her name is Louise Blake, and she is starting tomorrow. I have also offered the sales and bookkeeping vacancy to one of the remaining three. Her name is Wendy Brown, and she is also starting tomorrow. I thought she would make a good all-rounder. She can even help Louise if we get busy.'

I remarked, hugging Tara. 'You have been busy. I am glad you have your staff. You can now mould them precisely into the team you want.'

'We have to go to the hospital tonight. They beat Simon up for not wanting to be part of your abduction. Sarah, you can come with us if you like.'

Sarah declined, and Tara and I left to visit Simon at the hospital. We found his girlfriend, his mother and his father beside his bed. Simon was now fully alert, and we listened to his version of what had happened. We were all surprised at Mary's involvement.

'To think that so much evil hid behind such an innocent-looking face,' Simon's father remarked.

I assured Simon that his job was safe, waiting for him when he felt better, and he would be on full pay while recovering.

He thanked me for the private room with the TV and telephone. 'At least I am not cut off from the world. The Doctor said I could most likely return home this weekend. If that happens, I will be back at work on Monday.'

I told him to take his time and make a full recovery.

Tara smiled, showing her perfect teeth and transforming her face into pure goodness. She thanked Simon for not being involved in her abduction, which made him smile. 'I could never get involved in abducting a beautiful girl like you. Besides, you and Stephen have only shown kindness to the staff and me.'

We left Simon to be with his family and returned home. We ordered takeaway and decided on an early night as we both had new staff starting in the morning.

The following morning George arrived with a great big box of tools. He insisted on using his tools. 'I am so used to them; it makes it easier for me. Show me to my workbench, and I will get on with it.'

I showed George his workplace and all the items that required repairing. 'The chiffonier belongs to me, so there is no urgency. You can attend to it when you have time.'

I introduced George to Sue Kemp, our part-timer who had come to assist in Simon's absence.

I left George to finish his work and returned to the showroom to see if June needed help.

'June seems to manage satisfactorily. She had even purchased a diamond ring from one of our regular

customers,’ I commented. ‘The lady who sold you the diamond ring must have been engaged a hundred times. Every week she is here with another diamond ring for sale.’

June laughed. ‘She is not that beautiful; she must have stolen them.’

‘I hope not. It would mean the police would come to confiscate the stolen ring. In case, we better hang on to it for a few weeks.’

I was dying to go to the jewellery shop to meet the new staff. I remarked to June, ‘I have decided we need someone to help you, especially with me having to be at the jeweller shop occasionally. If anyone calls in regarding the advert for the vacancy, please arrange for them to come for an interview this afternoon. I will see that I am here.’

At the jeweller shop, a laughing Sarah met me. ‘Do you want to buy a diamond ring, sir? We have plenty in stock. Fake or real.’

Grinning back at her, I replied, ‘Be serious; you are at work.’

Tara rescued me. ‘Forgive our sales lady. She is an unmarried convict artist and will return to prison soon unless she finds a husband to control her.’

We all laughed at that, and Tara continued. 'Come, let me introduce you to the rest of the team.'

First was Wendy Blake, 24 years old, slim, with curly brown hair. She was well dressed and looked the part of a saleslady. 'Wendy is also an accomplished jeweller and will help Louise when it is quiet in the showroom,' Tara added.

Next was Louise Blake, 30 years old, slim, with long black hair. She was our jeweller and looked busy, soldering two pieces of silver together. Tara showed me a few pieces of jewellery that Louis had created, and I had to agree that the work looked professional.

Tara informed me that Sarah would be helping till the end of the week. I asked Tara if she needed Tracy from the accountant's office to show Wendy the computer software. Still, Tara declared, 'I do not think it would be necessary. Wendy is a whizz kid on the computer and has already worked out Tracy's programs. She has worked in a jeweller's shop before.'

'Well, you seem to have everything under control. If you have any problems, please get in touch with me immediately. I will visit your shop daily to show my face and see if you are coping,' I concluded, preparing to leave.

Tara interrupted, 'You do not have to come every day. I am sure we can cope.'

I smiled and touched her hand. 'I am also sure you can cope, but that is not why I want to visit every day. We have several enemies, and your safety is important to me.'

At the furniture store, June informed me that two women had phoned and were coming for an interview.

I informed June that she would have to interview the girls and select the one she thought was best suited while I minded the store.

She tried to object, but I pointed out that she had to work with the girl.

I made my excuses so that I could see how George was coming along. 'Please call me when these girls arrive.'

George was a talented woodworker. I was amazed at his speed in repairing furniture. He had already caught up with the backlog left by Fred. His work was excellent; you could not see the repairs. Everything looked brand new. In addition, he was friendly and did not mind telling me what he had done. He also listed each repaired piece, the time it took him and

the repair cost. 'This will be useful for June to calculate the item's selling price,' I remarked.

I could not wait to see the finished result of my chiffonier and hoped it would be to the same standard as his other work. George was a far more pleasant person to have as staff than Fred. His friendliness made all the difference.

I explained to Sue, the part-timer, that Simon was recovering well and had promised to return to work on Monday, but I had doubts that it would be so soon.

June called, 'The interviewees have arrived.' I returned to the showroom and attended to the customers while June interviewed the applicants.

There were two applicants, and June chose Jane Elliot, with brown hair in her early twenties.

June, looking smug, informed me she was starting tomorrow. 'The reason why I chose Jane was that she had a friendly personality and loved people. Here is her CV and application letter.'

I studied her CV. 'She went to a grammar school and had good school results. I think she will be a good saleslady.'

Monday morning, Simon arrived at work with a slight limp and his left arm in a sling. I told him to stick to the light duties and asked Sue if she could stay a little longer until he was back on his feet.

With her help, I felt relieved we had our full staff quota. We were up and running again in the jewellery shop and furniture restoration business.

CHAPTER TEN



For the next few months, Tara and I concentrated on staff training and moulding the business to our liking. Besides Mary as a suspect, the police had made no further progress regarding Peter's murder.

For entertainment, we still had the frequent, fun night out with Tony and Sarah.

One night at a pub, I suddenly felt a stinging sensation in my right upper arm while getting a round in at the bar. The barman pointed out. 'You are bleeding heavily. I better call the ambulance. I think someone stabbed you.'

I could feel my legs shaking and found it difficult to stand. The next thing I knew, Tony was beside me, trying to steady me. He shouted at the barman, 'Have you phoned for an ambulance? You better call the police as well. It is a bullet wound.'

Tara, in a panic, called Chief Inspector Metcalfe. 'Please come urgently. Someone has shot Stephen.' She informed him of her location.

The barman closed the front doors, moved swiftly to the band microphone, and announced that nobody left the pub until the police arrived, as there had been a shooting. It created even more panic. Customers were trying to force themselves out of the pub, stampeding the front door. Fortunately, the police and the ambulance arrive simultaneously, instantly containing the crowd.

All this time, Tony was nursing Stephen. He managed to stop the blood flow using some bandages he found in the pub's first aid kit.

Tony handed me over to the ambulance paramedics, explaining what he had done and ending. 'Fortunately, it is only a flesh wound, but a bullet caused it.'

Chief Inspector Metcalfe arrived on the scene, and within minutes he restored order in the pub and announced, 'Please, everyone, stay calm. Someone got shot, and this is a crime scene. Nobody leaves without giving their statement to one of my officers.'

He had his forensic team searching for the bullet in the direction where Tony indicated he thought it could be.

Tara was in a state of panic and insisted on accompanying me in the ambulance. The ambulance

took me to the accident and emergency department of the Royal Free Hospital, where they stitched up my wound and announced me well. However, they decided that I remain overnight for observation.

Tara insisted on a private room where I could recover in peace. She remained with me until I fell asleep.

The following morning, I woke up confused, not knowing where I was. Slowly the fog in my mind cleared, and recollection returned. Somebody shot me, and here I was, lying in a hospital. I inherited my brother's life, business, money, and enemies, which nearly cost me my life. My arm hurt like hell. I rang the nurse and asked for paracetamol.

Breakfast was an ordeal. Being shot in my right arm, I struggled to feed myself with my left hand, which I found difficult as I was right-handed. Eventually, the nurse stepped in to help me, and we managed between us.

The doctor came to inspect my arm and declared me fit to go home. Soon afterwards, Tara arrived, full of apologies for being late but ready to take me home.

She had to open both shops and explain what happened to the staff, and then Chief Inspector

Metcalf turned up. 'He is waiting for us at the furniture shop.'

I arrived at the furniture store, somewhat like a celebrity. All the staff was waiting and concerned about my health.

Chief Inspector Metcalfe brought the staff back to order. 'This is an official enquiry, and I need to take Stephen and Tara's statement. So please get back to your work.'

He turned to me. 'Stephen, please give me a detailed account of what happened at the pub. By the way, we found the bullet; it is a .38 calibre.'

'There is nothing much to tell,' I began to say. 'I was standing at the crowded bar counter, being pushed from side to side, trying to buy a round of drinks. Suddenly I felt a sharp sting in my right upper arm. The next I knew, Tony was beside me, holding me steady as I felt like fainting. The rest is history.'

Chief Inspector Metcalfe reasoned. 'That means you were standing with your back to the shooter. I wonder how he managed to hit you in such a crowd. He might not have been aiming at you if we assumed he was standing by the doors to make a fast getaway. I certainly do not think it is the correct setting for a hitman. More likely, an angered housewife was taking

a potshot at her husband. But why did nobody hear the shot? Suggesting the gunman used a silencer. That points to a professional.'

I added, 'I think I recognised a face in the crowd by the door. There was an African man that reminded me of Mr James Mthetwa. The Congolese man with Mr Fowlie when he offered me the uncut diamonds. I am not positive. It might be by association, being the only African in the pub.'

Chief Inspector Metcalfe stroked his chin. 'I will put the word out to try and find this man and question him, but if you can't positively identify him, there is not much I can do.'

With an angry look, Tara said to Chief Inspector Metcalfe, 'There is someone out there who dislikes the Jones family. First, they killed Peter. Then I was kidnapped, and now, an attempt on Stephen's life. Never mind all the attempted theft cases. It must be the same person involved in all these previous attempts. We can't live in fear while these people roam the streets. We need some action now.'

I tried to console Tara. 'It is fine to suspect someone, but the police need evidence to convict them in court. Until then, we have to be careful. Perhaps we should lay a trap for them.'

Chief Inspector Metcalfe looked alarmed. ‘Laying a trap for them is not being careful. I strongly advise against such actions. I know we move slowly, but I promise I will do my best to get to the bottom of all these crimes.’

We gave our statements to a constable, and I excused myself as the wound hurt. I had to lie down.

Tara helped me upstairs and made me comfortable on our bed. Concerned, she asked, ‘Are you okay, or should I call the doctor?’

Laughing, I replied, ‘Naturally, I am okay. It is only a ploy to get you alone in the bedroom. I missed you. You would make a lovely nurse.’

Tara smiled. ‘You are unwell; now behave yourself. Besides, I must take care of the business while you slink off and sleep all day.’

Tara left me paracetamol tablets with a glass of water and returned to the jewellery shop.

I fell asleep and woke up to the noise of pots clattering in the kitchen. Tara had returned to prepare me something to eat for lunch.

After lunch, she left to take care of her shop. I felt a bit better and went downstairs, but everything was

under control. June demanded that I return to bed. 'You are a nuisance on the shop floor with your arm in a sling. Go and rest until you are well. I promise you we can cope.'

I reluctantly went upstairs, got into bed, and slept until Tara returned from work. That evening Sarah and Tony came to visit and cheered me up considerably. I had a restless night thinking about Peter's murder and all the theft attempts. The only conclusion I could make from what happened was that Peter was the link to all these incidents. The way to unravel what had happened was to go back through Peter's life and see with who and what he was involved.

The following morning, I had less pain. I decided to go to work, even if only to start investigating Peter's background.

I asked Simon to join me in my office for a cup of tea if he was not too busy, as I wanted a word with him.

I started the conversation. 'You seem to have recovered well from your beating. Any clue who was behind the assault?'

Simon shook his head. 'I have suspicions, but I better keep that to myself.'

I pressed, 'Now, I think the same people shot me, and I want to get to the bottom of these attacks. I think it all originated from my brother, Peter. While he lived in South Africa, he was such a straight-lace person that butter would not melt in his mouth. His behaviour here in England seems such a contrast to his early life. You are the only person I know who knew him before I arrived. Therefore I would appreciate it if you could give me some idea of what he was up to until somebody killed him. Even if it was only hearsay.'

'As I am not involved in the gay community, everything I say is gossip. From what I hear, Peter arrived in England and visited a gay bar, where he met Mr Morris. They fell in love. Mr Morris, the crook he is, discovered that Peter had some money. He immediately convinced Peter to buy smuggled diamonds from his friends in Belgium to make money. Peter made a lot of money buying illegal rough diamonds, then had them cut and polished and sold at a huge profit. Mr Morris then convinced him to start a jewellery shop as a cover to trade in more uncut diamonds. At first, Peter was reluctant as he knew nothing about jewellery. Still, Mr Morris said he would run the business for him. Peter gave in to Mr Morris and started the jewellery shop.'

Simon continued, 'Peter's first love was furniture. He thought buying auction furniture and restoring it

for resale would be profitable. He discussed his idea with Mr Morris, who offered to find him the premises and the staff. All the staff Mr Morris recommended was gay except me, who Peter found via Sarah. Peter now found himself surrounded by gay staff. He must have felt like a kid in a candy store. First, he had an affair with Shaun, then Graham. I think even Mary was trying to get her hooks into him. It ended with Peter having a three-way relationship with Mr Morris, Graham and Shaun. I don't know if there was any closeness with Mary, but it was obvious that she was in love with him. She followed him around like a puppy. I decided to keep a safe distance from them as I thought there would be a major bust-up. Gay people get jealous just like straight people in love affairs. What Peter was up to could not continue indefinitely. Then someone shot Peter, and you know the rest.'

'How was Mary involved with Mr Morris?' I asked.

'Mr Morris, Fred and Mary are related.'

'I bet the staff at the jewellery are also family.'

Simon nodded. 'I agree. Mr Morris builds a web around the two businesses. That is why he was annoyed when you interfered.'

'Are we now rid of the Morris clan?' I asked.

Simon grinned. 'At work, we are. They are still out there, sulking that they have lost the two businesses. Mr Morris believes that he built both businesses.'

'I suppose Mr Morris has a point, regardless of his criminal intentions. Peter was not thinking straight. I am not surprised he got himself killed. The big question is. How do we get them off our backs?'

Simon shrugged his shoulders. 'Find Peter's murderer and expose him to the police.'

'Easier said than done,' I thought. I didn't even know where to start.

With Simon's help, we made a list of all the pubs Peter frequented. Injuring my right arm was a nuisance. It was a struggle to write left-handed. I intended to visit the pubs that Peter frequented and see if I could pick up a lead.

Before Simon left, I asked him to think carefully. 'Was there not another person Peter mentioned in conversation that might be of help?'

The two girls, June and Jane, seemed to run the showroom perfectly and made me feel surplus to requirements. I went to the workshop to see if I could help, but George did not need a one-handed nuisance

either. I went upstairs to the flat feeling sorry for myself.

Tara returned to redo my bandages at lunchtime, and I tried to feed myself without the sling. I found that I could manage the pain by eating with a fork using delicate movements.

I was feeling more confident. I was sure I could sign my name, but I left that for the following day. I spent the rest of the day moving my arm in and out of the sling, trying to do simple tasks.

That night Tara and I made love. Gentle at first, but more vigorously as I discovered my strength returning. I felt sure I would be back to normal by the weekend. Tara tried to warn me to take it carefully, but I would not heed her warnings, as I was feeling on top of the world.

The following day after Tara had gone to work, I went downstairs and called Mr De Jong in Amsterdam. I explained to him what had happened to me regarding the shooting and that I thought I saw Mr James Mthetwa in the pub. I asked him to help me find the whereabouts of Mr Fowlie and Mr Mthetwa from his friends in the diamond business. They were required to leave their contact details with the diamond-cutting community as that was their source of income.

The shooting disgusted Mr De Jong, and he promised to track down Mr Fowlie and Mr Mthetwa for me. He felt positive that some of his associates must have their contact details.

That evening Tara returned from work, in my eyes still the most beautiful woman in the world. She was proud of her work achievements and lovely customers during the day. I decided not to spoil things for her by telling her about my search for Mr Mthetwa. It would just create stress, which she did not deserve. Instead, I admired her outfit and suggested that she spend some time in Hampstead Outfitters to ensure she could wear a different outfit every day.

Tara laughed, her eyes shining like stars. ‘I could not possibly have that many outfits, but I agree that I need a few more outfits to alter my appearance occasionally.’

I agreed. ‘Why don’t you do that tomorrow? We have an account with Hampstead Outfitters.’

‘Only if you come with me. I don’t trust the sales ladies. They say everything I try on is right for me, only to get the sales over with.’

‘I can see their problem. It is because you are beautiful. Everything you try on looks perfect.’

Certainly, I will come with you. I am not doing much now with this sling on my arm.'

The following day I went to work with Tara. She opened the jewellery shop for the staff, and we went shopping for several hours. Tara ended up with ten new outfits, lingerie, shoes and handbags. It was past lunchtime before she dropped me at the furniture store.

June had several messages for me. The most important was from Mr De Jong. I had to call him urgently.

I got through to Mr De Jong, who had found Mr Mthetwa's and Mr Fowlie's whereabouts. They were indeed in London. He gave me their address and telephone number in Romford, a suburb of London.

I contacted a Private Investigator, Mr Tom Adams. He was recommended to me by the wholesale company where we purchased the diamond testing equipment. Mr Adams said he would come over immediately.

Half an hour later, a giant of a man entered the showroom. He was about six foot five inches, eighteen stone in weight, with dark brown hair and piercing eyes. He introduced himself as Tom Adams.

Shaking his hand with my left hand, I invited him to my office, offered him tea, and explained.

‘A week ago, someone in a crowded bar shot me in the arm. I thought I spotted a face that seemed familiar but out of place among the customers near the door. The gentleman is not supposed to be in the country.’

I explained our first meeting and the diamonds they were selling. ‘I bought the diamonds but reported them for smuggling. These are dangerous gangsters; please be careful. I would like you to find out what they are up to and who they meet. Everything you can find about them will be helpful without revealing my name. I am trying to build up an airtight case against them to ensure the police arrest them. As things stand now, they can take potshots at me anytime.’

‘I will have all the required information in two weeks,’ Tom Adams replied.

We discussed his fee, and I gave him the address and some photographs of Mr Fowlie and Mr Mthetwa.

After I answered a few more questions, Mr Adams left and promised to contact me as soon as he had some information.

I felt a sense of relief, as if I had achieved something significant. At least I was doing something positive. I called Mr De Jong and informed him what I did. I was thinking of also telling Chief Inspector Metcalfe but decided he would feel I was interfering in his investigation. Instead, I contacted my friend Tony and told him, but begged his silence. ‘Please do not let Sarah or Tara know what I have done; they will be concerned. I told you because someone must know, for the record, if something goes wrong.’

That evening Sarah and Tony came to visit. Tara invited them to show off her new outfits. Tony and I enjoyed several beers while nodding in agreement about how lovely each of Tara’s outfits looked.

Sarah poked Tony in his midriff and complained. ‘It is about time you buy me a few outfits.’

‘Tara’s outfits are all for work. The best I can buy you for work is an old pair of torn jeans,’ Tony replied and ran to the kitchen to hide.

Tony and Sarah returned from the kitchen with their arms around each other and laughing, peace restored.

Sarah, trying to be serious, said, ‘I better finish a few more paintings because I need some presentable clothes for our visit to the family in Ireland.’

I interrupted, 'Please don't be in a hurry to visit the family. I need to heal completely. Tara's father disapproved of the enemies I had made. He would be concerned for Tara's health if he heard someone shot me.'

We agreed to postpone our visit to Dublin for three weeks. Even Sarah was happy with this decision. It gave her time to finish more paintings and fill her wardrobe.

It took another two days before I felt fit enough to manage without the sling. Mostly I kept my right hand in my trouser pocket to support my arm. It still pained when I used it carelessly.

Mr Adams arrived to see me with a hand full of photographs. 'This is not a progress report; the investigation is still in progress. I have photographed several people at the premises and wondered if you recognised any of them to save me time tracking them.'

I studied the photos and selected two of them. 'This is Mr Morris, and this one is Shaun. They both used to work for me.'

Mr Adams sighed, 'I am sad to say that I think drug dealers use these premises as a distribution hub. Several of the visitors are known drug dealers. I am in

the process of establishing who is the legal tenant or owner of the property. Mr Fowlie and Mr Mthetwa are present.

‘I will try to establish all the dealer's identities who visit the place. Once we get all the required information, we should hand the case to the police. These drug dealers are dangerous to investigate. It is wise to involve the police for our safety,’ Mr Adams concluded.

‘If the police can arrest them on drug charges and find the gun used in trying to shoot me while searching the premises, then it will suit me fine. The police have the bullet they fired to check for a match.’

‘Please wait one more week before you mention it to the police. I will be in serious trouble if these gangsters suspect something. The police can be clumsy,’ Mr Adams cautioned.

The following week wound down smoothly. June ran the furniture section like a professional, and Tara, I was indeed proud of her. She had transformed the jewellery shop. All the displays were exquisite, and the trade was booming.

Mr Adams made an appointment to see me on Friday at ten in the morning. ‘I will have your full

report ready with a copy for the police. You may ask them to be present at the meeting.’

I immediately contacted Chief Inspector Metcalfe. I explained that I had hired a private investigator to observe Mr Fowlie and Mr Mthetwa’s movements and that his report would be ready on Friday.

‘Please could you come, he has also made a copy for you. I think you may now have the evidence to arrest them.’

Chief Inspector Metcalfe agreed, but I felt he was slightly aggrieved that we did not involve him from the start of the investigation.

On Friday morning, the Inspector arrived first. I explained why we were reluctant to involve the police earlier. Mr Adams discovered that the address details I gave him for Mr Fowlie and Mr Mthetwa were a drug dealer’s collection point. Every second person visiting the premises was a drug dealer. He had to keep a low profile to photograph these people as they were dangerous characters. ‘He asked me to delay informing you until he had completed his assignment.’

Mr Adams arrived with two folders, one for me and one for the Chief Inspector. I arranged tea with June while Chief Inspector Metcalfe studied his file. I could see his face light up. He addressed Mr Adams, ‘Thank

you. It is marvellous work by you. I shall arrange a house search for Monday morning. We may even find the gun used to fire at Stephen. But this will help us close down another drug ring. I recognise several of the individuals in your photographs. We will round them up as well.'

Flipping through the photos, I remarked, 'I noticed most of Peter's old staff has also become drug dealers.' I pulled out a few pictures. 'That is Shaun, Graham, Mr Morris and Paul. They must be breaking their bail conditions, buying drugs.'

Chief Inspector Metcalfe laughed. 'We will have a spring cleaning of hoodlums on Monday.'

I thanked Mr Adams and asked him for his invoice, which I settled immediately.

Chief Inspector Metcalfe turned to Mr Adams. 'You will testify to the accuracy of your report in court, I hope?'

'Why certainly, chief. I have signed and dated the statement,' Mr Adams replied. 'It is my pleasure to help clean up the streets of London.'

It was a difficult weekend trying not to tell Tara about the forthcoming police raid on Monday. All I

could think of was whether or not it would be successful.

Eventually, Monday arrived. I had to wait till the afternoon before Chief Inspector Metcalfe rang. They arrested Mr Fowlie and Mr Mthetwa and at least ten drug dealers, including Mr Morris, Shaun, Graham and Paul.

They also found a handgun at the address. It had the same calibre as the bullet found in the pub where someone shot me. Chief Inspector Metcalfe was waiting for forensics to confirm it was the same weapon.

That evening I told Tara what I had done and the police results thus far. She was furious. 'You have no right to endanger your life without consulting me. What would have happened if they had caught this private investigator and discovered you were behind the investigation? They would have killed you, and then what happens to me? Please don't ever endanger your life without telling me.' Her tears ran freely.

I took her in my arms and tried to soothe her. 'I promise I will in future discuss everything with you. I was scared that you would be overly concerned. What about going away for a break once these people are all arrested?'

She added tearfully, 'I am sorry for the outburst. Because of my father's involvement with the IRA, I hate violence and am terrified something may happen to you.'

Tara calmed down slightly. 'What do you have in mind? I do not want to go anywhere related to business or these people. Some place where nobody knows us. Only the two of us.'

I smiled, still hugging her and stroking her hair. 'I was thinking of the lake district. People tell me it is beautiful and peaceful.'

Tara's face lit up. 'That sounds lovely. I have seen pictures of Lake Windermere.'

'I would like to wait until these gangsters are locked up. It would be unfair on the staff, with them still prowling around. Chief Inspector Metcalfe sounds positive. We have to wait for forensics and what the judge decides. I think your dad would also be pleased with a positive result.'

The following day Chief Inspector Metcalfe confirmed that the gun recovered was the same gun fired at me in the pub. The bullets matched. However, none of the firearms used the same projectile that killed Peter.

Peter's killer must have got rid of the gun he used. Chief Inspector Metcalfe was sure that Mr Fowlie and Mr Mthetwa would go to prison and the Home Office would deport them after serving their sentence. The drug dealers would also go to jail, especially those who were out on bail at the moment. He further stated that we should know the outcome within a week.

Tara returned from work the following day with an arm full of travel brochures. 'I went to the travel agent today and picked all the brochures they had on the lake districts for us to study,' she announced with a big smile.

Whenever Tara smiled, I felt I fell in love with her again. Her lovely smooth teeth lit her face, and her eyes sparkled.

Tara was spontaneous in getting the brochures without a hint from me. It made me feel that going away was a brilliant idea.

That evening we studied the brochures and decided on or near Lake Windermere. We both preferred a self-catering cottage.

We found a log cabin in the heart of the English Lake District, deep within Cumbria's National Park, overlooking the famous Langdale Valley within a secluded, tranquil woodland estate.

The alpine-style timber cabin looked comfortable, tastefully furnished and extravagantly equipped. The location was an ideal romantic hideaway, close to nature, surrounded by walks on the fells directly from your doorstep.

The log cabin with private parking had two bedrooms, a living room, a flat-screen TV, an equipped kitchen with a fridge and an oven, and one bathroom with a shower.

The estate had a community hall nearby with a sauna, an indoor swimming pool and table tennis facilities. There was also a tiny shop stocked with everyday essentials.

‘It sounds magnificent, exactly what I had in mind. Should I book it for the week after next? I am sure all these criminals will be behind bars by then,’ I told Tara.

Tara got all excited. ‘Yes, please, book it now. I can’t wait. I will also have to get a swimming costume. I see there is an indoor swimming pool. Then if it is a rainy day, we can go swimming.’

As the cabin was a private rental, I contacted the owner immediately and booked for one week. The owner said he would send me a map with directions to get there by car.

Tara was so excited she studied the brochures all evening and speculated on what we might do during our stay there. There were boat trips on Lake Windermere, visits to Beatrice Potter's house and all the restaurants.

As we were getting ready for bed, Tara gasped. 'I had cleanly forgotten about Sarah. It is a two-bedroom cabin. I should invite Sarah and Tony. She will never forgive me.'

Tara was about to reach for the phone when I stopped her. 'Leave your phone call until morning; it is nearly midnight. Besides, we are only going in two weeks.'

Tara called Sarah before work the following morning and discussed the break with her. The discussion sounded more to me like a fashion show. The two of them discussed what to wear. All I got out of the conversation was that Tony and Sarah were coming over that evening.

Tara and I went our separate ways to work for the day. I felt relieved with all of Peter's criminal friends out of the way. I could concentrate on running the business without fearing what would happen next.

It was a pity that the police could not match the bullet that killed Peter with one of the guns found, but

it makes sense that they would dispose of the murder weapon.

Both businesses, to my mind, were running smoothly. I was impressed at what Tara had done for the jewellery shop. It was a pleasure walking into the store. Everyone was cheerful and went out of their way to help customers. Even Louise, our jeweller, was helping customers with ring sizing in the showroom.

That evening, Sarah and Tony visited to discuss the Lake District trip. Tony wanted to know why we had included them in the week's holiday.

'For standing by us while these criminals were pursuing us. With all of them arrested, we felt it was safe to leave London and decided on the lakes. Besides, Sarah can renew her inspiration to paint surrounded by beautiful scenery,' I replied.

We all studied the brochures Tara brought home. Tony spoke up, 'The log cabin looks fantastic. It says in this brochure that it is located partway between Windermere and Coniston at the head of the Langdale Valley in a secluded, mature woodland park of individually owned lodges. This tranquil setting means that complete peace is assured and is ideal for walkers and those who enjoy the tranquillity of the hills and the water. You will be close to fauna, flora and plenty of wildlife, with numerous sightings of

Deer and Badgers, many of them only feet from your cabin window.'

'There are also several boat trips on Lake Windermere and plenty of pubs,' Tara added.

Tony, looking concerned, asked, 'It is a lovely cabin that sounds like an idyllic spot. We would love to come, but how much will this cost?'

Tara interrupted, 'We have paid for the cabin. All you need is your spending money; remember it is self-catering, and bring your favourite foods. I don't know how close we are to a supermarket.'

'May I bring my easel and paints?' Sarah asked.

I replied, 'Certainly, you may, but I don't know if you will have time for painting. Bring your camera to take several photos of what you wish to paint. We will take our camera if we spot something we want you to paint for us.'

Sarah laughed. 'I know what you would like me to paint, Stephen. We don't even have to go far. I bet it is Tara.'

Everyone laughed. 'Am I that transparent?' I asked, turning red in the face.

Tony and I had a few cold beers while listening to the two girls discuss what to wear during the holiday.

We were all excited about going to the Lake District. Tara telephoned her mother, told her about our upcoming mini holiday, and promised we would come to Dublin afterwards.

Tara and I busied ourselves with preparing the staff for our absence. They agreed that they could cope for a week. They insisted that we should stop worrying and get out of there.

During the week, Chief Inspector Metcalfe came to see me. 'You can rest easy now. The court has set a date for the court case. They have remanded your ex-staff into custody with no bail.'

I thanked the Chief. 'That's excellent news. Now, with a clear mind, we can enjoy our Lake District trip.'

'Where are you going to? I like the Lake District,' the Chief asked.

I smiled as I told Chief Inspector Metcalfe that we had rented a Log Cabin in the Langdale Valley near Ambleside. His face brightened, and he told us to enjoy ourselves as he said, 'It is lovely up there.' He wished us a good and safe trip before shaking our hands with a hearty grip.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



We decided to use my car, inherited from Peter, a five-series BMW, as it was more comfortable than Tony's Ford Escort.

We set off early on Friday morning, as none of us has made the trip. The man at the filling station told me it would take approximately five hours.

After the long drive, Tony and I pulled into Windemere with one brief pit stop for lunch. We followed the hand-drawn map the log cabin owner provided to reach our destination via Skelwith Bridge and Ambleside. When we arrived at Blelham Tarn Community Centre, the lady in charge of the shop greeted us with a warm smile and handed us the keys and directions. As we approached the log cabin, my heart raced with anticipation; it was even more beautiful than the pictures had promised. The cottage came complete with every modern amenity, including a dishwasher – a luxury bonus we weren't expecting.

We soon unpacked and made ourselves comfortable. We decided not to explore that day but to relax and have a BBQ as we noticed the owner left a bag of charcoal for our convenience. On the veranda, there was a splendid barbeque grill. Tony

volunteered to start the fire while I wandered down the footpath to a bench. As there was a fence, I assumed it was the perimeter of the cottage property and sat down.

A few moments later, Tara snugly stepped up next to me, her eyes wide with wonder. A small deer stood grazing on the other side of a wooden fence. A gentle breeze rustled our hair, and we shared a silent admiration for the creature before us. I turned my gaze to meet hers, her cheeks glowing in the warmth of the setting sun. I spoke softly, expressing my deep love for her, and she returned it with a whisper that seemed to linger in the air.

We were disturbed by Tony calling. ‘Fire is ready for the meat.’

We both got up and joined Tony. I helped Tony with the meat while Tara and Sarah prepared a salad and laid the veranda table.

We had a lovely meal and made plans on what to do during our stay.

We decided to visit Windemere the following day and check out the boat cruises on the lake. Perhaps go on a cruise if there is time and do our shopping for whatever we have forgotten. According to our map, Windemere was the largest town in the area.

After our meal, we walked to the nearby community centre to see what was available. There was a heated indoor swimming pool, Two full-size table tennis tables and several bamboo tables and chairs. They also had a serving hatch where you could buy hot drinks and cakes and rent table tennis equipment. The serving hatch was at the back of the shop where we were earlier to collect our log cabin keys.

We had a cup of tea and watched several youngsters enjoying the pool. We had an early night, ready for the following day of exploring.

We followed the curvy roads, winding through picturesque villages and breathtaking countryside until we arrived at Windemere. The cobbled streets of Bowness-on-Windermere glimmered in the morning sunlight. We gathered around an information stand, eager to learn more about their boat cruises. The round trip lasted seventy-five minutes, with boats leaving every half hour. For a bit extra, we could get a Freedom of the Lake ticket that allowed us to hop on and off as many times as we wanted. Our eyes sparkled with excitement; this was going to be an adventure!

We decided to take the round trip that lasted for seventy-five minutes. On Monday, we would buy the Freedom of the Lake ticket from Ambleside, our

closest departure point. It allows us to explore the many lake towns, villages, and attractions stress-free without driving and taking in the sights on the water.

We boarded the boat on the upper deck. It had comfortable seating and a snack bar.

Soon after we left, the guide started telling us the history of the lake over a speaker system. It was exceptionally informative.

During the trip, our guide pointed out some unique historic buildings, fancy boathouses on the Lakeside, and some of the islands on Lake Windermere. He informed us there are 18 islands on Lake Windermere. The largest and only inhabited island is called Belle Isle and is 1 kilometre long. Other islands include Lady Holme, Hen Holme, Crow Holme, The Lilies, Silver Holme, Bee Holme, Snake Holme, and others.

The views heading down Lake Windermere were incredible. We all enjoyed the trip and the sights. Sarah clicked away with her camera while Tony ordered pints of lager from the onboard bar.

We arrived back at Bowness-on-Windemere, tired and hungry. The sweet smell of a maritime breeze sifted through the delicate trees, mingling with the salty scent of boats bobbing in the marina. Quaint

cottages, cobblestone paths, and coloured lights decorated the streets and walkways. There was a long pier stretching out over the water and lined with festive-looking shops and pubs. We decided on fish and chips for dinner. We took a stroll along Bowness Bay, under the shadow of craggy Blawith Knott and across Moss Wood to reach the end of the pier.

We strolled between the tall green grasses bordering the lake, with a breathtaking horizon view. The sun sparkled on the peaceful water as we watched and out of the harbour. We scattered bread grains for the birds and swans, their wings flapping as they flew around us.

Afterwards, we decided to do some shopping in Bowness. We were surprised it was bursting with little independent shops and big chain stores. Indeed, you could easily drown yourself in swag here. The girls thoroughly enjoyed the shopping; they searched for dresses, shoes, lipstick, books and toys. They devised a long list of necessities and wanted to buy everything before nightfall.

We spent the rest of the afternoon relaxing at our log cabin as we planned a walk to Rydal the following day.

That evening, Tony and I got the barbeque going while our companions set out to explore the nearby

area. They also asked for directions on how to get from the community centre to Rydal.

The following morning after breakfast, we set off to Loughrigg Tarn. The path led along the southern shore of Lilly Tarn on a gently sloping route through wildflower meadows and disappeared into a thick wood.

Some trees here were so old they had volcanic plugs sticking out of their trunks like greyed, curly hair. In its centre is the exquisite but small Lily Tarn, which looked more blue than green in the early-morning light. A blanket of ferns covered the water; a couple of ducks floated on its surface like toy boats in an ornate pond.

From Loughrigg Tarn, we walked on around the slopes of Loughrigg Fell. A drystone wall marched alongside the steep hillside. Then it bent north with it and brought us onto the grassy Loughrigg Terrace, with some excellent views from Loughrigg Terrace, looking north over Grasmere towards Skiddaw and Blencathra.

As we arrived at Rydal Water, the picturesque hamlet and calm lake greeted us. We wandered around admiring its natural beauty before heading to Rydal Mount, the home of William Wordsworth.

The building, still owned by his family members, has been preserved just as it was during his lifetime - the immaculate and maintained garden, the interior decorated with classic furnishings. We stayed for a while to admire the place in which one of England's greatest poets wrote some of his most famous works.

We followed a winding path flanked by bright flowers of many colours, leading to the thunderous Rydal Hall waterfall. We then ventured into the quaint Rydal St Mary's Church with its ancient stone walls and stained glass windows.

Afterwards, we set up a blanket in a grassy meadow on the banks of Rydal Water, taking in Wordsworth's beloved views of the lake and surrounding mountains.

Finally, we explored the Rydal Caves, marvelling at the intricate carvings in the walls created from chiselling slate out of the mine.

Our feet crunched on the dry leaves as we ventured along the winding path up Loughrigg Tarn, greedily gulping in the expansive views of rolling hills and lush greenery. Then, looming ahead, we spied the black mouths of ancient slate quarry caves. We quietly changed course, in awe that a place like this could exist just an hour from our cabin.

The air was thick with the smell of nature and teeming with lush greenery, creating a feeling of utter tranquillity. Tara gasped when she saw Sarah, normally tough and independent, standing in a beautiful summer dress, her hair woven with delicate flowers. The tranquillity of the lake was interrupted by Cupid's arrows careening through the air and igniting flames of passion between Sarah and Tony.

I was unaffected, for since I met Tara, my heart belonged only to her. Despite the romantic beauty that surrounded me, no other love could compare.

Love shone out of Sarah's eyes with an intensity that made Tara's heart swell. 'It seems that this minibreak to Windemere has done the trick. Sarah has fallen in love with Tony.'

When we arrived back at Blelham Tarn, Tara and I shared a look; it was the same dreamy expression of all those who couldn't quite believe they found such a haven. We knew that one day when the time was right, we would return to make it our own.

We decide to go to the community centre for a refreshing swim. The water was lovely and warm, rejuvenating our aching legs.

I was pleased that we planned Monday to be a day of cruises on Windemere, as my legs desperately

needed a rest. Tara, loaded with energy, was excited about what we should do next.

We went to the Waterhead Pier close to Ambleside the following morning and booked passage on the green cruise. Our original plan was to purchase the Freedom of the Lake ticket. Still, our visit to Rydal Mount had shown us that it would not be possible to fit everything in one day. So we decided to visit Wray Castle for the day. If we did not enjoy the castle, we could always return and stroll around Ambleside later in the afternoon.

We arrived at a pictures Gothic boathouse and jetty, not a long walk to Wray castle. Before this visit, we did not know the Lake District had a palace.

We were in awe of this remarkable structure. A Nineteenth-century Gothic Revival castle made with tall turrets and towers. An impressive creation of Dr James Dawson, a retired Liverpool surgeon who had it built in 1840, it stood proudly overlooking Lake Windermere.

After Dr Dawson died in 1875, the castle passed to his nephew Preston Rawnsley. Then he sold it to the National Trust in 1929.

We were allowed to explore inside the house/castle and had a lot of fun. Sarah took many photos inside

as well as outside. The views from the hilltop it's perched on are amazing; you can see Windermere clearly from there.

The estate boasted lush, verdant green lawns stretched for acres, dotted with leafy rows of elegant cedars and lofty oaks, some as old as the property. A sandy beach with weathered shingles led to a lake shimmering in the afternoon sun. Visitors could take a stroll around its idyllic shoreline.

It had a pop-up café on the castle grounds serving baked goods, savoury snacks, locally roasted coffee, teas and hot chocolate.

There is also a walk to Blelham Tarn, but we decided to give that a miss and explored the lakeshore walk instead.

We purchased several pies, sausage rolls, cakes, and tea to create a picnic lunch at the Lakeside. We relaxed and were sad to return to our log cabin in the afternoon.

On the return trip, Sarah and Tara decided the next expedition would be the World of Beatrix Potter attraction in the morning and Ambleside for lunch and afternoon shopping.

Tony interrupted. 'Who is Beatrix Potter?'

Sarah frowned and replied. 'Don't you know Beatrix Potter? She is a famous children's author who created characters like Peter Rabbit. Every child has read the book, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*.'

I interrupted. 'Growing up in South Africa, we were more interested in books such as *Jock of the Bushveld*.'

Sarah replied. 'Never heard of it.'

I added. 'All young boys read the story of *Jock of the Bushveld*. It is a famous book by the South African author Sir Percy Fitzpatrick. It tells of a young man's adventures with his Staffordshire bull terrier named Jock. Jock became one of South Africa's most beloved dogs.'

Tara laughed. 'Well, tomorrow will be an experience for both of you. One day you can tell your children about Peter Rabbit and his friends. I will buy you a copy for your education.' Tara said, hugging me.

With Tara still in my arms, I joked. 'OK, we will learn about your rabbit tomorrow, providing we declare Wednesday a national day of rest and go nowhere. Only to lie around the cabin and relax.'

At Waterhead Pier (Ambleside), Tara spotted a gift/jewellery shop, the Waterhead Shell Shop. The shells impressed Tara. She had to buy a selection for the jewellery shop in Hampstead to add to her window display. Soon she became friends with the owner and exchanged cards. They agreed on a trade price for the shells. The owner gave her a pictured catalogue with a price list in case she wanted to order more.

Instead of having a BBQ again at home, we had a lovely meal at the Table 22 restaurant, part of the Waterhead Bay Hotel.

That night in bed, Tara said. 'It is peaceful here. I could stay forever. When we get married, this is the sort of place I would like to spend my honeymoon.'

I acknowledged her wish and replied. 'I will certainly bear that in mind. I am sure we can find a similar peaceful location.'

The following morning we took a boat cruise from Waterhead to Bowness, a 5-minute walk to the Beatrix Potter attraction.

Beatrix Potter, a renowned writer and illustrator born in London in 1866, carved out an indelible name for herself in the lush Lake District. Despite spending much of her life primarily in the bustling city, she made time to embark on long trips to Scotland and

the Lake District. It was here where she found solace in the serenity and picturesque landscapes that inspired so many of her books.

On her inaugural visit to Windermere in 1882, Beatrix delightedly took up residence at Wray Castle. With its soaring turrets and sweeping views of the rolling hills, the castle provided just the inspiration she needed for her work. Standing atop one of the castle's towers, gazing at the breathtaking panorama before her, Beatrix knew that this idyllic paradise would remain forever etched in her memory as a place of enduring beauty.

She loved to draw. Illustrations came naturally to her hand, and it was a joy when her sketches brought life to the written word. Her first storybook, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, was well-received, and she enjoyed its surprising popularity.

It led to more books: 23 enchanting stories in total. Throughout life, Beatrix Potter became an independent woman with a career that satisfied her artistic soul. While living on Red Bank Farm, she wrote two books: *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin* and *The Tailor of Gloucester* (a tale about a poor tailor tricked by his wife).

Then, she decided she would focus on farming the land at Hill Top to provide food for herself and

financial independence. Property management was not quite as lucrative as writing. Yet, through her diligence and profit from her books, she gradually built up the property's value until it was 40 times its original value. Through judicious investments, she continued to increase her wealth.

Her books feature loveable characters like Peter Rabbit, Tom Kitten, Jemima Puddle-Duck, and Mrs Tiggy-Winkle. Hill Top Farm was the setting of many of her stories, which featured talking animals, heroes from all walks of life overcoming obstacles through selflessness and virtue, and homespun wisdom that left no doubt in a child's mind about right and wrong. The attraction aims to breathe life into these beloved tales with interactive exhibitions, walks, and gardens.

In the Dairy Kitchen, you can make jam and butter yourself, listen to old radios as they broadcast Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's coronation speech live via shortwave radio from London in 1953 (when she had just become the Queen), walk through "The Tale of Samuel Whiskers or The Roly-Poly Pudding" maze in the garden, visit the village shop at over seventy years old and still operating for real, watch cutaway videos illustrating how they made clothes before mass production took over in the 20th century... You can meet some of her favourite characters here and a short history of her life and influence on the Lake District.

Sarah and Tara bought a soft Peter Rabbit toy each. They insisted that Tony and I purchase the book *Tales of Peter Rabbit* for further education.

Afterwards, we returned to Waterhead by ferry and undertook the short walk to Ambleside.

Our first stop was Stagshaw Garden. It is a charming woodland garden where we relax in the peace and calm, full of blossoming flowers, bright greenery and native trees.

Then we visited the Apple Pie for a treat, a quaint and characterful bakery serving quality local produce. All their delicious goodies are homemade, including freshly baked bread, cakes and pies daily.

We strolled down the main street, with the girls stopping at every unique and whimsical shop window, eager to explore each one. Tony and I followed, our arms laden with brown paper packages from all the trinkets we'd purchased. After a while, we decided to take a break and visit Stock Ghyll Falls. We trekked through the lush forest and emerged in an open clearing where a thundering 70ft waterfall cascaded over rocky cliff faces. A gentle mist cooled our skin as we stepped onto the wooden observation platform and admired the remarkable scenery.

On our way back to Waterhead, where we left the car, we purchased four large pizzas to take home for our evening meal.

We had a lovely evening, watching TV and munching on our Pizzas. We all agreed to relax the following day and spend Thursday, our last day, on a boat trip to Lakeside. There we will ride on the steam train to Haverthwaite and back.

The following morning Sarah and Tony went for a walk, leaving Tara and me the run of the cabin. Instead of any hanky panky, we decided like adults to clean up the place, leaving less work for Friday when we leave.

Sarah and Tony burst into the room; their faces illuminated joyfully. Sarah squeals with delight as she proclaims her news: 'We are getting engaged next weekend in Dublin! It will be an event you won't want to miss!' Tara and I embrace the ecstatic couple with boisterous hugs and passionate kisses, sharing their blissful celebration. 'Windemere has performed its magic, making them fall in love.'

I produced a bottle of champagne and four glasses and drank a toast to Sarah and Tony. The four of us have become inseparable close friends.

Tara added. 'We should have a double wedding.' It sparked a serious debate between Sarah and Tara. Tony and I went outside to relax on the patio table and chairs.

I remarked. 'I don't want to interfere with the girl's wedding plans, but a double wedding would be funny. I would want you to be my best man at my wedding, and I presume you would want me to be your best man. We would both be the groom and best man at the same wedding. I have never heard of that before.'

Tony laughed. 'I would not worry about it; the girls will sort something. That is if they get past the dress subject and think of the planning.'

Shortly Sarah and Tara joined us. We decided to drive to Ambleside as there were plenty of restaurants to choose from for lunch. The afternoon we spent in the pool of our local community centre.

The following morning, we drove to the Waterside pier. We could already sense the excitement as soon as we stepped out of the car and onto the dock – you could feel the anticipation in the air. We boarded one of the Yellow Route boats and set off for Lakeside. As we cruised along Lake Windermere, surrounded by breathtaking views. Unique historic buildings lined up alongside each other like sentinels; fancy boathouses

shimmered under the sunlight, and misty islands punctuated the glassy lake surface.

We boarded the Lakeside and Haverthwaite Steam Railway, and the whistle blew as the engine lurched forward. We chugged slowly along the 3.5 miles of track, with views of misty lakes and meandering rivers through the windows. Once, this line had continued to Ulverston, part of a more extensive network linking up with the Furness Railway to reach Barrow-In-Furness.

The railroad's primary revenue source was transporting iron ore and other minerals from the mines around Lake Windermere. As industry diminished, so did the branch lines connected to it until they were eventually closed in 1965.

Thankfully, a group of local enthusiasts came together to preserve the railway. After several years of campaigning and negotiations, they reopened the line between Lakeside and Haverthwaite as a heritage railway in 1973.

Whilst at Haverthwaite, you can visit the Lakeland Motor Museum. We decided to give that a miss. The girls were not interested in cars.

The railway has several events during the season: *Thomas The Tank*, Engine, is a frequent guest. A

special ghost train makes a chilling voyage around Halloween.

Later that afternoon, we returned to Waterside Pier by ferry and bought meat and charcoal for our last evening BBQ. We all agreed that it was a wonderful break from London. Still, I could tell that Tara was beginning to worry about the jewellery shop in Hampstead.

The following morning we were all up early and did our best to restore the log cabin to the condition we found it. At ten am, the lady from the community hall came to do an inventory to check for any breakages. She was satisfied, and we were ready to start our five-hour trip home to London.

Tony and I were engrossed in listening to the girls discussing wedding plans during the trip home. Who would be the bridesmaid for which bride? I don't think they concluded. Hunger took over, and we stopped at a motorway service for burgers and chips.

We arrived home before five, gasping for a drink after a tiring trip. Sarah and Tony stayed for only one drink before heading home.

That night I made love to Tara as if it was our first time. We had refrained from sex during our holiday

as the log cabin was not soundproof. It was good to be home.

The following morning at work, the staff greeted me with smiley faces. There had not been any serious problems they could not handle, except that the auction houses needed payment for some items I bid for and won.

Nevertheless, because of all the past problems, I secretly checked the receipts with the bank deposits but found no discrepancies. Satisfied, I visited the workshop staff. They were happy and had no problems to report.

Later that day, I visited the jewellery shop and did a few spot checks. I was pleasantly surprised at how well they have done in our absence. Tara was busy arranging the shells she bought in Ambleside to enhance the jewellery display. I had to congratulate her; it certainly was effective.

Tony phoned in a panic. 'I have to buy Sarah an engagement ring before the weekend, and I am short of money. Can you help?'

I replied. 'I am at the jewellery shop right now. Can you come over?'

Tony excitedly responded. 'I am on my way.'

I told Tara the problem. She beamed. 'Leave it to me. I will ask Louise to assemble something for Sarah that doesn't cost the earth. We have the exact finger size, and I know what she likes.'

Tara cleverly removed her engagement ring before Tony arrived and gave it to me for safekeeping. 'I don't want Tony to compare the rings I try on for Sarah with my ring. It would be unfair. I will tell him I always take it off at work.'

Tony arrived. He and Tara went into the workshop area to get Louise's help. After some time, Tony reappeared with a broad smile. 'Tara and Louise have made a beautiful ring for Sarah that even I can afford. I know you are letting me have it at cost. I am extremely grateful. Tara said she would let me know when it is ready.'

As soon as Tony left, I went to Louise's workshop to see what they were making for Sarah. Tara explained that they use a one-karat diamond as the centrepiece with two sapphires on either side. Set in an eighteen-carat gold band. 'It is all made up of pieces that customers have brought for sale. After Louise has polished the ring and the stones, it will look brand new, and Sarah will be incredibly proud.'

Tara held her hand towards me and demanded. ‘My ring, please. I feel naked without it on my finger.’

I put the ring on Tara’s finger and asked with a big smile. ‘Will you marry me?’

Tara laughed. ‘You know the answer to that one. I can’t wait to be Mrs Jones.’

I added. ‘There is another cost-saving factor in Sarah’s engagement. We don’t have to buy new outfits for Sarah’s engagement party. We already have outfits from our engagements.’

Tara wrinkled her nose and crossed her arms. “There’s no way I’m wearing my same old dress,” she said. “My mom would die of embarrassment if I showed up in something outdated.”

I sighed. We had the money to buy a new dress for Tara, but what about Sarah and Tony? It was unfair for him not to be able to afford a nice outfit too. Making up my mind, I declared that I would pay for their plane tickets – at least, that would help a little.

CHAPTER TWELVE



We decided to fly to Dublin on Friday and return on Monday. The staff performed well in our absence; I felt reassured they would cope. I promised them an extra week of paid leave during the year. George said he would sooner have the cash. ‘Staying at home is not a holiday for me,’ he added.

Tony came to collect Sarah’s ring on Thursday and was delighted. ‘Thank you. It is beautiful. Sarah will love it.’ Tara found a lovely ring box and wrapped it in fancy paper for him.

It was a short flight to Dublin airport. Dublin was in perfect sunlight with clear blue skies. Tara and Sarah’s parents met us in the arrivals hall.

We left in separate cars as Tara, and I stayed with her parents. The party would be at Sarah’s parent’s home, where Tony and Sarah stayed.

As we were purely guests at the engagement party on Saturday night, we were not supposed to be involved in helping with the catering. Still, we were no sooner at Tara’s parent’s house than Tara and her mother decided that they would offer their help.

I was about to remark when Tara's dad stopped me and said, 'In my experience, I have learnt it is best not to interfere. Let them get on with whatever they plan. You will get no thanks for interfering.'

Tara and her mother left to help with the preparations, leaving me alone with Tara's father.

Mr Willis always made me feel nervous when we were alone. It made me feel like he was cross-examining me. He only tried to hear the story first-hand instead of getting the girl's account. Nevertheless, I always thought it was my fault and that I should sort out these problems that may endanger Tara's life.

He first said to me, 'I believe someone shot you. What happened?'

I tried to explain to Mr Willis, trying to keep it light-hearted but feeling nervous and pacing backwards and forward. 'I don't know what happened. We were at a pub, and I felt a stinging pain in my arm while I stood at the bar counter getting drinks. The next thing Tony was administering first aid, telling me that it was a bullet wound. The police and ambulance arrived and whisked me off to the hospital.'

‘Tara said the police caught the perpetrators. How did that happen?’ Mr Willis asked.

I continued to explain. ‘I noticed among the crowd of people a familiar African face. I was sure he was one of the men who sold me the uncut diamonds. The police thought I must be mistaken as he was not allowed in the country. The police seemed to be getting nowhere. When they discharged me from the hospital, I contacted a friend of mine, a diamond cutter in Amsterdam, to help locate this Mr Mthetwa. He found them in London and gave me their address. I hired a private investigator to watch the property and photograph all visitors. He soon discovered it was a drug den. I informed Chief Inspector Metcalfe of what we discovered. The police raided the property. Arrested several people, including Peter’s ex-staff on bail for theft, now for drug dealing charges. They also found the handgun that matched the bullet retrieved from the pub.’

Mr Willis smiled. ‘You certainly have been through the mill since your arrival in England. Do you think all your brother’s trouble is now behind you?’

‘I hope that is true. We tried to run the business legitimately and replaced all the old staff. Chief Inspector Metcalfe seems to think that. However, they still have not found the gun that killed Peter or any proof of who was behind Peter’s killing. Chief

Inspector Metcalfe believes it must be one of the criminals arrested, and they destroyed the gun involved in the crime.'

I continued, 'Both businesses are now running smoothly. I am proud of Tara. She is having tremendous success in the jewellery shop.'

Mr Willis smiled. 'Our Tara has always been fond of jewellery. She is in the right business and looks happy to me. I suppose you have to be complimented on her happiness as well. I only hope the police can pin your brother's murder on someone; it would put our minds at rest. It is worrying, not knowing who was responsible and that he may still be out there, ready to strike again.'

Thankfully Tara and her mother returned, excited about Sarah's upcoming party and what an ideal match Tony was for Sarah.

'Sarah's parents did not need our help to prepare for the party as they hired caterers to prepare the food,' Tara explained with a serious expression.

Tara then told her parents about the lovely holiday we had at the lake district.

I could feel the stirring in my heart. I could fall in love with Tara all over again whenever she was

earnest. The look on her face was adorable; I could almost eat her alive. I wish we were alone.

Tara's dad brought me back to earth by asking, 'How much do they charge daily for such a log cabin?'

'It is one hundred and thirty pounds per day, but it can sleep four people (two couples), and there is a swimming pool in the private park hall,' I answered.

Mr Willis remarked. 'That's affordable for four people.'

Tara interrupted. 'It has all the mod cons, including a TV and a dishwasher. It is a nature reserve with many hiking paths leading through the park. Also, it is not far from Waterhead, the port of Ambleside, where you can catch a ferry to any destination on Lake Windemere. You must go for a week. Mum would love it there. You can even spot deer through the window, outside the cabin.'

Mrs Willis interrupted, 'It sounds marvellous. Please, let's go. We have not had a holiday for a long time.'

Tara's dad hummed. 'It does sound like a nice break. I will get all the details from Stephen. If we take the ferry to Holyhead, we are halfway there.'

We decided to have an early night in preparation for Sarah's party the following day. That night, alone in bed with Tara, I again told her how much I loved her, and we both fell asleep with my arms around her.

The following day it was all preparation for the ladies.

'I am glad to be a man. I could not spend all day doing my hair and checking my clothes for creases for a party where you will end up untidy within a few hours from dancing, eating and drinking,' Mr Willis remarked.

Sarah's mother called Mrs Willis to tell her how stunning Sarah's engagement ring was. That made Tara especially happy as she spent hours choosing the stones.

The evening party was attended chiefly by family and a few of Sarah's school friends. Everyone admired Sarah's ring. Although I had eyes for Tara only, I must admit Sarah looked lovely. Several guests made speeches, including me, as I was the only person present to represent Tony.

All had a good time, and the food was marvellous. I particularly enjoyed the lobster. We danced and partied till the early morning hours when we returned home exhausted.

Tara's parents took us on a guided cruise on the River Liffey the following day.

We went aboard an all-weather 48-passenger river boat for a 45-minute cruise to see the city from the river. Our guide gave us an insight into the history of Dublin City and the River Liffey in particular, from the arrival of the Vikings more than 1,000 years ago, through the swift development of Dublin during the 18th and 19th centuries, to the subsequent decline and more recent redevelopment of Dublin Docklands.

It was a good experience, a short but exciting trip with the history of the buildings and bridges of the river Liffey. The guide, Jerry, was hilarious, with dark humour that we appreciated, and he even made small children laugh. In addition, the boat was exceedingly comfortable and covered.

Mrs Willis commented, 'I have lived in Dublin all my life, and today is my first boat trip on the Liffey. It was exciting and enjoyable.

Afterwards, we walked in the Temple Bar district, often described as Dublin's bohemian quarter. It was full of entertainment, art, and culinary action. We then visited The Temple Bar pub for sandwiches and drinks. Famous for its traditional ambience, unrivalled vitality and enjoyable social activity.

Because my mother was Irish, Mr Willis took us to the Famine memorial in Custom House Quay in the Dublin Docklands to finish the day.

These haunting figures commemorated the Great Famine—the most profound disaster in Irish history.

During the famine, approximately one million people died of starvation. A million more emigrated from Ireland, causing the island's population to fall by twenty to twenty-five per cent.

It was a sad memorial, making me think of my mother. Perhaps her father was one of the people who had to flee Ireland due to starvation.

They blame the cause of the famine on a potato disease known as potato blight. The blight ravaged potato crops throughout Europe during the 1840s. Still, the impact and human cost in Ireland, where one-third of the population depended entirely on the potato for food, was extremely high.

We left for home in a sombre mood, each with their thoughts. Tara held my hand to comfort me throughout.

That evening Tony, Sarah and her parents visited and finalised arrangements for our trip back to England. Sarah's mother was proud of her daughter's

engagement. She must have mentioned it a hundred times. I think, secretly, she must have thought it would never happen. Sarah appeared to be a tomboy, always in her artist's clothing, paint-smeared jeans and T-shirts, with no thoughts of marriage.

We descended upon Dublin airport like a blanket of excited butterflies. After a steaming cup of tea, we embraced our grown-ups in a flurry of hugs and kisses, reminding them that it was their turn to embark on an adventure with us in London next. Our faces shone with eagerness for one final moment together before takeoff.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



It was such a short hop to Heathrow that we had hardly settled into our flight, and the plane was descending to land. On our drive back to our apartment, I told Tony about our visit to the famine memorial.

‘They say that sharks followed the ships leaving the harbour, scavenging on the dead bodies thrown overboard by the ship's crew,’ he added.

‘The famine must have been a difficult time,’ I sighed.

That night in our bed, Tara and I made love as if it were our first time or deprived of sex for years. It amazed me how much I loved her. Every moment of the day, I was thinking of her. Thinking of her would bring a smile to my face. She was more precious than gold or diamonds.

The thought of gold made me remember the gold bars in my safe. They were accumulating again; there must be more than two kilos. It was unfair to the staff to have that much gold in stock. If the word gets out about the gold, it will attract all the low life, especially with my frequent absence.

I went to work the following morning feeling all jumpy, expecting trouble. I collected my keys from June, and the first thing I checked was my safe, but I was unduly worried. The gold bars were all there; the staff had taken good care of the business. Everything was as it should be.

As a precaution, I placed the gold bars in a leather case to take to the bank for storage in my safety deposit box.

I moved on to the workshop, but even there, everyone was happy and greeted me with smiles. Everything seemed perfect, and I started to doubt my intuition warning me something was wrong. As a precaution, I visited the jewellery shop after depositing the gold bars.

Tara greeted me with a big smile and assured me everything was well. 'My only problem is that Wendy has sold some of the shells I use for display purposes. I will have to get more, but I can't find the shop's telephone number in the lakes where I bought them,' Tara complained.

I felt relieved. I hugged Tara and kissed her with all the passion I could muster on the shop floor amongst the customers. Tara blushed.

'What was that for?'

‘I love you,’ I responded. The customers nearest to us laughed and started clapping. Embarrassed, I led Tara into the workshop for some privacy.

‘Sorry about that; I don’t know what came over me.’

Now it was Tara who started to laugh. ‘You should have seen the customer's faces. They must think it is a love shop.’

I told Tara I had this crazy feeling that something was wrong. ‘I was relieved that you were okay. I lost control of myself.’

Tara smiled that beautiful smile that you could even see in her eyes. Her entire face seemed to light up. She was beautiful, and I loved her.

I gave her another kiss before leaving. The customers were still grouped in the showroom, waiting for us. It wasn't comfortable, I did not know what they were expecting, but I made a beeline for the front door and left.

I returned to park my car behind the furniture business and opened the door to get out. That was the last I remembered until I woke up in darkness on a strange mattress. My head was aching, and I felt dizzy.

There was sticky liquid all over the place. I thought it was blood.

I tried to move, but that caused me to ache even more. Finally, I lay there, wondering where I was. I could hear the water lapping against the side. I thought I was on a boat, yet I could feel no movement. The craft must have moored alongside a jetty.

I lay there for hours in an unconscious state, waking up and drifting off again before I could see a glimmer of light coming through the window blinds. I started making sense of my surroundings, lying on a foam mattress in the forward section of the boat. There was blood everywhere.

I was frightened that my attackers might return. After a while, I realised that I was alone. I tried to shout for help but lost consciousness again.

The boat's owner found me and called the police and ambulance service.

When I regained consciousness again, I was on a clean white bed with nurses and a doctor around the bed. The doctor was speaking to me. I could not fully understand; everyone was blurry and out of focus. All I could grasp were the words induced coma, and then I lost consciousness again.

When I woke again, I was in a different room, connected to various monitors but feeling better. I could focus on the doctor's face. He spoke, 'You are in intensive care and have been in a medically induced coma for the last two days to help you recover from the blow on your head. The swelling is easing, and we brought you out of the coma. All being well, we will move you to a general ward in a few days.'

I tried to talk, but the words came out as a whisper; the Doctor had to lean forward to hear me.

'What hospital is this? Please tell my fiancé Tara at *Jones of London* Jewellers in Hampstead.'

The Doctor smiled and nodded. 'You are in the Ealing Hospital. No more talking; you must rest.'

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



I went to sleep again and woke up that evening with a soft, delicate hand holding mine. I instantly knew it was Tara and felt rescued. I whispered. ‘I love you.’

Tara smiled, her face brightening up the whole room. ‘I love you too. The nurse said no talking. I am only allowed to sit here and hold your hand.’

Soon the nurse asked Tara to leave, allowing me to sleep. I could hear Tara discussing a private room for me when I left intensive care.

The following morning Tara was beside my bed, holding my hand. I don’t know what I would have done without her. She gave me a reason to live. To wake up each morning.

The doctor came for his rounds and smiled at me. ‘You don’t need me. You have the best medicine sitting next to you, holding your hand. No wonder you are recovering well. Tomorrow we can disconnect most of the monitors and move you to a private room. The police want to interview you, but I told them to wait a few more days until I feel you are up to it.’

My voice had improved, and I thanked the doctor. 'I agree with you; Tara is the best medicine I have ever had. She is lovely.'

Tara stayed the entire day holding my hand. She must have stayed next to me even while I was sleeping. The nurse on duty organised her lunch. It was only that evening that she went home.

The following morning she was back and helped the Doctor and nurses move me to my private room. The Doctor explained to her that most of the danger was behind me and that I would fully recover; it only needed time and love.

When they settled me in my new room, Tara held my hand and talked to me. 'I don't want to upset you, but I thought you needed to know what happened the night you went missing. Thieves broke into your furniture shop, opened your safe, and stole the contents, leaving it open with the keys still in the safe door. They did not take anything else, according to June.'

'No, they did not,' I responded.

Tara, concerned, squeezed my hand. 'Yes, they did, Stephen.'

I laughed and tried to pull her towards me, but I was still too weak. 'No, you don't understand. There was nothing in the safe for them to steal. That morning before I visited you, I emptied the contents of the safe into a leather case. I placed it in my safety deposit box at the bank.'

Tara gave me a big kiss, smiling from ear to ear. 'You clever man. You suspected something like that to happen. That is why you were emotional in the jeweller shop that day. The police will be surprised. They have desperately tried to determine how much gold was in your safe. June thought that it must have been about three kilos.'

I asked Tara to do me a favour. 'I am sure the police will be here soon to cross-examine me. When they arrive, would you go to my office? In my diary, there will be a listing for Tom Adams. Please call him and ask him to come and see me. Do not tell anyone. I have a hunch, and I want him to investigate it.'

I had hardly finished talking to Tara, and Chief Inspector Metcalfe and his Sergeant entered the room.

Tara made her excuses, promising to visit in the afternoon and departed.

Chief Inspector pulled up a chair next to my bed and began. ‘Now tell me everything you can remember about your attack.’

I gave Chief Inspector Metcalfe as many details as I could remember, including removing my safe's content before the burglary occurred.

The Sergeant looked up at me. ‘How did you know to remove the content of your safe? Did someone give you a warning?’

‘No,’ I replied. ‘I have been worrying about the amount of gold in the safe all weekend. It is unfair to the staff to have such a quantity of gold on the premises, especially in my absence. I should have taken it to the bank before leaving for the weekend.’

I turned to Chief Inspector Metcalfe. ‘On whose boat did they find me? I need to thank the owner for saving my life and apologise for the mess I made.’

‘It is a Mr Upton,’ Chief Inspector replied.

‘Could you please write down his details and telephone number? I will ask Tara to contact him.’

The Chief wrote down Mr Upton’s details for me on a page of his notebook and placed it on my bedside table.

That afternoon Mr Tom Adams came to see me. I explained what had happened and what I wanted him to investigate. 'Firstly, someone must have informed them about the gold in the safe. One of the girls working in the showroom must have let it slip to one of their friends. I don't think they are involved, but they may have a friend who knows these culprits. Please investigate and photograph all the friends they have. Perhaps I can recognise one. Secondly, the boat on which they found me; someone must have known about the yacht—they did not pick some random boat. I have here the name and address of the owner. Please check out his friends and the friends of the boat owners moored close by.'

Tom said it would take about two weeks to gather the information. Still, he would contact me immediately if he found something suspicious. He wrote down Mr Upton's address and left.

Tara entered and came to sit beside me. 'Have you been waiting outside? You poor girl, I am sorry. Let me order you some tea,' I inquired.

'When I arrived, the nurse said you were busy with some detective, and I did not want to interrupt,' Tara said.

‘Probably the right decision. It would be best if you didn’t get involved in the investigation. I will never forgive myself if something happens to you,’ I replied.

I suggested that we have some routine. ‘In the future, unless it is something serious, you don’t visit in the morning. We make afternoons and evenings ours, and I will tell the police and others to come only in the morning. Then you will never again have to wait in the passage.’

I gave Tara Mr Upton’s details and asked, ‘Could you please phone him and thank him for saving my life? If he did not phone the police and ambulance, I might not be here today. He found me on his boat.’

Tara smiled. ‘I will phone him this evening. I owe him a big thank you.’

‘If he asks where we got his information, you can tell him Chief Inspector Metcalfe gave it to me.’

Tara remained with me all day. That evening the entire staff from both businesses came to visit. There was hardly any space to move in my room. They all gave me best wishes and get-well cards; some girls brought me flowers. June assured me that the furniture section was running smoothly. Tony and Sarah were also there, wishing me a full recovery. It was like having a party; everyone was in good spirits

with lots of laughter. The nurse had to come and reprimand my visitors. 'Please keep the noise down. It is a hospital. There are sick people here who need their rest.'

George apologised to the nurse. 'We all apologise for the noise. We are excited and thankful that you saved our friend's life.'

Although my visitors upset the nurses somewhat, it was therapeutic to me. I felt wanted, and it raised my spirits. I thanked them all for coming. They all left, leaving Tara and me to ourselves. I felt grateful to have Tara's affection; she was beautiful and caring. I tried to move towards her for a kiss, but my wounds prevented my attempt. She had to lean towards and kiss me, reminding me it was still early in the healing process for the several stab wounds I had received. Between her kisses, I murmured, 'God, I can't wait to feel your body against mine. It has been such a long time.'

Tara smiled. 'I love and miss you too. Soon we will be together again.'

Before Tara left, I reminded her to call Mr Upton. I owed him much, even though it mystified me why they had chosen his boat. There had to be a link somehow.

The following morning I regretted the arrangement I had made with Tara. I was beginning to feel lonely with her not around when an elderly man in his eighties opened the door and hesitantly entered. 'Are you Mr Jones who bled all over my boat?'

Grinning, I answered, 'Yes, I apologise for my mess. Next time, I will be more careful. Thank you for arriving at the right time and calling the authorities. I think you saved my life.'

'Your young lady friend contacted me last night and thanked me for finding you. She is lovely. She said you were recovering well, but I decided to come and see for myself. You are a lucky young man; we have not used the motor yacht in years. My wife and I decided to sell it, and as a precaution, that morning, I visited the boat to see if it was still in good order before I put it up for sale. Nobody would want to buy it with a body in one of the cabins. We have put the sale on hold, waiting to see if the insurance pays for a thorough steam clean.'

'If the insurance company reneges on paying for a steam clean, I will gladly pay,' I added hastily.

Our discussion was interrupted by Tara entering the room, saying, 'Sorry to interrupt. I wanted to let you know that Mr Upton might visit you this morning.'

Mr Upton smiled. 'Is this your lady friend that called me last night? She looks as lovely as she sounds. You are indeed a lucky man.'

Tara kissed me, and I smiled with pleasure. 'Mr Upton tells me that he and his wife intend to sell the boat after it has a steam clean. Why don't you and Mr Upton visit the boat, take photos and collect all the particulars for me to study? I might be interested in buying it for us to use on weekends. Living in a flat is constricted.'

Tara beamed. 'What a good idea. Nevertheless, I would like to see the boat before they clean all the mess. It will be a scene to remember forever.'

I disagreed with that. The less I saw of my blood, the better. I had enough pain from the incident and was a bit squeamish.

They set off together to Richmond, where Mr Upton moored his boat christened *Seabreeze*.

That afternoon Tara returned full of excitement with pages of literature regarding the boat. 'It is a lovely old boat full of gorgeous woodwork and fitted like a caravan. It can sleep two couples and has a toilet and shower room with a fully equipped kitchen and a dining table. Stairs lead up to the main cabin, where

you steer the boat. There is a fitted sofa to relax on and doors on either side to enter from outside.'

Tara continued. 'I am sure George and Simon could restore the woodwork and upholstery, and the boat will be as good as new. Everything seems to be there. It simply needs some tender loving care.'

I smiled at Tara. 'You like the boat. It would be great to cruise up and down the river on weekends.'

Tara beamed. 'Mr Upton said you could easily sail to Ireland or France in it. The boat has a powerful diesel engine, suitable for the sea. He and his wife visited France several times and sailed around Britain once. However, he stated you will have to improve the engine before attempting such trips as it was long ago since they were that adventurous.'

'Well, I suggest you take Simon and George to look at the boat and give an estimate of the cost involved. Also, ask them if they know someone who could overhaul the engine and at what cost. I do not know the high seas, and it will take a lot of training before I attempt something daring.'

Tara and I studied the boat's layout. I had to admit that it had all the conveniences of a caravan, even a sink with running water in the small kitchen. There was also a colour television. Mr Upton agreed we

could take over his mooring, bypassing the long waiting list for mooring on the Thames here in London.

Mr Upton's asking price was reasonable. 'If the restoration cost plus engine reconditioning is less than ten thousand pounds, let us buy the boat,' I told Tara.

Tara nearly jumped out of her skin with joy. 'Yipee! A boat would be lovely. I don't know much about engines, but George and Simon will restore the boat for a small charge. Mr and Mrs Upton did a good job looking after the yacht. I think it looks lovely even without George restoring all the wood panelling. The only downside is your mess, bleeding all over the bed. I don't believe steam cleaning is the answer; Simon must make a new mattress and cover.'

Looking at Tara's photos, I agreed that the boat appeared in good condition. Still, I insisted that George and Simon do their bit. 'I want it to be like new. They must recover all the cushions and seat covers. It would help if you chose the colour scheme. They must restore the wood panelling to look like new. I would like them to paint the boat inside and out. I think the outside must be white. The bedroom, toilet and shower do not need dark wood panelled; you could also paint them lighter. I will let you decide. The wood panel everywhere makes it look a bit old-fashioned.'

I continued, 'The hull will have to be scraped clean and repainted with a red stripe as it is now. You can leave that for me to arrange with Mr Upton as you are supposed to do it yearly. Mr Upton may also know who could overhaul the engine.'

'That is enough for now. I think that will keep you busy in the mornings,' I said with a smile.

Tara's eyes were sparkling with excitement. 'It is somewhat of a challenge you have given me, but I am up to it and appreciate it. I have aged considerably, I think, lying in bed at night worrying about you. Restoring the boat will keep my mind occupied, thinking of the future with us sailing on the river. You better get well and get out of this hospital soon. You are needed in my bed and on the boat.'

I had no visitors the following day until the afternoon when Tara, Simon and George walked into my room. Tara was the first to react. After kissing me, she exploded with excitement. 'Mr Upton said that an engine overall plus cleaning and painting the hull will cost about three thousand pounds. George and Simon quoted the same for their share of the work.'

'Well then, you better tell Mr Upton we will go ahead and buy the boat,' I said, smiling at her.

George joined in the conversation. 'I am also of the opinion that dark wood panelling is old fashioned. I have it in mind to use melamine on marine plywood. It does not need painting; it is waterproof and cleans easily. It is the same material as the kitchen cupboards used on the boat. White shower and toilet with a light colour for the dining table would brighten the inside of the boat.'

'How long will it take you and Simon?' I asked George.

'It would take me about a week,' he replied.

'For me, about the same,' Simon added.

I remarked, 'I will give you both a week's paid leave for the week after next. Next week, you will have to buy all your material and do this job the following week. Will that suit both of you?'

George and Simon both nodded their heads in acknowledgement. I turned to Tara. 'You are responsible for choosing the colours and paying for the material. Please also tell Mr Upton we are buying the boat and to arrange the takeover of the mooring. You can pay him as soon as he has given you his invoice.'

‘One more thing. I noticed one solar panel on the roof of the main cabin. There seems to be space for two. Could you guys find out if it is worthwhile to fit another solar panel to give the batteries a better charge?’

George and Simon returned to work, leaving Tara and me with some quality time. Tara got on the bed beside me and gently cuddled and kissed me.

‘Don’t take advantage of an injured man. When I am better, I will make you pay,’ I said.

‘I can’t wait,’ Tara teased and kissed me again.

Mr Upton came to see me to thank me for the payment. He stated that the company maintaining the yacht for him could immediately clean and paint the hull and overhaul the engine. Ready for when my team wanted to revamp the inside.

I agreed and asked, ‘When I am out of the hospital, would you mind spending a few days to show me the basics of steering and caring for *Seabreeze*? I have never driven a boat this size and am quite nervous.’

Mr Upton agreed with a big smile. ‘It would be my pleasure. Your young lady has asked as well. I am happy to teach both of you. I will also search at home

for the instructions I have on navigating. We bought loads of books and instruments when we sailed around Britain. Now that I have sold the boat, I will have no further use for them, and you are welcome to have them.'

I thanked Mr Upton. He added, 'Can the boat people collect her this afternoon? I have a spare set of keys with me they can use.'

'No problem. Please remind the boat builders to be finished by the end of next week, before my chaps arrive.'

After Mr Upton left, I thought this hospital room was busy. 'I am not getting a lot of rest here. Mr Upton is such a pleasant man I did not ask how my abductors knew about his boat and where they got the keys. There must be a link somehow.' But I thought it was best to let the police or Tom Adams investigate.

After lunch, Tara burst in like a breath of fresh air. 'Sue Kemp, your part-timer and I had a lovely morning selecting material for the boat. I think it will look lovely, and I can't wait to see the finished product.'

Tara was enthusiastic about everything she did. I could not help smiling. 'Mr Upton was here and said the boat builders are collecting the boat this afternoon,

and they should finish next Friday. I hope you have completed your measurements.'

Tara assured me that she and Sue measured everywhere they could think. 'Besides, I will visit these boat people every morning to check if they are doing an excellent job. I am not letting anyone mess with our boat. By next Friday, I will know everything there is to know about that engine, and they will be tired of me checking on them. They will pay me to take the boat away.'

I told Tara, 'At the moment, the boat is called *Seabreeze*. You might want to change the name to something you like. You can also instruct them to paint the deck. I thought white, but again you can choose different colours providing it is light and bright.'

Holding her hand, I asked, 'I know I am boring, but how are the businesses?'

Tara exclaimed. 'No, you are not boring. I love the business and am glad and proud to say both shops are running smoothly. There is a bit of a hiccup with George and Simon, but that is understandable. They are a bit behind with the excitement of choosing material for the boat. That's why I have asked Sue to help me choose the fabric.'

A nurse arrived with a tea trolley. 'Afternoon tea for the sick and lazy?'

We both answered in unison. 'Yes, please!'

Tara jumped up and helped the nurse prepare our tea.

'Mr Upton tells me that we are both enrolled in lessons with him to drive and maintain the boat. I am glad as I know nothing about motor yachts,' I told Tara.

'Nor do I know anything. I can't wait for the workmen to finish the work. It will look lovely,' Tara replied.

Tara helped me to sit up and enjoy my tea. It was still painful to move around. I pulled a face, complaining. 'I sometimes wonder when the pain will go away.'

Tara was holding my hand. 'Please be patient. The Doctor said you are doing well. You are trying to be active too soon. Shall I ask the nurse for a painkiller?'

'No, I need to get used to it; I don't like being half asleep all the time. I don't know what I would have done without you. You give me a reason to stay alive. Thank you,' I said.

Tara squeezed my hand. 'I love you.'

I lay in bed quietly, holding her hand. It was peaceful that I could feel myself drifting to sleep. My last thoughts were how lovely and caring Tara was and how fortunate I was to have her by my side.

I woke up still holding Tara's hand. The room was semi-darkness. It must be evening. Tara had been sitting next to my bed all afternoon till now. Alarmed, I asked, 'What is the time? I am sorry I fell asleep. You poor girl, sitting here next to a sleeping person all this time. Oh, I do love you and thank you. I will try not to let that happen again. You give up your time to be with me, and then I fall asleep.'

Tara smiled. 'Sleeping helps to heal, and I want you to get better. Think nothing of it.'

The nurse entered and spoke to Tara. 'I am afraid it is time for you to say good night. Lover boy here needs his sleep, and it is getting late.'

Tara laughed. 'He has barely woken up.'

The nurse turned to me, looking stern. 'I can't understand you, men. How could you possibly fall asleep in the presence of such lovely company? No more sweeties for you.'

The following morning Chief Inspector Metcalfe came to visit. 'I have come to update you on our progress and see how you are.'

I smiled at the Chief Inspector. 'I am a bit frustrated with my slow recovery, but I must admit that they are looking well after me. Now let's have this news you have. It will brighten up my day.'

'Well, the wheels of progress are slow in police investigations, but now and then, we get lucky. One of your safe robbers was clumsy and left his fingerprints. We have him on our records,' Chief Inspector declared, reaching for his briefcase and extracting a brown manilla folder. 'We are hoping that you might identify him. He is Mr Peter Morris, part of London's gay community.'

I studied the photograph and informed Chief Inspector Metcalfe. 'I don't know this man, but he remarkably resembles Mr Alexandra Morris, who you currently have in custody. Is it perhaps his brother?'

Chief Inspector smiled. 'I also think it may be his brother. Forensics are cross-referencing DNA as we speak.'

'If the two are connected, it could explain the ease with which the burglars opened the safe. They may

have a copy of the key. I remarked that the safe was in the jewellery shop where Alexandra worked.

Chief Inspector Metcalfe remained for a cup of tea before he returned to work. He promised to call in the following week with more news regarding the identity of Peter Morris.

After lunch, I slept until Tara arrived with chocolates and grapes. 'You have arrived to fatten me up,' I said. 'How was your morning?'

Tara kissed me. 'Everything is running smoothly. I had to order more shells. Wendy keeps on selling my displays. At this rate, we will become a shell shop.'

'Why don't you use a separate cabinet with shells for sale, and maybe the customers will leave your display alone?' I offered.

Tara smiled. 'That's what I have done. I have ordered enough shells to fill a cabinet; we will see how it goes. How was your morning?'

I told Tara that Chief Inspector Metcalfe visited and told me they had a lead. 'One of the burglars has left his fingerprints on the safe, and they think it is Alexandra Morris's brother. He felt that someone leaked the information about the contents of the safe. Soon we may know who that may be. Now that the

police have a lead, the whole plot will unravel; you watch.'

I continued. 'In my opinion, the leak comes from Jane Elliot. I do not think she was directly involved with my abduction or the burglary. Still, I think she inadvertently let it slip to one of her friends that there was a large amount of gold in my safe. This friend may have told someone involved in the burglary.'

'To avoid the police finding out, she was the informer, causing more disruption at work. I think it would be best if she resigned. It would be best if you did not tell her directly. What I want you to do is, tell Wendy, your sales lady, in casual conversation that the police think there was a leak regarding the gold. They are about to find out and arrest the person responsible. Do not name anyone, especially who I suspect. Then we will sit back and see what happens. I am sure Wendy will tell the rest of the staff.'

Tara nodded. 'I can do that. You are trying to flush out the guilty person without making a fuss.'

'You are correct, but please do not elaborate or mention names. Only casually tell Wendy. Do not tell anyone else. Treat it as unimportant. The word will spread automatically; Wendy and June are friends. Please be careful. These people are dangerous. Remember, they nearly killed me,' I warned Tara.

Tara promised to be careful and set our plan in motion the following morning.

Laughing, she explained. 'I also had an interesting morning. I visited the boat builders that took our boat away and reprimanded them for sitting about doing nothing. I warned them that I would visit every morning to check their progress. The owner of the boatyard said they were waiting for the paint. I said that the paint wouldn't walk here. Does he not have a car, or should I fetch the paint? He immediately got in his van and left; to fetch the paint, I hope.'

I took Tara's hand and laughed. 'You are a fierce employer. Have mercy on the workers. I bet they were only on their second cup of tea. If you revisit them at the boatyard, please ask them to check the chrome railings on the deck. Ask them to replace where necessary.'

I made sure not to fall asleep again and changed the subject. I was worried about what Tara's father thought about my abduction. I bet he was concerned about Tara's safety and would hold me responsible. 'What do your mom and dad think about my incident? I bet they are furious that I have not yet stopped this gang,' I asked Tara.

Tara smiled at me. 'It is nice that you are concerned about my safety. I can assure you that

although my parents are concerned, they have lived in danger all their lives. You see, my dad was a member of the IRA, and my mother and I would never know if he would return each night safely. That is why I detest violence. I would not worry too much. They are used to living in danger. You are doing the right thing convincing him that you have the situation under control. I don't want him and his mates to get involved in our problems. Their solutions are not to my liking and usually illegal.'

I was astonished and apologised. 'I did not want to pry into your family's past. I did not know. It must have been a harsh upbringing. That explains my fear of your father's opinion, how I am handling the case and looking after your well-being. He reminds me of the sergeant major we had during my national service training.'

Tara explained, 'I should have told you sooner, but I wanted to put everything behind me. It is the past and best forgotten. My father is a hard man and comes off as fierce, but he is a puppy inside.'

My recovery remained slow. I was still bedridden and couldn't even walk to the toilet. The doctor said I had to be patient. It was driving me mad. I couldn't wait to get out of the hospital.

Tara was loving and patient with me; her visits and the daily news kept me going. The following Monday, she arrived with a result. Jane Elliot resigned that morning. I kissed Tara and remarked, 'The plan worked. Could you ask Chief Inspector Metcalfe to come and see me?'

Tara also informed me that the boat was looking good. They were busy with the engine overhaul and would be finished before Friday, ready for next week's interior refit. Tara took photos of the boat on trestles out of the water while they were busy working on the hull.

'She looks a lot bigger out of the water. Have you decided on a name yet?' I asked.

'I would like to keep the name *Seabreeze*. I like the name; it suits her. I will ask the sign writer to repaint the name,' Tara replied.

With Tara's help that day, I sat sideways on the bed for the first time with my feet dangling down the side. It was still painful, but I managed and felt proud of myself.

Tara was alarmed. 'Take it easy. Don't overdo things; you have plenty of time.'

'Tomorrow, I will stand up,' I replied.

Tara had worry etched on her face. 'Please don't try to stand up without me to help. I do not want you to slip and fall.'

The following morning I told the Doctor while doing his rounds that I sat up the previous day on the bed with my legs dangling down.

'Did you have any pain?' was his follow-up question.

'I was sore all over but bearable. It made me feel great. I will try to stand today when Tara comes,' I answered.

'The exercise will do you good and speed up your recovery. I must, however, warn you to take it easy. If you feel any sharp pains, you must stop immediately. If you tear any of the knife wounds, it will delay your recovery by weeks. When you try to stand the first time, ensure the nurse is with Tara to help you back into bed in case you have severe pain. Don't try to walk straight away if you stand without too much pain. Try standing for a few days, and then we will see if you are ready to walk,' the doctor told me.

The doctor left, and immediately Chief Inspector Metcalfe entered. 'I am sorry. Did they keep you waiting outside?'

Chief Inspector smiled. 'Not a problem. You get used to hospitals after a while. You said you wanted to see me.'

'Yes', I acknowledged and continued to tell him what Tara and I did to see if we could fish out the person who informed the burglars about the gold in the safe. 'I don't think that Jane is involved in the burglary, but that she unintentionally slipped the information to a friend who might be concerned or know someone implicated in the burglary.'

'That is interesting. It certainly gives us a lead from a different angle to investigate. I will certainly have a word with Miss Elliot. You don't happen to have her home address, do you?'

I told the Chief he could get Jane's home address from June Rhyder at the shop.

Chief Inspector Metcalfe left in a hurry. 'Shame,' he did not want to admit it, but the doctor kept him waiting too long.

That afternoon when Tara arrived, I noticed the nurse stayed in the room. I looked at her, enquiring. 'The Doctor said I was to stay to help Tara when you want to stand,' she remarked.

I smiled at the nurse. ‘Well, here goes. I do not want you to get behind in your duties. I better try now.’

I manoeuvred myself into a sitting-up position with my legs dangling over the side of the bed. It was a long way from my feet to the ground, and I figured I would have to slide down to the floor slowly not to get too much of a jolt when I hit the ground. How I was ever going to get back up in bed, I did not know. I slid down, hanging on for dear life to the bedding to break my descent. My feet touched the ground without much pain, and I tried to stand up, but my legs were weak; I could feel them shaking under me. Fortunately, Tara and the nurse steadied me, holding me upright.

‘Look, I can stand,’ I announced proudly.

After a short while, I began to complain. ‘Please help me back into bed. I think that is enough for today.’

It took me three days of practice trying to stand with the aid of Tara and the nurse before I could stand comfortably on my own. Getting back into bed was still impossible. I wondered why they made hospital beds that high.

On Friday morning Mr Tom Adams, the PI, brought me his report. He apologised and said, ‘After

two weeks of surveillance, I could not detect anything unusual. I am sorry it was a waste of time.'

He handed me his report, which I had studied for a while. I noticed one name that appeared in connection with the shop and the boat and smiled. I did not mention what I spotted but thanked him. 'Tom, this will do fine. You did a great job. Please let me have your invoice, and I will arrange payment.'

That afternoon when Tara arrived, I got out of bed and took a few steps towards her. I hugged and kissed her proudly. 'I am nearly better. I can walk.' Tara had to help me back into bed.

After I made myself comfortable and my breathing returned to normal, she updated me about the boat. 'Seabreeze is now back at its mooring. She looks great. In addition to reconditioning the engine, they have insulated the engine compartment. You can hardly hear the motor when running. George and Simon have now started on the interior. We have decided to buy you a new captain's chair that you can raise or lower after sitting down. The old chair was the wrong colour and too high. You would have struggled to get on it.'

I thanked Tara for her dedicated project supervision. I promised her a cruise when the doctor

discharged me from the hospital, and I learned how to drive our boat.

I did not show Tara the report made by Mr Adams as I was positive she would have spotted what I picked up from the account. I was frightened that it would make her anxious.

I was positive I now knew who Peter's murderer was. Still, I decided to keep it to myself until I was fit enough to do something about it.

My priority was to recover fully, and then I would decide what to do.

I was getting better at getting out of bed, walking to and sitting on an easy chair. The nurse still had to help me get back on the bed. The doctor, impressed, called one of the porters and asked him to find a wooden box that could serve as a step to aid me in getting on the bed.

The porter was back in five minutes with a wooden step. I found that I could manage to get into bed using the box. 'Try getting in and out of bed for three days. If you find it easy, we will remove your catheter. Then you can walk to the toilet to relieve yourself; it will be an excellent exercise for you and your bladder,' the doctor said.

That evening Sarah and Tony visited. I could hardly get a word in. Tara was excitedly telling them about the changes made to the boat. She invited them to join her the following morning for a grand tour. Tony enquired, 'You can truly sail her to Ireland?' Tara responded, 'Mr Upton said, with ease and to France. He and his wife sailed the boat right around Britain.'

At that point, I interrupted. 'Before we attempt a cruise like that, we will both need a lot of training. I have not seen the boat, except for looking at the photos Tara showed me. I wish I could come with you tomorrow.'

Sarah exclaimed. 'Going to Dublin by boat will be fun. Imagine anchored on the River Liffey and inviting our parents to come for a cruise. They will be astounded. Does it have a cooker?'

Tara laughed. 'Wouldn't it be fun? Yes, it has a cooker and a fridge. We can even invite them for a meal.'

I interrupted, holding up my hand. 'Hold on. You have to study navigation before you can sail on the open seas. I don't know yet how to start the engines. Please don't make any arrangements. It might be a long time before I can sail a boat.'

Tara smiled. 'You said that from next week you would be walking. Sailing to Dublin should not be a problem if you can achieve that. You could study navigation while in the hospital, doing nothing.'

'Then I suppose you better enrol me in a navigation course and bring me all the literature. Mr Upton might know what is best,' I replied.

Sarah smiled. 'That settles it then. We can continue with our planning. When can we go for a ride on the boat?'

Tara was full of confidence. 'I will ask Mr Upton to take *Seabreeze* for a trial run next weekend. Someone has to test the motor; he is the best person for the job. You are all welcome.'

I had to recover quickly, or these girls would run away with the boat project. They were excited by the prospect of sailing. Tara would be captain in no time if I didn't watch out.

I practised getting out of bed and making regular short walks. On Wednesday, the doctor agreed to remove my catheter. His prognosis was that the stab wounds were healing nicely. The only worry was the bash on my head. He warned me that there was a lot of pressure on my brain and that I must take it easy as

the bones in my head had not fully healed. He booked me for another brain CT scan to check the progress.

Chief Inspector Metcalfe visited me to update me on the case. He mentioned to me that they had three suspects. I did not know them, except Peter Morris, who I knew only by name. He also felt confident that they would soon be able to identify who informed the burglars that there was gold in my safe.

The police progress was slow. We already knew that Jane had let it slip about the gold in my safe. I suppose the police needed proof before they could accuse anyone. Chief Inspector Metcalfe had thus far not established a link with the boat.

I smiled and informed him, 'I have bought the boat they found me on, and they have restored it to look brand new.'

Chief Inspector Metcalfe smiled. 'Some people have all the luck. I always wanted to have a boat.' Then he left, walking out of the room.

With the help of Mr Upton, Tara enrolled me in a navigation course and arrived with her arms full of documents, booklets and a laptop.

I first discovered that *Seabreeze* was ill-equipped for sea-going expeditions. I had to install equipment

to safely take her to sea, especially for a novice like me.

I would still have to study the basic navigation methods in case of equipment failure. Still, I would much sooner rely on navigational electronics.

At a minimum, the navigational electronics needed were a multi-function device (MFD) with a clear, intuitive and easy-to-use user interface, called a chart plotter in some circles, including cartography for my cruising area: a fixed-mount VHF radio and a depth sounder or sonar.

It was all I needed on a bright sunny day with unrestricted visibility. But in limited visibility, radar was likely the single most crucial tool. Nothing was more helpful in filling in the picture of what's around you when nightfall, rain, or fog limit view from the pilothouse windows. Radar was also an invaluable tool when severe weather was moving through. Tracking storms on the radar would give good information to avoid the worst weather.

Automatic Identification System (AIS) helps you see other AIS-equipped vessels around you. If a transceiver was part of the boat's equipment, it also helped those boats see you. It was a small additional investment for a transceiver-which received

information from other vessels and transmitted your information.

The first time you encounter a fast ferry in time because of AIS, you'll be glad you spent the extra money.

Additional electronics for night-time cruising, such as a reflected infrared camera, are also available. It is a valuable tool for extensive nighttime cruising, an autopilot, a device to enhance your night vision and a satellite weather system.

If offshore, out of range of cellular towers, satellite weather would be a helpful tool to have on board.

However, suppose the GPS fails due to a lost signal. I would need to use traditional methods and tools (e.g. paper chart, compass, parallel rulers) to verify the position and calculate course headings and distances to the closest port of call.

The tool needed in such an event would be a magnetic compass to determine the magnetic bearings of landmarks, other ships or celestial bodies. You use a magnetic compass to determine the magnetic heading of the boat—north, south, east, or west—as measured in degrees relative to magnetic north. There are 360 degrees representing a full circle.

Charts for the waterways I wished to travel. Parallel rulers and dividers. Nautical charts provide all the information you need to navigate your boat without GPS. These detailed maps of the water could steer you clear of underwater hazards and guide you to your destination.

In addition to the equipment I had listed, I needed to know how to use it. Then, in an emergency, how to navigate manually. It would require a lot of studies. I had better get started on my course.

I selected the product brand from a marine supplier and, on Tara's next visit, asked her to contact them to install the equipment I had listed.

'Are we sailing to Dublin then?' Tara remarked.

Laughingly I replied. 'It is fun getting *Seabreeze* ready. However, I am still far off from knowing how to sail her. I know from your photos there is a mast on the boat. Could you please find out from the suppliers if it is correct for their navigating equipment or if we must replace it with a new mast?'

'If you are buying all this navigational equipment, why must you study how to navigate manually?' Tara enquired.

‘It is in case the GPS fails for whatever reason. It seems the first thing I must master is a sextant,’ I replied.

‘What is a sextant?’ Tara frowned, enquiring.

‘My textbooks state that you use a sextant to determine the angle between the horizon and celestial bodies, such as the Sun, the Moon, or a star. It is used in celestial navigation to determine latitude and longitude. The device comprises a circle arc marked off in degrees and a movable radial arm pivoted at the circle's centre.’

I showed Tara a picture from one of my textbooks. Tara declared, ‘It looks complex and difficult to me.’

‘I know it looks complex and will require a learning period to master this instrument. You may ask Mr Upton if he has an old sextant he is willing to sell now that he has stopped sailing. Buying a new one is expensive, and his help coaching me might help accelerate me to master the instrument.’

My physical fitness was improving day by day. I walked everywhere and spent most of my time studying navigation in a chair. Tara informed me that the boat was ready and looked brand new. I was dying to see it.

The doctor was pleased with my physical progress and said I could recover at home. However, he insisted that I needed one more head CT scan. If that were positive, then he would discharge me from the hospital.

Two days later, the Doctor gave me the all-clear but warned me to take it easy. 'You are fit to go home, but do not try strenuous work for at least another three weeks.'

I phoned Tara with the news and asked her to collect me. The nurse helped me to get dressed in street clothes, and I joked. 'You will not try to dress me when I am fit in three weeks,' I laughed.

She smiled. 'You better go home. You are getting too well to keep in hospital.'

The nurse helped me pack all my belongings into my suitcase. I was all ready when Tara arrived. We both thanked the nurse and made our way out of the building.

I breathed in the smell of freedom as we pulled out of the driveway, and I couldn't help but smile. When my feet touched the pavement outside our flat, I struggled to catch my breath on the stairs.

My legs felt heavy, like two blocks of cement, and each step up felt like scaling a mountain. Fear struck me—if I couldn't make it up these few steps. They would confine me to my apartment, a prisoner in the place I am supposed to call home.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



Tara returned to the jeweller shop, and I went downstairs to see how my staff performed in my absence. A strange young blond girl met me, trying to serve me. Before I could respond, June came running up to us.

‘Stephen, this is Linda Percy; she replaced Jane.’ June then turned to a red-faced Linda. ‘This is your boss, Mr Jones.’

With the introductions behind us, I explained that I would return to work full-time from tomorrow. ‘The doctor declared me fit to work, providing I don’t undertake heavy lifting and running.’ I thanked June for looking after the shop. ‘Today, I am saying hello to everyone and testing my strength. I have already discovered that I must take the stairs slowly and carefully.’

I asked Linda if she was enjoying her job. She beamed with delight. ‘I find it satisfying and rewarding. I always wanted to serve customers.’

I turned to June. ‘It has been such a long time; we will chat as soon as I greet the workshop staff.’

On entering the workshop, I found George, Simon and Sue hard at work. They seemed to stop what they were doing and greeted me together. 'Welcome back. It is good to see you back at work.'

I responded with a smile. 'Thank you. It feels as if I have been gone for a long time. Is everything going to schedule here?'

George replied, 'We fell behind when restoring the boat, but now we are catching up fast. Are you completely recovered, and have the police apprehended the culprits?'

'Not completely recovered yet, but the doctor decided I was wasting hospital space and could make my final healing at home. As for my attackers, the police move slowly. I have no news yet. I suppose it is up to me to track them down. Thank you for the work you have done on the boat. I am dying to see it.'

I returned to my office and decided to check the contents of my safe. It was again full of small gold bars.

I called Simon and June; together, we weighed the gold bars. It was way over one kilo. I made Simon take one kg of the small gold bars and asked him to melt it into a 1kg bar I could take away for assaying. 'Having that much gold on the premises is dangerous for the staff. Look what happened to me,' I said.

I showed June what I was doing and made Simon sign for the gold. 'In the future, if I am away for any reason, I want you to follow the same procedure. When Simon has produced a one kg bar of gold, we will take it to the assay office to certify and mark the gold bar. They have customers who will purchase the gold immediately and pay the funds into our bank account. It is then safely out of our way.'

June had done an excellent job running the show while I was in the hospital. I gave her a bonus and a salary increase. She was delighted.

I studied a few pieces of furniture that George repaired and found his work excellent. The items he worked on were as good as new. I decided the entire staff should receive a bonus as I felt their joint effort kept the business running smoothly. I asked June to arrange it on their next pay packet.

The business functioned well in my absence, making me feel like a spare part. I planned to visit the jewellery shop to see how they coped. I decided against it after the positive results in the furniture shop. My snooping would probably mortify Tara.

Instead, I contacted Mr Upton to arrange lessons in steering *Seabreeze* up and down the Thames. We agreed on every afternoon, starting the following

Monday. He promised to bring his old sextant to show me how to calculate longitude and latitude.

I phoned my insurance broker to insure the boat entirely in case I crashed it against the side or something silly. I was not at all confident in my ability to sail it.

That evening Tara and I spent it together by ourselves, trying to catch up with what we had missed. We even tried making love. It was wonderful having her in my arms, but Tara had to do most of the work, and afterwards, we fell asleep, both exhausted.

That weekend we visited the boat. Tara took some food with them for a picnic. 'It is like a caravan on water; you can live on it,' she said.

Tara was right. The boat was terrific, beautiful in white and chrome railings. Inside, the upholstery was in a light blue shade. It had a fully fitted kitchen with plenty of drawers for cooking utensils and cutlery. It also had a toilet and a shower room, all in white. It was marvellous.

The kitchen had a dining table to convert into a double bed.

Tara showed me the sleeping area. 'This is where they found you. They have removed all the blood stains.'

A cold shudder went down my spine, looking at the bed while listening to Tara. 'They left me here to die. Their time will come,' I whispered to her.

Tara looked at me. 'Why are you whispering? There is nobody here but us.'

I laughed. 'I don't know. I am being silly, I guess. It felt as if someone had walked over my grave. The boat holds bad memories for me. Do not worry; I will get over them.'

We moved back into the steering cabin. The back was on a continuous bench stylishly upholstered in a light blue fabric with scattered cushions. The front of this area housed the steering wheel, the throttle, the instruments and all the navigating screens with a luxurious captain's chair to sit on. It was impressive.

I tried sitting on the captain's chair. It was a perfect fit and made me feel comfortable.

'Do you know how to start the boat?' I asked Tara.

Tara indicated a key. 'I think you turn the key, but Mr Upton said you must warm her up before starting

the boat. I am not sure. It is best to leave it until Monday. Then he can show you himself.'

I decided I better wait for Mr Upton to show me the correct procedure and explain all the instruments. I needed to check the engine's oil level before running the motor.

I had to congratulate the team. I was impressed with the appearance of the boat. 'It looked amazing.'

Monday morning Simon had completed the 1kg gold bar. I asked June to accompany me to the assay office to learn the procedure for future reference. Leaving gold lying around seemed to be a dangerous temptation. 'You don't have to wait until it is one kilo; the assay office will happily accept a half-kilo bar.'

That afternoon I met Mr Upton at the boat mooring. He showed me how to get to the engine to check the oil and any other maintenance that may be necessary. He also showed me all the instruments and how to start the engine. Because it was diesel, you had to half-turn the ignition key first, hold it there for a minute, and then turn it all the way. It started immediately.

Mr Upton showed me where to fill the diesel tank. The inlet was right outside the door on the steering side. The boat had two tanks, one for diesel and one

for water. The water tank filling cap was outside the opposite door from the steering wheel. It was essential not to get mixed up between the two.

We undid the mooring ropes, and he took me for a short cruise, allowing me to take over and feel the steering and the throttle. I thought driving was relatively easy. I felt proud of my progress until we arrived back at the marina, and I attempted to dock her. I thought you had to be an Olympic athlete to do it alone. She was a long boat, nearly forty feet, and you could not simultaneously see the bow or the stern.

Mr Upton docked her with my help. I had to jump ashore and tie the bow while he manoeuvred the stern until the fender touched the side. Then I tied that as well. How one person would manage that, I had no idea.

‘It takes practice, but most sailors manage to dock independently,’ Mr Upton remarked.

Mr Upton continued. ‘There is a method to take the stress out of docking, especially if you go to strange marinas. That is installing bow and stern thrusters. They virtually allow you to control the bow and the stern separately. The Sideshift technology is affordable and easy to install.’

‘That sounds to me exactly what I need. It will take me ages to dock *Seabreeze* on my own. Can you recommend someone to fit the thrusters?’

‘The same people who reconditioned the engine could do it. Shall I book her in for next week? That will give us time this week to continue with our lesson. Then you will know the basics when they have installed the thrusters.’

The following morning I phoned Tom Adams. I needed to find out who had attacked me. The police were far too slow for my liking. Chief Inspector Metcalfe was a good man, but all the official red tape made the investigation difficult. I think he needed some help.

Tom had given me a clue about who had passed on the information. However, I did not believe she was involved in the physical attack.

Tom arrived shortly, and I explained the problem to him. ‘I can't allow these guys to get away with nearly killing me. I must find out who they are and let the police and the court punish them.’

Tom agreed to investigate and said that he would contact me shortly. That afternoon I continued my lessons with Mr Upton.

By Friday, I was feeling confident in handling the boat. I could even dock her with someone's help. Although Mr Upton had brought the sextant, I had not yet had the time to practise with it; there were many other points I had to take in. I felt confident enough to invite Tara for a cruise over the weekend.

Mr Upton had arranged for the shipyard to pick *Seabreeze* up on Monday to fit the thrusters, then while the boat was in the boatyard, he would show me how to use a sextant.

That evening I told Tara I would like to take her on a short cruise on the Thames over the weekend.

Tara was delighted. 'You have progressed fast. You must show me what you have learnt. Then I can assist you when we go to Ireland.'

I laughed. 'It is not a lot, but I will show you everything. There is still much to learn before we attempt the open sea.'

Saturday night, we slept on *Seabreeze*. As I got into our bunk again, I experienced a sudden cold shudder. It was a horrible feeling, as if something was wrong. I ignored it, blaming my bad experience when they found me on the same bunk.

The following morning Tara made breakfast on board. She loved the boat. She exclaimed. 'Cooking is such fun in this kitchen. Sorry, I meant galley. Can we spend every weekend on *Seabreeze*? It is such fun. Like being on holiday.'

After breakfast, we cruised on the river. Tara was excited, trying her hand at steering. 'I could do this all day,' she remarked.

I showed her how the navigation equipment worked. She was interested, but steering the boat was what she liked best.

We found a mooring on the side of the river and stopped to have a picnic lunch. It certainly was pleasant having a boat, I thought.

Later that afternoon, we returned to the marina, and Tara helped me with the docking. She jumped on the side to tie the boat up. 'I can see it would be difficult to dock in this confined space alone. 'Will these things you are having fitted tomorrow make it easier?'

'It had better. Otherwise, docking *Seabreeze* single-handedly is near impossible,' I replied.

We both had a lovely day, and on our return home, we fell asleep in each other's arms, exhausted.

The following day about midday, Mr Upton phoned me with the alarming news that *Seabreeze* was on fire. 'The marina could not find your number. Therefore they contacted me. It seems like there was an explosion on your boat. Two other boats were also damaged. I think you should go to the marina immediately.'

I told June I would be out for the rest of the day and rushed to the marina as fast as I could drive.

I struggled to find parking. Firemen, police and spectators crowded the marina. My boat was nowhere to be seen. I thought they must have towed her away. *Seabreeze* was gone. The fireman was struggling to control the fire on the two adjacent boats.

'What happened to my boat? I docked it between the two boats the fireman are working on,' I asked a policeman.

'You mean *Seabreeze*. It exploded,' the policeman replied.

'How can it explode? It was fine yesterday.'

The policeman responded. 'It could be a gas cylinder or something like that. As soon as the firemen have the fire under control, we will salvage

what is left, and our forensic experts will determine the cause.'

Mr Upton appeared by my side and interrupted. 'That's no gas explosion. We keep the gas bottles in her bow. A gas bottle explosion would rip the bows apart, not the entire boat. To me, it looks more like a bomb. Has anyone checked if the man from the boatyard has arrived? He may still be on board.'

The policeman looked alarmed. 'Good God. You mean someone may be on board,' he explained, shouting for his sergeant.

Mr Upton nodded. 'There certainly may be. You had better check.' He gave the policeman the name of the boatyard. 'They were supposed to collect the boat to work on her this morning.'

I interrupted. 'While you are on the phone, ask Chief Inspector Metcalfe to come over. I think this may be another case for CID.'

The police soon established that the boatyard had dropped their employee earlier that day to pilot *Seabreeze* to the boatyard. He had thus far not yet arrived.

By this time, the firemen had extinguished the fires on the two adjacent boats, leaving only superficial

damage. I swapped names and addresses with the owners and advised them that my insurance broker would contact them.

The police decided they needed a diving team as they seriously suspected the boatyard person may have died in the explosion.

Chief Inspector Metcalfe arrived and took charge of the operation. While they were waiting for the diving team, I returned to the jewellery shop to phone my insurance broker and give Tara the bad news.

She was devastated. 'I have been telling the staff and customers what a lovely boat we have and how pleasant a weekend we spent on the river. Now you tell me our lovely boat is gone, blown up. What are we going to do?'

'At least we are insured. That means we can always buy another boat,' I said, trying to console Tara.

She groaned. 'It will not be the same. I put my heart and soul into restoring *Seabreeze*. There could never be another one. Oh, how I hate all this violence.'

'At least we could be thankful that we were not on the boat when the explosion happened. I think it killed the man from the boatyard. I now have to

concentrate on finding out who is responsible. I can't understand why; who could hate me that much to try and harm me?'

Tara went quiet and said, 'You mean the explosion killed somebody.'

I replied. 'We think it. The boatyard sent a man to collect the boat; now, he is missing. I had better return to the marina; the police are waiting for me.'

Before returning, I phoned Tom Adams and explained that I thought they had made another attempt on my life. 'You got to help me find the persons responsible. I cannot live an ordinary life with these criminals about.'

He assured me that he would do his best and start immediately.

My insurance broker assured me he would handle the claim but would need the boat's value and a police report.

Back at the marina, I found that the police divers had recovered the body of a man. They were now waiting for a salvage company to retrieve the boat's remains.

Chief Inspector Metcalfe said, 'You have certainly made some bad friends. Can't you think who would dislike you that much to try and kill you repeatedly? Indeed you must have some idea. You and your late brother are keeping us busy.'

Chief Inspector continued, 'Fortunately, the marina has CCTV. Please let me know when the last time you used your boat was. I can get my sergeant to check the videotapes. Maybe we will get lucky. At least we can see if the man from the boatyard was on the boat when it exploded.'

I explained that Tara and I slept on *Seabreeze* Saturday night, and on Sunday, we cruised on the river returning at 3 pm to dock the boat. We then tidied her up, locked everything and went home. The boatyard had a set of spare keys and was to collect the yacht this morning to install thrusters to make docking easier when single-handed.

Chief Inspector Metcalfe called his sergeant. 'See if you can find all the videotapes from 3 pm yesterday till now from that security camera.'

The sergeant went to the marina's office. He returned in about twenty minutes. 'Sir, I have played back the tapes, and we see a man entering the boat late Sunday night carrying a bag. We also have an image of a man entering the boat this morning.'

Chief Inspector Metcalfe instructed me to follow him and the sergeant to the marina's office. 'We have a picture of someone entering your boat last night. Perhaps you can identify him.'

They played back the videotapes for me. Although they had captured identifiable images of both men, I did not recognise them.

'I have never seen either of them,' I said.

The Chief told his sergeant to bag the tapes for evidence and said to me. 'Never mind, we will trace them soon enough. I would appreciate it if you made a full statement to my sergeant while the details are still fresh in your mind. We will also need to get a statement from Tara.'

We returned to the riverside, where the salvage team dragged the boat's remains from the river. I noticed my insurance broker with an insurance man taking photos of what they salvaged from the water.

The Chief Inspector demanded of them. 'I would like copies of all the photos you took as evidence.'

The insurance man agreed and smiled. 'It will be impossible to put this boat together again. It is a total write-off. It must have been a bomb.'

Chief Inspector Metcalfe said, 'We think so, but will have to wait for the forensic team to confirm before we can say with certainty.'

I had to agree. The boat was a mess. There was nothing to salvage. Even Tara's pots and pans were unusable. All the expensive navigation equipment was rendered useless.

It made me wonder why somebody would dislike me to such an extent to do this. Was this person trying to kill me? Who was he? I couldn't think of any person I might have upset to such a degree. It might be the same person who killed Peter. Whoever it was needed to be caught and put away. He might even be insane. Already he had killed an innocent person who may have a wife and children who have now lost a husband/father and his income.

In my opinion, bombs were the coward's way of killing. It was indiscriminate, and it generally hurt innocent people.

I made a statement to the sergeant and gave him Tara's work address. 'You will have to visit her at work to get her account. It would be similar to my statement seeing as we were together.'

I decided there was nothing more to see here but destruction and returned to work.

I calculated the actual value of *Seabreeze* and submitted my insurance claim form with all the appropriate invoices to my insurance broker.

I decided not to replace my boat, phoned the marina, and cancelled my docking space. If I ever replace *Seabreeze*, it will be with a Sailing Yacht somewhere on the coast.

That evening I explained to Tara that I would not replace *Seabreeze*. 'Until the police arrest all the gang members, I would sooner not own another boat. I now feel responsible for killing an innocent person. I know they meant the bomb for me, but I killed an innocent person because I asked the boatyard to install thrusters. It could even have been you.'

Sarah and Tony visited, and we had to explain what happened in detail. 'How did you know about the explosion?' I asked.

'The whole of London knows by now. It was in the evening paper,' Tony replied.

Tara gasped, reaching for the phone. 'Oh, my goodness. I better let my mother know we are safe before she hears about it from a third party.'

Tony laughed. 'Now the whole of Ireland will know about the incident.'

Tony and I speculated what kind of person would plant a bomb.

‘I associate bomb with terrorism. You got to know what you are doing. For instance, I would not know how to make a bomb, never mind how to trigger it to detonate,’ I said.

Tony laughed. ‘You only need to visit your local library. You will find all the details readily available.’

‘Is that true? That means it could be anyone.’ I sighed. ‘Let’s have a drink,’ I said, walking towards the whisky bottle on the drinks cabinet.

Tony nodded. ‘Yes, please. I think we all need one. Does the police have any idea who could be responsible?’

‘I don’t think at this stage, but they have a clear image on the security camera of someone entering the boat on Sunday evening,’ I replied.

Tony laughed. ‘That is stupid of them. You would think a person planting a bomb would be a bit savvier than that. Security cameras are everywhere, especially in places like marinas, where they keep expensive boats. You would think an intruder’s first objective would be to find and destroy the security camera.’

‘Well, I hope the police catch the culprit soon. Because the police move slowly, I have employed a private investigator to help.’

Tony and Sarah left after a few drinks as tomorrow was a working day.

Chief Inspector Metcalfe called the following afternoon with some bad news. The image of the man visiting the boat on Sunday night was of a man wearing a mask of Dean Martin, who passed away several years ago. Criminals used his facial mask in several crimes. ‘This leaves us with no DNA, fingerprints or even the identity of the person who planted the explosives. It is going to be a difficult case.’

Chief Inspector Metcalfe confirmed that the body found by the police divers was that of Mr Steve Blake, an employee of the boatyard sent to collect the boat.

‘Even though they killed Mr Blake in the explosion, we know the real target was you.’

In the workshop, I thanked George and Simon. ‘You did a super job on my boat. I was impressed by your professional workmanship. It is a pity that someone had to come and blow it to pieces. Please pass my thanks to Sue; I noticed she is not in today.’

George agreed. 'She was certainly a lovely boat. My grandchildren have all been asking to see it.'

'They would have been most welcome. It is a pity what happened,' I replied.

George continued, shaking his head. 'You must have upset someone badly for them to do something that disgusting. I hope the police apprehend them soon.'

'I cannot think of who I could have upset that bad. I also hope the police find the person responsible. I have only been in the country briefly,' I answered.

Later that day, Mr Upton phoned. 'You realise that they could have blown us up in the explosion. Today's newspaper states that starting the boat triggered the explosion.'

I corrected Mr. Upton. 'The newspaper is speculating. The police state they are waiting for forensics to submit their report. However, turning the ignition key most likely started the explosion, a lucky break for us but sad news for Mr Blake and his family.'

'The insurance broker phoned to inform me that the insurance company has agreed that the boat was a complete write-off, and they are happy with my claim.'

You can therefore start looking for a new yacht. If you like.'

I explained that I would prefer to wait until the police had caught the person responsible for planting the bomb.

I was unsure that I should continue the business in London. Living in England was not safe for Tara or me. My brother Peter started the hatred with his many affairs. Now it seems that the people my brother offended had directed their bad feelings at me; I did not even know who was behind all the violence.

There was no reason for me to stay. If we sold up and started again somewhere else, the new business would be equally successful as we now had the know-how and the money.

That evening, I discussed it with Tara. She was totally against such a move. The jewellery shop was her heart and soul. 'I have never had anything that I could build up into something to be proud of. No one is going to force me to give up on my dream. Over my dead body!' Tara exclaimed.

'The only alternative is to find our enemies, identify and destroy them,' I remarked.

Tara cautioned me. 'Please be careful. Do not take the law into your own hands; remember, these people are dangerous. They have already killed your brother and a stranger in the boat explosion.'

I assured Tara that I would tread carefully, but if we were to stay, we would have to eliminate these evil people.

The first was to identify them, and as far as I could tell, they were all Peter's friends that he met at the gay bar. It seemed that when Peter discovered that being gay was not illegal here in England. He did not hesitate to have affairs with as many gay men as possible, not considering that gay relationships were as sensitive as heterosexual relationships. You could not treat these relationships as a bit of fun. Without realising his error, he caused a lot of ill feelings and jealousy.

That is where we should start our investigation. The following morning I phoned Tom Adams and explained my thoughts on finding the persons responsible for my beating and the explosion. 'We need to place an unknown person in this gay bar where Peter met all these people to infiltrate the group and find out who is giving the instruction and doing the footwork. You will find it is the same person who killed Peter. We already have a clue with the leak about the gold in my safe.'

Mr Adams said he had the right man for this task. One of his inspectors was gay and would fit in perfectly. He promised to update me as soon as he has some news.

I called the staff together and explained the situation to them. 'I believe I am the cause of these thugs killing an innocent person. Therefore I have no option but to sell the business unless I catch the person and punish him, stopping this violence. Please help me find this thug. We have a happy team, and I do not want our unit broken up.'

I hoped my speech would inspire some staff to help me with information, even if it was only a rumour they had picked up.

To my delight, the entire staff came to see me in my office, offering their support to help apprehend the guilty person. 'These are the same thugs who attacked me. You can count me in. I will do my best to help,' Simon chipped in.

Strangely the first breakthrough came from Wendy Brown, a saleslady at the jeweller shop. She told Tara she thought she recognised the guy captured on the security camera by his walk and mannerisms.

I phoned Chief Inspector Metcalfe with the information. He agreed to meet me at the jeweller

shop to interview Wendy. She did not know the guy personally but thought he often visited the pub where her boyfriend took her for drinks. 'His name is Paul,' she added.

I was astounded. 'Not the same Paul that used to work here as a jeweller?' I asked.

Looking confused, Wendy replied, 'I don't know. That was before my time.'

Chief Inspector Metcalfe's face lit up. 'Thank you. You are the second person who believes his name is Paul. We will follow your lead and find this character immediately. Would you be able to pick him out from an identity lineup?'

Wendy agreed. 'Certainly, I can pick him out from his appearance alone. He has a certain look about him.'

Chief Inspector Metcalfe pulled me to one side. 'It could be your Mr Paul King. The judge suspended him because we caught him with a few drugs. Before I arrange the identity parade for Wendy, I will let the forensic team see if they can identify any links. We have Paul King's DNA and fingerprints on our database.'

A week later, Chief Inspector Metcalfe visited me at the shop. 'Wendy identified Paul King in the identity parade; then we arrested him. Searching his house, we found the comic Dean Martin mask and chemicals to make a bomb. His main defence seems to be that the business you inherited rightly belongs to his family and that your brother stole it from them.'

'That song has now been played to death. Perhaps Mr Morris was entitled to a share of the jewellery business but lost that entitlement by stealing from the business. I can't see why they should think the entire family is entitled to a share,' I said to contradict Paul's statement. 'The business did not even employ him at that time.'

Chief Inspector Metcalfe nodded. 'It seems as if they expected something for smiling at your brother, regardless of how much they stole from him. The whole family thinks that the world owes them something.'

I agreed with the inspector. 'Clearly, blowing up my boat would not enrich them. If they had a claim to the business, it would only make them poorer.'

'Money is not their main purpose anymore. It is hatred that drives them now,' concluded the Chief.

Later that day, Mr Adams came to see me with similar news. 'Paul King is responsible for planting the bomb on your boat, but the person behind all these attempts on your life and your brother's death is Mary Pope. She seems to have a hatred for you and your brother.'

'That can't be true. Mary was pleasant and helpful to me when I first arrived. She showed me how to run the business,' I replied in disbelief.

'I believe she is the brains behind the entire family. She seems to control their every move,' Tom Adams added.

I could not take in that Mary was behind all this violence. She was such a sweet girl. I thought that Tom must have it wrong. However, this was the second time he mentioned that Mary was involved. I could not get my head around her and crime, let alone murder.

Without opening the file, Mr Adams handed it to me. I decided to ignore Mary as a suspect for the present time and concentrate on Paul King, who planted the bomb. He at least admitted his crime. There was no hard evidence against Mary at all.

I wasn't sure why. Perhaps it was the stress caused by the explosion and my injuries or the suggestion of selling the business. I had a sickly feeling that Tara and

I were drifting apart. She seemed to have lost her sparkle for me, now replaced with cool detachment and boredom. Sometimes she was cold towards me and gave clipped replies when I spoke to her. Neither of us had mentioned marriage for some time, though we had often discussed it.

My heart thumped in my chest, loud and oppressive like a ticking time bomb. I could barely look at Tara, let alone speak the dreaded words. But as much as I wanted to avoid it, I knew this issue would not pass until we confronted it head-on.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



The tension between us was growing. Eventually, Tara confronted me. ‘I am sorry to do this to you, Stephen, but I have met someone else at the jewellery shop. He has asked me to go with him to America, where he lives, and I feel I must go. You live too dangerous a life for me, and it is not suitable to raise a family. I will always think of you fondly,’ Tara said, removing her engagement ring.

‘Greg is from America, and he has offered me a peaceful life with no crime or murder and all the luxuries I need.

He had been visiting Tara at the jewellery store regularly, convincing her to believe how beautiful life was in New York and how wealthy he was.

I tried protesting. ‘That is why I am willing to sell the business and move away from here.’ But Tara was adamant. ‘Even if you do that, the danger would follow you wherever you go. You are that type of person. You remind me of my father. Please let us part as friends and wish me good luck in New York.’

Feeling rejected, I mumbled, ‘When are you planning to leave?’

Tara replied, 'We are flying to New York at the end of the week. I will continue working until Friday to prepare the staff but will leave you now to stay in a hotel until we leave.'

'What about your share in the jewellery shop?' I inquired. 'You worked hard to make it successful.'

'You keep it. I do not deserve anything. I am the guilty party.'

'Nevertheless, I insist that I buy out your share. Tomorrow I will ask the accountant to negotiate a fair price and draw the necessary documents. Business is business. You can't lose out financially because you no longer love me. Besides, I cannot allow you to go to America without a penny in your pocket. You would eventually hate me if I did.'

'Oh God, you are the nicest person I have ever met. I hope I am doing the correct thing. Please hug me and send me on my way before I start crying. I cannot change my mind now,' Tara declared and flung her arms around me. We kissed, and then it was goodbye.

Tara had already packed her suitcase. I felt a profound loss as I helped her with the luggage down the stairs. Soon she was in a taxi, disappearing from sight and out of my life.

I returned to the flat. It was dead and empty. Even Tara's painting was gone. I knew I was going to miss her dreadfully. I poured myself a double whisky to drown my sorrow.

The following morning I woke up still on the sofa with a splitting headache and an empty bottle of whisky. I must have drank myself to sleep out of absolute despair.

I reluctantly went to shower. I did not feel like getting up or going to work.

The shower woke me up, and I tried some coffee with toast. It was going to be a long day. The flat was as quiet as a grave. No sounds of Tara singing or chasing me on to get ready.

I mumbled to myself, 'What am I going to do? I miss her badly; it is only the first day.' I was depressed. I could not concentrate. My mind continued mulling over the errors I must have made in our relationship to cause this breakup.

I had the most beautiful girl in the world and allowed her to slip through my fingers. What a fool I was.

I walked over to the drinks cabinet and poured myself another double whisky. 'Only this one to

steady my nerves, then I must go to work,' I said, trying to convince myself.

One whisky became two; consequently, I did not go to work that day but drowned my sorrows in whisky.

The following morning I was woken up by a loud banging on my front door. I felt a mess and must have looked one too. I combed my hair and put on my dressing gown, hoping to portray some form of normalcy and made my way to the door with my hands over my ears, trying to deafen the banging noise from my head.

I opened the door. It was Tony. 'Would you please stop the banging? My head is busting,' I begged of him.

Tony stared at me. 'Look at the state you are in. People's livelihood depends on you. Pull yourself together. I know you loved Tara, but you have responsibilities and must carry on with your work.'

Tony pulled me by my arm towards the kitchen and said. 'Come, I will make you a coffee and something to eat. Then you can have a shower and shave. Today you will go to work even if I sit with you all day.'

True to his word, Tony spent most of the day with me. I should have been grateful, but I sighed with relief when he eventually left.

I thought, now I can have a drink, but I did not until I locked up at five that afternoon and went home.

The flat felt empty without Tara or even her painting. I found a photo of her, framed it and put it on the dressing table. Even only her picture there brightened up the room.

I only had a small whisky as Sarah arrived to keep me company. She could not understand the breakup between Tara and me. It came out of the blue. 'Tara did not even introduce me to this American. What is his name? She has not told me, or I was that shocked it did not register. I think she has made a wrong decision, but I wish her the best of luck.'

Sarah continued, 'Even though Tara is my cousin and best friend, my duty now lies with you. It must have been a terrible shock for you; Tara leaving suddenly. I feel guilty, as I was responsible for you two getting together. I thought it was the ideal match; now, look what has happened.'

I could see Sarah was near tears.

‘It was not your fault I fell in love with Tara or that she has left me. I must thank you. Living with Tara was the best time of my life. I assure you I have overcome the shock and won't become a raving alcoholic. I will now concentrate on bringing all the culprits who instigated these crimes to justice. I think all the violence drove Tara away. His name is Greg. I don't know anything about him either. The girls at the jewellery shop may know more.’

After Sarah left, I restricted myself to only one whisky before bed.

Although I hardly slept that night, I felt better in the morning, ready to face life again. I realized it was Saturday, and Tara was already in New York. My first port of call that morning was the jewellery shop. I had to see if the girls there were coping.

In my absence, Tara promoted Louise Blake to the manager and instructed her to seek another girl from the jewellery academy to help with jewellery making and sales.

I felt pleased that Tara did not leave the shop in a mess. It showed that at least she cared, giving me a glimmer of hope.

Before I left, I asked Louise to let me know when she would hold the interviews for the job seekers as I would like to be present.

Back at the furniture store, I dug out Mr Adams' file and sat back, reading its contents. It was fascinating, mentioning several people he thought were friends and possibly helped Paul King with the bomb-making.

I noted all their names and thought of different ways to meet them without giving the game away. It seemed that they all frequented the gay bars. As much as I detested going to these places, it looked like my only option. All being well, I won't be recognised, as all my ex-workers were in prison.

Coming from South Africa, wrongly raised that homosexuality was not natural but a wilful illegal act and not an act of birth. Both Peter and I had no idea how gay people behaved. Peter must have always been gay. He was such a kind and loving person.

In all walks of life, there are good people and bad people. Peter, being naïve and gay, managed to befriend a group of utterly evil men and got himself in trouble with these men who frequented the Three Anchor pub.

That evening I went to the Three Anchor Pub, where Peter used to hang out. It was crowded and full of men. Straight away, I realized this was no ordinary pub but more like a dating agency for men. Several aggressive-looking men approached me and offered to buy me a drink.

I did not know what to do. These men were touching my arm and shoulder. I felt like running out of the pub.

I accepted a drink from the kindest-looking face, who made room for me at the bar counter. He introduced himself as Clive and commented, 'What is your name? I have not seen you here before.'

'My name is Stephen. It is my first time visiting this pub,' I answered.

'You have to be careful in these pubs. Some of the clients here are absolute bitches. You are fortunate that I am here to look out for you,' Clive added.

I confessed. 'I am new to London. I come from South Africa. My late brother Peter told me that he used to frequent this bar. I did not know it was this rowdy.'

Clive enquired, 'I think I knew your brother Peter. Was he involved with some jewellers? Now that was a

rough crowd. I stayed as far away from them as possible. I am a male nurse at Guy's Hospital and detest violence.'

'Now that is a coincidence. I have a friend, Tony, from South Africa, who works at Guy's Hospital. He is studying to become a radiologist,' I commented.

Clive beamed. 'I think I have met him. Is he a short, stocky guy with dark hair?'

'Yes, that sounds like him. A friendly guy, absolutely cut out for the nursing profession.' I smiled, thinking of Tony.

Clive said nervously, 'You won't tell him you met me in this pub. This pub has a bad reputation, and the management at the hospital won't be pleased if they find out I came here. You see, they are not aware that I am gay.'

I assured Clive that his secret was safe with me. 'Do you mind pointing out Peter's friends to me? It would help me understand what happened to him. I don't want an introduction. I purely want to know what they looked like.'

Clive grimaced. 'Assuredly. Some of Peter's friends were not likeable characters. Most people think that all gay men are sensitive. But that is not true; some can

be real scumbags, which accounts for most of Peter's friends.'

Clive pointed out some of the persons with whom Peter used to associate, and I had to agree, looking at them, I would not like to meet them at night on a lonely street.

Anger welled up in me. To think these monsters were why Tara left me to go to America. I decided then that each one would pay for me losing Tara.

I noted their names for further reference and to inform the private investigator, Mr Adams, as his agent did not mention any of these names in his report.

The following night I returned to the same pub. I immediately spotted one of the men Clive had pointed out the previous night. I waited till he was ready to leave. I hurried my beer down and followed him. He took a shortcut down an alleyway.

I don't know what overcame me, but I belted him over the head with a cosh I had brought with me for the purpose. He no sooner hit the ground, and I kicked him in his face with all the pent-up anger I had built up. Then I grabbed him by the scruff of his neck and said, 'Now it is your turn to pay. What does it feel like being on the receiving end?'

To my disappointment, he was unconscious. I dropped him to the floor and delivered another kick straight to his testicles.

I dropped him again on the floor and walked away in disgust. It was about time these hooligans received some of the treatment they had been dishing out. My attack seemed to satisfy my anger, making me feel light-headed. That night I slept peacefully and woke up the following morning feeling refreshed.

I repeated my assaults on individual gang members four times before I started feeling sick with myself. *'What am I doing?'* I thought. *'I am lowering myself down to the criminal level. I need to stop these attacks immediately. They will not bring Tara back.'*

Unknown to me, assaulting four of their gang had the desired effect. Like most bullies, it shook them up. They no longer braved it alone outside but stayed in groups.

However, as is often the case with crime, when a group of thugs attack an innocent person, the police can't identify the culprits. But if you attack one of their gang, the police will soon knock on your door.

Therefore, I was unsurprised to find Chief Inspector Metcalfe at my office door. 'Come in, Chief

Inspector. How can I help?’ I invited him in and offered him a chair. ‘Would you like a cup of tea?’

Chief Inspector Metcalfe made himself comfortable. ‘It has been reported that someone is beating up the scum that frequents the Three Anchor public bar. Nobody has made a positive identity, but they think it is you. They have spotted you hanging around the pub. I must warn you that you can’t take the law into your own hands, and I must take these complaints seriously. Please refrain from going to the Three Anchor pub, as I would not like to arrest you. I know that you are trying to find the thugs who beat you up and helped with planting a bomb on your boat.’

‘They caused the breakup of my engagement to Tara. She decided she could no longer live with all the violence and moved to America,’ I added.

‘I am sorry to hear that, but please listen to my caution. All the patrons at the Three Anchor are running scared and could easily concoct false evidence to convict you,’ Chief Inspector Metcalfe replied.

I explained to Chief Inspector Metcalfe that I was aware of that and realized that attacking them would lower me to their level. ‘However, I love Tara deeply, and losing her has angered me immensely. I wish

these thugs all the harm possible, but I promise I will not get involved personally. The sooner you arrest them, the better for all humanity.'

Chief Inspector Metcalfe got up from his chair, ready to leave. 'I am sorry as to what happened between you and Tara. I hope for a speedy reconciliation, but please bear my warning in mind. I would not like to see you in trouble with the law.'

With that thought, Chief Inspector Metcalfe left me.

What a life, I thought, feeling sorry for myself. 'I am not allowed to seek revenge or drown my sorrow in alcohol. What am I to do at night? I miss Tara badly, and I wish she would come back. I will forgive her everything.'

I felt sorry for myself for several weeks when Tony and Sarah visited me one evening. I had not heard from them and thought they had given up on me. They were perhaps coming to check on my drinking. I had been behaving myself lately and would only have one or two whiskies at night to help me sleep.

Sarah announced out of the blue, 'Tara is back in Dublin. It did not work out with this guy. They have split up.'

At first, I was shocked and felt sorry for Tara. 'Is she okay? She must be in a dreadful state. What happened?' A glimmer of hope entered my mind, but I tried to keep it under control.

'I have not spoken to her yet. My mother gave me the news. I knew how much you loved Tara. I told Tony we best come and tell you immediately in person. I do hope the two of you will get it together again. I think Tara made a grave mistake leaving you. I know the continuous violence is not fun to live with, but it is better faced by the two of you together,' Sarah replied.

Sarah promised to call Tara and let me know what happened.

After Sarah and Tony left that evening, I sat in my easy chair with a glass of whisky, wondering what to do. Will Tara return to me, or is that too much to dream of? Should I phone her or wait? Maybe she would call me. Indeed that would be unlikely. I would have to do the running.

I better wait until Sarah has spoken to Tara, and then I can determine my chances.

The following day I could not concentrate. Thinking of Tara all day was nerve-shattering. 'Does she still love me?' I wondered.

Sarah told me she would call Tara later that day and come over that evening to keep me updated. Tony would be a bit late due to a heavy workload but would join us when he had finished work.

The rest of the day was a total failure. I could not concentrate at all and made countless mistakes. That evening Sarah arrived. I could not wait for her to sit and exclaimed, 'What did Tara say? Is she coming back to me?'

Sarah looked at me, somewhat amused. 'Calm down. Let us wait for Tony to arrive, or I must repeat everything. He will be here any minute.'

I poured Sarah a glass of wine and a beer for myself, and we settled on the sofa waiting for Tony to arrive.

A loud banging on the front door shook me out of my deep thoughts. Sarah beamed. 'That must be Tony.'

I scrambled to unlock the door, only to see Mary, my former employee, standing there with a wicked glint in her eye and a handgun pointed straight at me. She immediately pressed me against the wall and began berating me with accusations that I had cost her the love of Peter, and now she sought revenge. 'I killed

him and hated his whole family!’ She yelled. ‘Now you must pay for it with your life!’

I begged her to let me explain myself, but she was deaf to my pleas.

Then Tony appeared behind her, screaming for her to drop the gun. Distracted by his sudden arrival, she spun around, giving me enough time to slam the door shut as Tony kept Mary occupied.

Reeling from what had just happened, I dialled the police; before I could finish relaying what had happened, I heard a gunshot followed by silence over the phone line. I did not know what to expect when I opened the door again, so my heart raced as I stepped into the hallway. Sprawled on the floor was Mary, motionless and surrounded by a pool of blood. Tony stood frozen in amazement, his face pale with shock.

I shouted: ‘What just happened?!’ Tony seemed to come to his senses as he replied. ‘She put the gun to her head... then pulled the trigger.’

A siren blared outside as I told Tony not to touch anything. The street door flew open, and several policemen clambered up every step of the stairs until they reached us. They shouted orders not to move or disturb evidence while assessing the situation.

Soon there were people everywhere. Forensics, Doctors and paramedics from the ambulance. Amongst them was Chief Inspector Metcalfe, the only calm person.

He took us into the lounge area. ‘Well, that was Mary, the person behind all the violence. I suspected her for some time but could not find the evidence to prove it. Life would now return to normal. She was an evil lady.’

I admitted to Chief Metcalfe, ‘Mr Adams, the private investigator, also mentioned that he thought Mary was behind all this crime, but I could not believe it. She was kind and helpful to me.’

‘Mary hid a lot of evil and bitterness behind her mask of friendliness. You can’t trust some women these days,’ Chief Inspector Metcalfe replied.

The flat was chaotic, with police everywhere. Sarah was about to leave without disclosing the content of her telephone conversation with Tara. I managed to stop her on the way out. ‘Before you leave. Please tell me what Tara said. Do you think there is still a bit of hope for me?’

Sarah smiled. ‘I think there is, but she needs space before considering any relationship. She had a shock breaking up with you, but now with this incident, I

don't know how she will take it. My advice to you is to wait and see. Take it slowly, and try not to put any pressure on her right now.'

Tony and Sarah left, leaving me alone with all the police officers. I went to the living room, poured myself a whisky and relaxed on the sofa.

'This must be the end of my relationship with Tara. She would not take it kindly to another attempt on my life,' I thought, feeling sorry for myself.

I had several more whiskies and got myself into a suitably depressed mood. I did not know when the police left, but I woke up the following morning with a violent headache on the sofa.

I should have gone to work that day, but instead, I stayed at home and drank an entire bottle of whisky, wallowing in my guilt. I knew I had to do something - sell the business and return to South Africa.

But the thought of leaving everything behind filled me with a dread I couldn't explain.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



The following morning I received a telephone call from Tara, 'Please pick me up from Heathrow airport.'

'Are you coming home?' I asked hopefully.

'I don't know. Please pick me up. I don't want to leave you alone with what has happened,' Tara replied.

'I am on my way.'

On the way back from the airport, Tara said, 'My father made me see sense. He explained that I would never be able to live with myself if something happened to you and I was not there by your side to stand by you. He also said we got into this mess together; we should see it through together. After that, we can split up if we want to.'

Tara continued, 'Most of all, I love you and would like to try again if you agree.'

'Naturally, I will be delighted. I never wanted you to leave,' I admitted with a smile. However, I was curious about what Tara's father said to make her

decide to return promptly. I did not ask but accepted the situation and was thankful she returned.

That evening I said to her, 'I feel discouraged by this whole affair. Let's sell up and move away from London.'

But Tara was adamant that we stay. 'I will not make the same mistake again by running away. In future, we will face whatever danger is out there together. My Dad is right. What if we arrive in some other city and someone threatens us? Do we then sell up and move again? We will be running for the rest of our lives. Let us make a stand right here and stay.'

'We are not at the moment living under threats alone. These people have murdered and will do again. What if they attack you? I will never live with myself. What would I tell your parents? It is not worth staying. Let us, at least, investigate the option of moving,' I begged Tara.

'Besides, I want us to get married, but it seems silly with death threats hanging over us under the circumstances,' I added.

Tara exclaimed. 'This must stop now! If you want to marry me, let us do it immediately. I will no longer allow some cowards to dictate my life again. Say the word, and I am ready to marry you tomorrow morning

and won't wait for our troubles to disappear. There will always be problems.'

'I love you. You are positive about life. If that is your wish, let us get married immediately, and we will handle the problems.'

Taking Tara in my arms, I hugged her reassuringly, hiding my deep concerns.

Tara immediately transformed into a ball of energy, phoning Sarah and starting with our wedding arrangements.

Tara announced that a double wedding was still on. 'I am trying to arrange it for three weeks from now in Dublin, but I have to get all my family and Sarah's family on board. To complicate matters, both our parents insist on a church wedding. That means we have to go to Dublin to get permission from Father Erick for you and Tony, as both of you are not Catholic; fortunately, you are both baptised Christians as Non-Christians cannot receive the sacraments.'

Tara arranged a Saturday morning meeting with Father Eric at her local Roman Catholic Church.

Friday, after work, we raced to Heathrow Airport to catch a flight to Dublin, where Tara's Dad met us. 'Our family home is in turmoil, and your mother is

making herself sick with excitement with your sudden decision to get married. I hope you have a good reason. You are not in the family way, I hope?' Tara's father said, laughing.

Tara looked at her Dad and smiled. 'No, Dad, I am not pregnant. Stephen will explain it all at home when we are more relaxed.'

That evening Tara's Dad invited Tony and me to his den for a quiet chat away from all the excited chatter of the woman.

'Now tell me, Stephen,' he asked. 'Why the sudden rush to get married? I thought you wanted to wait until the authorities charged everyone involved in your brother's death?'

'That was a general idea until they blew up our boat and killed an innocent person. Tara then decided to run off to America, away from all the violence. Now on her return after Mary committed suicide, she seemed to have changed her mind about all the violence.'

I tried to convince Tara that we should sell up and start somewhere else. I did not think it was wise to risk our lives. The police seemed to be moving slowly.

But Tara has now dug her heels in and demanded that we get married immediately if I want to marry her. She is adamant that no criminal would dictate her life ever again, and she is not moving,' I replied.

'Ay, the Willis woman can be strong-minded regarding matters of love. I have learned from many years of experience not to cross them,' Tara's Dad answered. 'If you need help sorting out this gang of roughnecks, I have a group of men at my disposal that would only be too glad of the action. They will sort them out in hours.'

I refused Mr Willis's offer, thinking that was the last thing I needed—the IRA killing people in London.

Tara came to the rescue. 'What are you men discussing? I hope it is to do with the wedding, and you are not planning the destruction of all the people in London?'

How could you think such a thing of your father? I am a peace-loving man. We have put the violence of the past behind us,' Mr Willis smiled, defending himself to Tara. The following morning we met Father Eric. He was a friendly priest in his late fifties.

He explained all the church rituals in detail to Tony and me, and within an hour, he permitted us to marry in three weeks.

After a lovely lunch with Tara and Sarah's parents, Tara's dad drove us to Dublin Airport for our flight back to London.

We were no sooner home. 'What about your wedding dress? We will have to go shopping,' I asked Tara.

Tara laughed. 'My wedding dress is in my suitcase. My mother gave me her wedding dress last night. It is beautiful, and I will proudly wear it, but you cannot see it until our wedding day. All you have to worry about is your suit.'

That night we made love as if it was our first time. I fell in love with Tara all over again. We fell asleep in each other's arms.

The following morning Tara woke me up with a kiss and coffee. I returned her kiss and embraced her. We made love again, and afterwards, I found that my coffee had gone cold. We lay cuddled in each other's arms for some time, and thankfully, it was Sunday. There was no rush to go to work.

Tara fell asleep in my arms. I lay there, thinking how lucky I was that Tara and I were reunited. I nearly lost her. I noticed her painting was back up against the wall, its rightful place. I could not bear to lose her again.

I looked down at her beautiful face and softly stroked her hair. *'We will be married in three weeks,'* I thought in amazement.

I carefully got out of bed, trying not to disturb Tara and went to the kitchen to make her a cup of tea. On my way to the kitchen, I paused in front of Tara's portrait, taking in the beauty of her large blue eyes, her face framed by her ginger hair and remarked, 'I love you, Tara Willis. Nobody is going to take you away from me again.'

On my return to the bedroom, Tara was sitting up wide awake. 'Oh, thank you for the tea,' Tara said, stretching.

'Sorry, I tried not to wake you; I am clumsy.' I apologised to Tara.

'I don't think you woke me up getting out of bed. I automatically woke up when I felt you had left me alone in bed,' Tara replied.

We had a lazy day, mainly in each other's arms, and I explained to Tara that I wanted to make friends with all of Peter's enemies and try to stop all this violence.

I explained to her that I wanted to reach out to the LGBT Foundation and offer to put their stickers in

our shop windows to indicate our willingness to help any vulnerable person. Besides, Peter was gay, and I should not write off all gay and lesbian people as bad people. I think Peter may have benefitted from the help the LGBT Foundation offered.

I felt ashamed and did not tell Tara about my antics at the Three Anchor Pub. I was concerned that she would hold me responsible if a backlash occurred. She might feel like I am causing danger yet again.

Tara agreed, and on Monday morning, with these thoughts still fresh in my mind and to try and assure our future safety, I contacted one of the leaders of the LGBT Foundation. I explained my situation and my misunderstanding with the Three Anchor pub.

I assured him I had no issues with the gay or lesbian community. I directed my anger at a few patrons at that pub who had caused me harm. As a token of sincerity, I told him I would like to donate a sum of money to the LGBT Foundation and display their logos in both my shop windows to make vulnerable people aware that we support them and are willing to help in case of an emergency.

Furthermore, I asked him if he would accompany me to the Three Anchor Pub to offer my apologies and future help.

I chose the LGBT Foundation because they were the most significant LGBT health and community services charity in the UK, offering services to people in person and online.

Pride in Practice is LGBT Foundation's quality assurance support service that strengthens and develops Primary Care Services relationships with lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans patients within the local community.

The Soho Angels, a night-time harm reduction programme based on the Village Angels, was established in Soho in collaboration with Westminster City Council and Smirnoff.

LGBT Foundation provides a wide range of well-being and support services. Their domestic-abuse programme provides practical housing advice, one-to-one casework support and advice sessions to LGBT victims of domestic abuse.

I was impressed by their support for the Lesbian and Gay community. I thought my brother Peter would still be alive if he had reached out for help from the LGBT Foundation.

After I made friends with the Three Anchor management, I invited the gentleman to meet Tara at the jewellery shop.

It was right up Tara's street. She liked helping good causes and felt proud to serve any person. Tara helped him place his stickers and contact numbers on the shop windows. She also listed all the contacts in case someone requested help inside the store.

Our wedding day was around the corner. Yet, I was still concerned about leaving the staff to run the business in our absence as we planned to go away for ten days for our honeymoon. However, befriending the LGBT Foundation seemed to have worked. We have had no trouble since Mary's suicide.

Father Eric married us. Tara looked beautiful in her mother's wedding dress. I could tell it was an important day for her. She was radiant and beautiful; I loved her. After the wedding and the photographs, we went to the Clayton Hotel, near the airport, where we hired a conference room for the reception. We had already booked in the day before as we were flying to Cape Town the following day.

It was good that we booked in at the hotel as the party continued till late. Tara and Sarah changed their wedding dresses for the reception. They left their wedding outfits with their mothers for safekeeping.

We were worse for wear in the morning and had a late breakfast. We caught a flight to Heathrow in

London with ample time for the evening direct flight to Cape Town.

We decided to make the Southern Sun Waterfront Hotel our base in the heart of Cape Town's most tourist-friendly precinct to explore the city.

It offered great comfort with excellent amenities, such as air conditioning, an included breakfast, a workout in an equipped gym, a splash in the pool, and for the girls to get pampered at the Utopia Beauty Salon and Spa.

The hotel also offered the convenience of a free shuttle to get you to the V&A Waterfront. The hotel's location puts the Zeitz MOCAA, Two Oceans Aquarium, the V&A, and the City Bowl within a ten-minute walk.

Tara and Sarah found the city full of charm and history. They could not stop exploring the stunning beaches, Table Mountain, and the famous Robbin Island to must-see restaurants and shops.

Tony and I were more interested in Cape Town's history and insisted on visiting places like the Castle of Good Hope, built by the Dutch in 1652.

Table Bay, where the first landing by Europeans took place in 1652, and the iconic Nelson Mandela monument.

If there was one thing we all agreed on, it was the food and wine. Whether it's in one of the top restaurants or local establishments catering to people from all over the world, the food in Cape Town was fantastic.

Whether it's a great diving venue for fresh seafood or your favourite steak, there will always be something delicious waiting no matter where you go in the city.

Then there was the wine. From the famed Bordeaux wines of the Cape Winelands to the sparkling wines of Franschhoek, the city had something to offer everyone who loves a good tippie.

Before we knew it, our ten-day holiday was over, and there was much we still wanted to do.

'We did not even go to a safari park. Everyone back home said I must see the game. It is magnificent,' Tara complained.

I promised Tara that next time we would come for a month's holiday, as ten days seemed too short.

Arriving back in London was a bit of a letdown. It was raining and cold. We all wished we were still on holiday.

Tara and I were soon under a blanket on a sofa in our flat. Now it was her turn to discuss the pros and cons of selling up and moving to Cape Town.

We agreed to continue in London for a while longer to see if we now had Peter's enemies placated to such an extent as harmless.

I suggested to Tara that perhaps I should visit Mr Alexandra Morris and offer him a sum of money to allow him to start his business as a token of acknowledgement that he was Peter's partner in building up the original business.

Tara agreed. 'Perhaps we were too harsh on him. I suppose we have to look at them as husband and wife and that he was entitled to some share. The stealing might have been an act of desperation.'

'I will first find out if he is still in prison. It should be near his time for release on good behaviour,' I added.

The following day we returned to work to find that we needed to commend the staff. They ran both

businesses exceptionally well and had no problems to report.

Tara agreed. 'I am also starting to believe that Peter was the cause of some of the problems. One cannot have affairs with several different people and not expect repercussions. The stealing might have been an act of desperation.'

I visited Mr Morris in prison and offered him our olive branch and forgiveness. He seemed sincerely happy with the cash offer to start his jeweller shop.

Without any conditions from me, he stated that we would now be at peace and he would see that none of Peter's enemies would plan or instigate any violence towards us.

I told Tara about my visit to Mr Morris. She was pleased. 'Now we can think of starting a family.'

'Let us give him some time to prove his sincerity,' I smiled.

- End -