

The fourth part of the diaries of Ewan Walker, the story follows Ewan and his extended family as he navigates a personal tragedy— the sudden death of his partner Jordan in a car accident. The narrative traces Ewan’s grieving process supported by his family, followed by the unexpected arrival of an old school acquaintance, who described herself as a “feisty kitten”..

# Forever Twenty-Five

From my Father’s Diaries  
Part 4

Peter Walker

---

# Forever Twenty-Five

---

**Peter Walker**

## **Author's Note**

Although these stories are written in the context of real-world events, the places and areas described in this narrative are entirely fictitious, as are the events that make up this story.

All characters in this book are completely fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

This story contains strong and emotive language in certain places, as it reflects the kinds of language used by young people of at the beginning of the Twenty-First Century.

I see no good reason to be prudish about this sort of thing, but if such language offends, I apologise.

# Chapter 1

## June 2016 – January 2020

On Friday 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016, it was announced that the British people had voted to turn their backs on the European Union. The United Kingdom was anything but united; it was split from North to South, East to West.

The charlatans and snake-oil salesmen who had deceived the electorate were shown running about without a shred of a clue about what to do with their victory. The Prime Minister resigned and within a few weeks had left politics altogether. He retreated to his house in the country, buying a shepherd's hut for twenty-five grand. The idea was to write his memoirs. However, he later announced he was “bored shitless” but received little sympathy.

The United Kingdom became ever more fragmented over the next three years. The new Prime Minister, who sold herself by evoking the morality of the vicarage, started off with a good number of pious platitudes about the “just about managing”, and “healing the divisions between remain and leave voters”. She achieved neither. The woman, who had described the Conservative Party as “the nasty party”, turned out to be pretty nasty herself. Under her premiership, the party became even more riven than it was before. It also became the toxic party. The Prime Minister ended up being held hostage, quite willingly as it seemed, to a small cabal of right-wing journalists and politicians. She set herself the target of extricating the United Kingdom from the European Union completely, a so-called Hard Brexit. The MPs who called for a Hard Brexit had safe seats in southern England and were influenced by the nostalgia of the Little Englander. The nostalgia evoked the images of the villagers

going to church on a Sunday morning, then going to the pub, followed by watching cricket in the afternoon. That ordinary people could not have a hope in hell of living in those villages that were their ancestral homes never occurred to them. The villages were ghettos of “the right sort of people”, the very rich. The houses that were occupied by farm workers were now occupied by sales directors. Where a bicycle was parked, now there was a top-of-the-range sports utility vehicle.

At the end of March 2017, the Prime Minister set in train the procedure for leaving the European Union without the faintest idea of what she was going to do. Then, while on a hill-walk with her husband in Wales, she decided to hold a general election. The rationale for this was that the Labour Party was being led by a septuagenarian dullard whose teenage Marxist views were splitting the Labour Party from top to bottom. Therefore, the electorate would return the Conservative Party with a bigger majority.

Except they didn't.

The election campaign was abysmal in general, and the Prime Minister's contribution was robotic. She stuck to stock phrases like “Brexit means Brexit”. (A programming error led to the phrase being auto corrected to “Breakfast means Breakfast”. A patch was duly developed.) Other parroted phrases included, “Strong and stable”, and “The will of the people”. She lost her majority and had to rely on some hard-right Ulster politicians to keep her in power. This required a number of visits to the “magic money tree”.

There was not a “Coalition of Chaos”, but a Coalition of Mayhem. Strong and stable became weak and clueless.

Negotiations with the European Union started off badly and deteriorated from then on. A minister was appointed to oversee the process. Unlike his European counterparts, he did no

preparation whatsoever, and over a period of several months he had just four hours of meetings with his opposite numbers.

Soon bad descended to abysmal, then to farcical. If an author wrote it as a story, it would be rejected as total fantasy. Indeed, the imagery produced by many a cartoonist was a unicorn. After two further years of parliamentary shenanigans, the Prime Minister had proved beyond all reasonable doubt that she was stubborn, secretive, self-absorbed, devious, and manipulative. She was leading a party that was utterly absorbed with itself and cared even less about the national interest than it did before. She was proud of herself being “a bloody difficult woman”. This would be complimentary compared with the phrases of others who had to work alongside her. History would not and did not judge her kindly.

Nor was it complimentary about the Leader of Her Majesty’s Most Loyal Opposition. He, too, was devious, manipulative, stubborn, secretive, and self-absorbed. He was completely up himself with his teenage Marxist ideology. Where the nation looked for a strong alternative leader, he provided the leadership of an irrelevant pressure group that had lost its way.

At the end of the process, the general public were completely fed up as the government was conducted by an infestation of incompetence, for example, a minister who was leading Brexit stating he didn’t realise that most freight passed through the Port of Dover. A large sum of money was passed by another minister to a company for freight ferry services. This company had neither experience in running ferries, nor any ferries to run. This was no problem; they could buy a copy of *Ship Simulator* to practise sailing in one of the world’s busiest shipping lanes in perfect comfort and safety. After that, they could go down to the ship shop and buy a dozen ferries, provided the owner had enough in stock. The particular minister in this case was notorious for his casual incompetence. He had the antidote

to the Midas touch. Instead of gold, everything he touched turned to dust.

While the government lurched from crisis to crisis, the United Kingdom ended up as a laughingstock across the world. The British once had a fine reputation for common sense and diplomacy. This enviable reputation was trashed by a foreign secretary who was a buffoon and had an unfortunate knack of insulting his counterparts from other countries. He was succeeded by someone who seemed more sensible, but had problems distinguishing between the Chinese and Japanese, something that intensely irritated citizens of both countries. Slovakia and Slovenia also caused him problems.

The Defence Secretary had no military experience. His early life was occupied by selling fireplaces. This did not stop him threatening to send out the only Royal Navy aircraft carrier, despite the fact that it had no planes. A carefully aimed anti-ship missile would be all that would be needed to end its rather brief career.

Meanwhile crime increased, including an epidemic of knife attacks that in too many cases ended up as murder. The police had been so reduced by austerity policies that most forces were almost ineffective. Child poverty rates had risen such that there were four million children in poverty. Of these, seventy percent were from working families. Industry was collapsing as a result of Brexit. The former Foreign Secretary's outburst of "Fuck industry" caught the headlines. Those being let go from well-paid jobs to have to apply for Universal Credit did not make the headlines. Instead, they went to the foodbanks in order to place food on the table for their families while their claims were worked out in a hostile environment which assumed that applicants were work-shy scroungers.

As the people became more concerned with Brexit, more demands were made for a second vote. This was refused on the basis that the “people had spoken”. The real reason was that Conservative Party MPs were scared of a reversal. Many people who had voted Brexit had not voted to be poorer, or to lose their jobs, let alone the right to travel to, live in, and work in whatever country they wanted. They were known as the “regrexits”. The Brexit disaster distressed them every bit as much as those who voted remain.

There were two types of people who continued to consider Brexit to be a good thing. Firstly, there were the wealthy prime movers who wanted nothing to do with the European Union. They wanted a low-tax environment for the wealthy, with little or zero public services, and no workers’ rights. The second group were the ignorant who could be led by the nose by the gutter tabloids, believing any fake news that was served up with a side dish of celebrity gossip. These were the sort of people who needed a passport to travel to the next county, or even town. As long as they had their fags, footy and fish-and-chips, everything was fine.

By 2019, the British nation was broken and humiliated. The absolute failure of statecraft and statesmanship had made the British people a laughingstock. Britain was rapidly descending to a second-class state. The responsibility lay at the feet of one woman and one woman alone.

In March 2019, the European Union, thoroughly fed up with the shenanigans, granted an extension until the end of October 2019. This was in the hope that the UK Parliament might get a viable agreement. That hope was in vain due to the pig-headed intransigence of a small number of Conservative MPs and their Ulster counterparts. That the UK was heading for a national crisis did not prevent MPs from taking a long summer break.

In May 2019, that PM left office, leaving a state of mayhem. European elections were held, which showed the split across the nation. The newly formed Brexit Party stood with a motley bunch of fruitcakes and swivel-eyed loons. Those who were elected went to the European Parliament and turned their backs on the orchestra of young musicians who were playing Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*. That the symphony (Number 9 in D minor) was commissioned by the Royal Philharmonic Society of London was entirely overlooked in this juvenile display of bad manners. Later bad-mannered contributions were made by an elderly ex-minister who had a trade-mark shrill voice. The Brexit Party would surely have taken a very dim view of others turning their backs on a band playing the UK National Anthem.

An election for a new leader was held, the victor of which was the scammer who had led the British People by the nose. He appealed to a very small fraction of the British electorate who consisted of mostly very wealthy elderly men and women who lived in grossly overpriced houses in the villages in Southern England for which the little Englander is very nostalgic. This chief scammer was rewarded for the blatant lies and tricks for which he had been notorious for years. While ordinary people would have to take the consequences for such actions and behaviour, the new Prime Minister, a Winston Churchill wannabe, had been protected by other members of the London elite.

He immediately set his mind on a no-deal Brexit, and surrounded himself with other like-minded people, including one whom a predecessor had described as a "career psychopath". It later emerged that this man owned a farm that had taken about quarter of a million euros worth of subsidies. A few accusations of hypocrisy did not put him off one little bit. That this kamikaze action would damage the entire nation to the point of stressing social cohesion mattered not one bit to the prime-minister and his

minions. Consequences such as losing one's job and having to use foodbanks were for the little people.

In Scotland, the reception for the new Prime Minister was icy, to say the least. The Conservative Party in Scotland fought a desperate rear-guard action to block the appointment of the chief scammer in a plot appropriately named Operation Arse. In the latter half of 2019, there was growing support for a second referendum on independence.

To stop the delays from derailing Brexit, the Prime Minister ordered that Parliament should be prorogued (or suspended) and allowed himself "Henry VIII" powers. He sent the "Minister of the Nineteenth Century" to lie to mislead Her Majesty, The Queen, about these actions in order to get royal approval.

With Her Majesty's Most Loyal Opposition, led by its septuagenarian dullard, being scarcely able to offer a policy to open a bag of crisps, all the chaotic government had to do was to promise the world to a gullible electorate. This included oven ready Brexit, and stunts like driving a (brand new) excavator through a "red" wall of expanded polystyrene blocks. Led by the Churchill wannabe the Conservatives won by a landslide.

The final act in this abysmal performance was the projection of a countdown clock shone onto the front of Downing Street. While some had called for street parties in celebration for this dismal act of national self-harm, there were none. Instead, the Prime Minister continued his fantasies of being a Winston Churchill wannabe, seeing off all those horrible foreigners. In fact, Winston Churchill had set the foundation of the European Union through his protégé, Jean Monet. He would have been appalled at Brexit. Since this disciple of Churchill could not tell a truth from a lie, such a coincidence was overlooked.

Later, a real Churchillian figure arose in Europe in the form of a Ukrainian ex-comedian called Volodymyr Zelinsky who had been democratically elected president of his nation. There was nothing remotely funny about what happened next. Ukraine was invaded by Russian forces. The Ukrainians fought very bravely and there ensued a long and squalid war of attrition in which hundreds of thousands died, all at the behest of the ego of one old man in his seventies.

In late 2019 a particularly nasty turn of events came from the far East. In the unspeakable squalor and cruelty of a Wuhan wet market, a virus that normally infected bats jumped species to affect humans. It rapidly spread on aeroplanes causing illness wherever it spread. Its effect varied from the asymptomatic to a serious respiratory illness that in far too many cases was fatal. SARS-CoV-2, better known as Covid 19 had two further nasty surprises. It was highly infective and had a habit of mutating into a number of variants. It caught many governments throughout the world napping and produced an unprecedented pandemic.

Whether the responses by governments of all different persuasions were the right ones is a matter of on-going debate. Facing such a sudden and unprecedented public health crisis, many governments made it up as they went along, varying from effective management of the crisis, to the downright wacky and ineffective. The 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America, went as far as suggesting people should drink bleach as it killed all known germs dead. And in several cases, it killed the people who followed such advice dead.

In the United Kingdom, the response left a certain amount to be desired. The Churchill wannabe didn't take the rising public health crisis that seriously at first. He failed to

attend COBRA<sup>1</sup> meetings. Some of his reported utterances seemed callous, to say the least. As the damnable virus spread, however, action was taken belatedly. Lock downs were ordered, enforceable by a £100 fine for non-compliance. People were allowed out to do essential shopping and exercise. People had to socially distance by at least 2 metres. Non-essential workers were ordered to work from home. If that were not possible, they were paid up to 80 % of their pay by the government.

Essential workers, such as power station operatives, shopworkers in supermarkets, teachers, hospital staff and other emergency workers had to go in, and those in close contact with others had to wear personal protective equipment (PPE).

Lock downs meant that those affected had to stay at home. People were not allowed to mix with others, even family if they lived in another house. University students in halls of residence fared particularly badly. They were pretty well confined to their rooms; some felt, not unnaturally, that they were in prison. Lectures and seminars were delivered remotely. People could be fined up to £10000 for organising a social gathering. Lock downs were imposed, relaxed, then reimposed as the pandemic came in waves. The “Eat out to help out” initiative from the Chancellor of the Exchequer is thought to have contributed to a second wave of the disease.

The worst effects of the lock down were suffered by those unfortunate enough to be in care homes. Residents and staff were made to isolate, a situation made worse when hospitals were emptied of older patients. Some of these carried the illness into the care homes. Many older people could not understand their enforced isolation and not being able to see loved ones. There were lots of heart-wrenching cases of elderly people,

---

<sup>1</sup> COBRA stands for Cabinet Office Briefing Room A, a committee of top civil servants and government ministers that meets in time of severe national crisis.

previously relatively healthy, going into a prolonged and terminal decline.

Scientists worked hard to produce a vaccine. Many wanted to collaborate with colleagues in Europe to produce a European vaccine, but were told not to by the government, as this ran contrary to the spirit of Brexit. Government wanted to trumpet a British success.

During the distracted months of the pandemic, the ground became fertile for the awarding of contracts with minimal due diligence. The main qualification to bid was not organisational expertise, but a history of donations to the Conservative Party. Some organisations were tasked with providing equipment that they were not competent to provide. Much PPE was found to be totally unsuited for purpose. It is said that an organisation tasked with providing medical flasks was actually run by the landlord of the Secretary of State for Health's local pub. As time passed by, more scandals and allegations of corruption emerged. This included an assignation by the Health Secretary with his bit of fluff in a stationery cupboard. It was not socially distanced.

The nation was further scandalised by the revelation that the Prime Minister had run a party house at 10 Downing Street. Booze had been brought in by the suitcase load through the back door. Some of these parties had become drunken orgies that had left a disgusting mess for the staff to clear up the following morning. One of the most outrageous of these had taken place the evening before the funeral of His late Royal Highness, The Duke of Edinburgh, who had passed away not long before his hundredth birthday. The Queen was shown seated, wearing a mask, all alone during the socially isolated funeral service.

Rules were for the little people.

In Scotland, there were similar, if not stricter, lock down rules. In the words of the First Minister, it was “one of the worst things that she ever had to do”. There was the odd scandal where a senior member of the Scottish administration had been observed driving from Edinburgh to her home. The book was thrown at her and thrown at her hard.

Further scandals rocked the government, and the Prime Minister was found to have misled Parliament, one of the gravest offences that could be committed. He was suspended from The House for ninety days. He took the hint and resigned in Mid-2022. He remained as Prime Minister until his successor was elected. Finally on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2022, both he and his successor went to see The Queen at Balmoral, and his successor was received into her post.

The next day, Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2022, Her Majesty passed away at her favourite place, Balmoral. A picture appeared in the newspapers of a rainbow over Windsor Castle, and a day later, a cartoon of an elderly lady walking upstairs on the rainbow.

It had been predicted that the new Prime Minister would not last in office for long, as she held some decidedly eccentric (extreme perhaps?) views. A lettuce was purchased in a supermarket and was kept in a fridge; its shelf-life outlasted the new Prime Minister, much to the amusement of many.

She was voted out in the election of 2024 and refused to offer any speech accepting the decision of the voters. This was considered very poor form.

In 2025, the 47<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, a keen supporter of Brexit, described, in an interview with the BBC, that the whole process from start to end was “sloppy”.

Even the most imaginative writer of depressing dystopian narratives could not make this up. It was true. However, the rest of this story is made up...

## Chapter 2

June 2016 – January 2022

Friday 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016 was considered to be a black day in Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil. It was the day on which it had been announced that the people of the United Kingdom had voted to leave the European Union. For a region that owed almost all of its prosperity to the EU, it was a grievous blow. The region was remote and, like many, had been left behind by the policies of Westminster governments. The European Union had offered it much development assistance, and more was in the pipeline. The constituency of Buchanan and Strathcadden had returned the highest percentage of remain votes in the United Kingdom at 76 %.

There was a general feeling of outrage and foreboding at the implication of the result, a feeling that was replicated to a greater or lesser extent across the whole of Scotland. The mendacious snake oil salesmen had succeeded. In the centre of Corscadden on that Friday at lunchtime, a spontaneous demonstration occurred calling for a second referendum on Scottish independence. Many of the participants were draped in EU flags or Saltires.

A few individuals had celebrated the vote to leave. There was a drunken party organised in the Union Bar on Fife Road. It got out of hand and the police were called. Several, mostly elderly men, were convicted of public order offences and fined. Their names were well known across the town. “Typical,” was the comment of most people. For their pains, they were cold-shouldered by most of the townsfolk. Those who had advocated leave the most found themselves being refused service in the local shops and other businesses. Soon, most leave-voters denied that they had done so. A year later, nobody would admit to voting

leave, so that Strathcadden had a hundred percent support for remain.

It would take little imagination to realise that the announcement of Brexit went down like a lead balloon in Brewster House. After clearing up the coffee that had overflowed from her cup into the sink, Laura went upstairs to the bedroom to tell Joby.

“We’ve been scammed!” said Joby as Laura came in.

“I hate the North East of England,” was Laura’s reply, before she went out to work. She tried hard to keep the news out of her mind in case she crashed the car on the way to the Strathie.

Gemma burst into tears when she heard the news. Chris listened as the regional statistics revealed a seventy-five percent vote to leave in the Sowerland Conurbation. “Typical,” he said. “They are ignorant scum there.”

He went to comfort Gemma, whose career at Dunalastair Engineering depended on the excellent links that the company had forged with a range of railway engineering companies in Europe.

Aidan and Ewan were not best pleased either. Both were worried about their years abroad supported by the Erasmus scheme. Both were in tears at the prospect of being stuck in a backward-looking and insular nation ruled by narrow-minded gammons from Little England.

“I have never felt so ashamed to be a Brit,” said Aidan through his tears.

“*Inselaffen*<sup>2</sup>!” said Ewan. “Indyref 2. Now!”

---

<sup>2</sup> *Inselaffen* – a pejorative German word meaning “island monkeys”.

The reference to a second referendum on Scottish Independence was made many times all over Scotland in that period.

Gradually the people of Scotland in general, and Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil in particular tried hard to put things to the backs of their minds and get on with their lives. Over the coming weeks, friends rang up various members of the Walker Tribe, saying how they had fallen out with Brexit-voting parents or grandparents. There was a lot of division in families, especially south of the border.

It was no surprise to Jordan to hear that his ex-mother and the Bell-Dick, Head of Corporate Banking had voted for Brexit. As talk increased about cliff-edges, Jordan rather hoped that the pair of them would be the first over one. It needed to be at least two hundred metres high.

For Benjamin and Daniel Walker, Brexit didn't even register as adult blah-blah in their sixteen-month infant skulls. They were doted on by grandparents, parents, and brothers. Gemma, who stayed at Brewster House during the week, was decidedly broody at times. However, Benjamin or Daniel would have a "moment", like all infants do. That would make Gemma decidedly unbroody.

By contrast, the constituents of the Laine Valley were delighted, for they had fallen hook, line and sinker for the sunlit uplands of Brexit. They would be able to partake in whatever tax avoidance ruses that suited them without let nor hindrance from those pesky Europeans who insisted that wealthy people should pay their fair share of taxation. Tax consultants, accountants whose specialism was personal taxation (they were careful not to call it tax avoidance) and estate agents who rigged the housing

market to extract more commission from their well-heeled clients all profited.

As for Rupert Bell-Dick, Head of Corporate Banking at Glynn's Bank and his partner, Kathryn Chetwynd, they shared the delight of their fellow constituents and the majority of the residents of Wapplesfield, well those who were "the right kind of people". They were so pleased at the outcome that they almost became civil to each other. Windhover Barn almost seemed an attractive place to be, despite the fact that the vaulted ceiling had not been decorated and there were long tracks of plaster between the minimalist and very expensive light fittings.

Rupert was particularly pleased with his contribution to the Leave campaign. He had managed to make it to the various constituency events, even though he had been forced to use what he considered to be transport for the plebs, taxis. Fortunately for him, the blacklisting by Premier Cars and Chauffeurs had not extended to the workaday taxi hire companies, other than those in Laineshurst. As he was very wealthy, Rupert was well able to absorb what for normal people would be extortionate fares. He had also managed to network on the big red Mercedes bus. This had required train journeys into Town, first-class naturally.

As Rupert had hedged considerable sums of money to the success of the Leave campaign, he had secured for the Bank a very considerable profit, and more importantly, a very substantial bonus for himself. In a rare moment of generosity, he arranged a cruise for him and Kathryn. He had secured a top-specification luxury cabin on the most luxurious cruise ship. Some people suggested that somebody had had the cabin, but Rupert's very much higher offer had led the company to cancel the previous occupants' booking. It was certainly worth their while to accept Rupert's booking, even though they had refunded the previous clients and given them substantial compensation.

And on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> July 2016 they went, flying out from Gatwick and picking up the ship in Gibraltar for a 21-day Mediterranean cruise. Yes, it went very smoothly. No, they did not fall out. Rupert ate too much as usual, and his corporation grew in the way that would make a CEO of a real corporation very pleased. To salve their (almost atrophied) consciences over excessive consumption, both Rupert and Kathryn went to the gym regularly. Rupert maintained that he was “pumping iron”, while in reality he was pumping feathers. Kathryn in her skin-tight Lycra jerked feebly. An untrained observer might well have called a doctor.

For them, the clientele on board ship suited them down to the ground. They were all of “the right kind of background”, just like they were in North Sussex. That meant that they were staunchly Thatcherite, very wealthy, lived in relatively large houses, and were staunch and proud Brexit voters. Overwhelmingly nostalgic, they lived the Little Englander dream of the village church, the village pub and the village cricket team.

It was a good cruise on a ship that dripped with luxury from start to finish. Both Rupert and Kathryn made a point of showing to everyone that they were so well suited to each other. The food, the company, the luxurious cabin and the attentive service helped no end. Even the excursions were pleasurable, despite the fact that everyone had to use tour buses. These were top-of-the-range models, but not quite to the level of a chauffeur-driven Bentley. Windhover Barn was a long way away, and even further from their well-fed and watered minds.

The post-cruise euphoria in Windhover Barn was short-lived, however. On Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> August, an envelope thumped down onto the doormat, addressed to Rupert Bell-Dick. This was unfortunate, because Rupert was in Town during the week staying in his pied-à-terre in Knightsbridge. He did not get to see its contents until he got home on the Friday evening. Noticing that

the envelope was from the Conservative Party, Rupert was convinced that he was going to receive fulsome praise for the success of the Brexit campaign. There had been some discussion on the big red bus about a possible role for Rupert in the post-Brexit planning process, and he was sure that the letter would confirm a new opportunity for him to make his mark.

As Rupert read the letter, initially he became crestfallen, then decidedly angry. It did not make for pleasing reading.

*Dear Mr Bell-Dick*

*I write to you concerning an investigation that I have been tasked with, to consider your behaviour and attitude you displayed to our interview panel at Ettering Hall on Saturday, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2016. As part of new standard processes introduced by the Prime Minister and Leader of the Conservative Party, two assessors were sent to the recent interviews in which Ms Helen Byland-Bailey was appointed as Candidate for the Laine Valley Constituency.*

*Our assessors have reported that the interview process was marred by a considerable amount of highly offensive sexist talk that belonged more to a locker room rather than a serious interview process. We have spoken to a number of witnesses who have corroborated the complaints. We are, therefore, satisfied that there is sufficient evidence for a disciplinary hearing, which will take place at Conservative Party Headquarters, Smith Square, on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> August 2016 at 14.30. You are entitled to be supported by your legal representative.*

*Yours sincerely*

*James Skinner*

“What the fuck?” yelled Rupert as he stared at the letter.  
“Who the fuck do they think they are?”

“Language!” Kathryn remonstrated. The post-cruise euphoria had not yet faded for Kathryn, who had enjoyed the

company of nice people who didn't use rude words that started with the letter 'P'. "This is Wapplesfield, not Laineshurst. There aren't any plebs round here, but with that kind of filthy talk, they will soon be joining us!"

"You can talk!" Rupert countered, "Your mouth can be like a sewer at times! All that time I spent on the Brexit campaign, and what do I get?"

"What are you on about, Rupe?"

"This! They want me at Smith Square for a disciplinary on Tuesday! I have got more important things to do than listen to Tory Party minions telling me what I can say and what I can't. I have an important meeting at the Bank. I will not alter my schedule at the behest of some airhead who can't take a bit of bloke talk."

"You know plenty in the Tory Party. You know Lord Elpess, and Lord Hoplus. Surely, they can pull a few strings."

Unfortunately for Rupert, neither of his influential friends in high places was able or willing to help. Each knew which side his toast was buttered on, especially as each was jockeying for new high positions in the Conservative Party. Despite that, Rupert forcefully told James Skinner from Smith Square that he had important meetings with equally important corporate clients of Glynn's Bank and that the meeting would have to be rearranged.

On Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> August 2016, early in the morning, a letter thumped onto the doormat at Windhover Barn, and Kathryn dumped it onto the pile waiting for Rupert when he got back from Town.

On Friday evening, Rupert was feeling tired and grumpy as he got back to Windhover Barn. His mood was not improved by the note that Kathryn had left to the effect that she had

decided to go out with the girls to Royal Tunbridge Wells for a night on the town and that he would have to get his own meal, and woe betide him if he left a mess in the kitchen. The George and Dragon was fully booked up. He rummaged through the freezer and found a portion of lasagne. It didn't seem enough, so he looked for another and found it and a third. He defrosted them in the microwave, before placing them in the oven. After three quarters of an hour, Rupert decanted most of the lasagne onto a plate, with a small amount dropping onto the bench. It was still icy-cold; he had not turned on the oven. It had not helped that the internet connected screen had been turned off. He swore as he turned on the oven. Rupert turned on the screen, having forgotten that the internet-connected appliances had acquired a whole ecosystem of malware. Instead of displaying helpful recipes, the oven's computer was linked up to a number of gay porn sites. The screen could be turned on easily but was not so easy to turn off again. It would be another hour before he could have his meal.

As he waited, he flicked through the contents of what was on TV. There was a large choice of channels as always, but on a Friday evening they were rubbish, which was a polite way of putting it. When he turned to the computer, his favourite porn site was quick to take his money (in dollars), but slow to deliver the filth that he craved. By the time that he had concluded that the movie was utter drivel, Rupert was feeling decidedly grumpy.

Rupert's mood was not improved by a smell of burning from the oven. He did have the nous to turn it off before putting on oven mitts and removing the plate with his somewhat singed meal. The oven's internet connected screen was still on, showing graphic pornographic material of a homosexual nature. There seemed to be no way of turning it off, or at least no way that Rupert understood. If that sort of thing had happened at his

prestigious public school, the headmaster would have dealt with it with six of the best.

Rupert hated cooking; that was someone else's job but that someone else was in Royal Tunbridge Wells having a girls' night out. He placed the plate on the bench and fancied that he had heard a faint cracking sound from below the lasagne. The lasagne was piping hot on top but seemed still to be cool in the middle. As befitted an old boy of one of Southern England's top public schools, he ate it all regardless, before picking up the plate to put it in the dishwasher. That was the problem. Only half the plate had accompanied the hand that had lifted it. The rest remained on the bench alongside a strip of lasagne.

Rupert cursed at his lack of prowess in the kitchen, but at least his stomach was relatively satisfied. In his flat in Town, he only used the kitchen to make some cereal, coffee and toast. At lunchtime Rupert partook of luncheon in the senior staff dining room and the portions were more than ample. In the evening there was a choice of fine restaurants around Knightsbridge.

The fall-out from Rupert's efforts at being a gourmet chef persuaded him that a visit to the George and Dragon would do him good, and that is what he did until slinging out time.

"Get up you slob!" came the familiar screeching of an angry harridan the following morning. Rupert's consciousness was feeling decidedly murky as his hangover kicked in. "Rupert! You have left the oven on!"

"I turned it off!"

"Why's that filth on the screen?" yelled Kathryn. The screen above the oven had spontaneously moved onto another site with graphic content. If Rupert had paid for the material on

his favourite porn channel, he would have been more than satisfied with its value for money.

“Turn it off at once! Typical of the sexist filth you watch.”

“I don’t know how to do so. You’re the one who knows everything about this kitchen. In my day, you simply turned a knob.”

“It’s easy,” Kathryn retorted as she stabbed several buttons that not only turned off the screen but also disconnected the oven. She continued, “Look at the fucking mess you have left in the kitchen. How did you break that plate? Don’t you realise that I bought a whole dinner service from Harrods, and each plate costs £250.”

“I only popped it in the oven,” replied Rupert defensively.

“They’re not meant to go into the oven, you idiot!”

“Don’t you call me an idiot!”

“Well, you are an idiot. And look at the mess in the freezer. How many portions did you take?”

“Why? Only three.”

“That was my bloody dinner for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday next week! I am working late those days! Now I am going to have to make a load more! You are such a pig, Rupert.”

“Those portions would hardly feed a starving gnat.”

“You are such a pig! I have far better and more important things to do than having to make meals when I have been working late, just because you’re such a pig.”

“Well, I enjoy my food, not picking at it so delicately.”

“Rupert, I was brought up properly at home and at school. Unlike you, I have decent manners. And look how you have burned the bench top. Start clearing up after yourself and start now. You can get your own breakfast.”

“Can’t you do it for me?”

“What the fuck do you think I am, Rupert? I am a free spirit, not your skivvy! I am going out. Shift your fat carcass and do something useful instead of messing up the house.”

“Kathryn, if you didn’t want your precious kitchen messed up, you should have stayed in and cooked our meal, instead of going out for one of your damned girls’ nights out!”

With that, Kathryn hurled a wet dishcloth at Rupert. At the same time, the morning post thumped onto the doormat. All of it was addressed to Rupert, which did not please Kathryn one little bit. She thrust a large pile at her partner. “Do something useful for a change and look at your post. I am going out to Etterington. What I am doing is none of your business, in case you were going to ask.”

“Couldn’t give a shit,” said Rupert as he picked up the pile of envelopes. “Anyone would think I am an office clerk.”

The contents of one particular letter especially displeased him. He recognised the high-quality stationery as being from the Conservative Party head office.

*Dear Mr Bell-Dick*

*I am writing to inform you of the outcome of the disciplinary meeting that you told me that you would not attend as it was not sufficiently compelling for you to disrupt your work schedule of meetings.*

*We have reviewed all the evidence, and the panel has concluded that there was sufficient evidence to support the complaints brought to the attention of this committee. We have been satisfied that there was sufficient evidence of*

*sexist, racist, and homophobic words and behaviour during your interview process at Ettering Hall. Our attention was drawn to your subsequent attitude and behaviour towards Mr Errol Meek, an employee of Premier Cars and Chauffeurs. We are appalled and consider such behaviour to be completely unacceptable.*

*We have decided to remove you permanently from the list of approved candidates for election as an MP for the Conservative Party, or any other post as an employee (paid or unpaid) of the Party. There is no right of appeal.*

*Yours sincerely*

*James Skinner*

Rupert's euphoria from the cruise had evaporated completely.

As well as working hard, Aidan, Ewan, and Christian played hard, not only at running, but also at rowing. Ewan and Christian had joined Corscadden Rowing Club as student members. They were in a senior crew that had some success in regattas. Ryan Fleetwood was in their team as well.

Aidan spent a lot of time with Tamsin. They would walk out in the hills, watch birds, play music, and listen to music. Tamsin was developing an interest in gardening, and where better to practise than the extensive garden of Brewster House? They would spend time cuddled together and their conversations consisted of very romantic sweet nothings. They were in total love. Their romance was even more obvious than that of Chris and Gemma.

In late July, there was the annual photoshoot for the Autumn and Winter collections. Christian was in charge now. As usual there were the shots for all ages. Benjamin and Daniel were roped in for their earliest experience of fashion modelling. It was

to be the first out of many. Both sets of Chris' grandparents were dragooned to do the shots for those of a certain age. Brian and Brenda had never considered themselves as fashion models, and this was a new experience.

Joby, Laura, Imm, and Alex modelled for the middle-aged customer, although none of them wanted to admit to being middle aged.

The young people of the Walker Tribe were still teenagers (just) so modelled the teen gear. A good couple of days were had by all. Chris and his colleague Jonathan Clements worked hard at preparing the web-shots and the Autumn Collection went up online on September 1<sup>st</sup>.

Just before Chris and Aidy had their joint twentieth birthday on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> August 2016, Tamsin passed her driving test, which added to the celebrations. She would often come in her mother's car to Brewster House. She would drive with Aidy at the front, and Chris and Gemma cuddled up in the back. Like all of the young people in the Walker tribe, Tamsin was a steady driver, keen to improve her driving skills. She would remind Aidy that she had learned to pass her test. Now she was learning to drive. Aidy and Tamsin were now finding walks that were inaccessible to those who depended on public transport. They would also visit gardens to get ideas on what to do with the garden at Brewster House.

As Tamsin put it, there was a whole world out there, away from the smart phone and social media. It was cool. Away from the smart phone, she was busy writing and performing a range of gentle music for quiet reflective meditation.

The garden at Brewster House was not neglected, but it still could have done with some tender loving care. Chris and Gemma were planning a complete facelift, but work tended to get in the way. Laura and Joby did the mowing. Joby liked his big-

boy's toys, while Laura used the cylinder mower which she walked behind. It kept her trim.

Joby had been badgered by his sons to set the tennis court up, which he did, surrounding it with netting to prevent stray tennis balls going through windows. Ewan and Jordan used it a lot.

Soon it was time to go back to Uni. Aidy spent the first semester in Mulhouse, and the second semester in Basel. While he was fluent in both French and German, lectures in those languages sharpened his skills further, so that he spoke like a native. In the exams, he scored very highly, and on his return to Edinburgh, he got a First in his third-year exams.

For Gemma, Chris, Eejay, and Jordan, it was back to their second year with all the challenges that the new year would bring. For Tamsin, going to University was a new adventure. Aidy was there for the first couple of weeks, which helped her to settle in

. Once Aidan had left for Mulhouse, the two love-struck young people continued their romance at a distance, using Skype and weekly handwritten letters as before.

The Academic Year 2016 – 2017 was very much like the previous years. The boys shared the flat at 26, Marchmont Gardens. Gemma regularly came, sometimes with her female friends, including Tamsin. Other male friends came as well. The young men worked hard and played hard.

They would go back to Brewster House from time to time. Their baby twin brothers were thriving. As all of the boys (as they were to their parents) loved children, looking after their little brothers was a joy. They would read to them, play with them, and sing to them. Benjamin and Daniel, who were now two-year-old toddlers, loved music. There was a lot of brightly coloured plastic about Brewster House. The twins loved Thomas

the Tank Engine, which Aidy, Chris, and Eejay had enjoyed at the turn of the Millennium. Neither of the twins stuck a screwdriver into their father's electrostatic loudspeakers.

Almost as soon as the academic year had started, it was time for them to offer themselves for their diets of examination. There were enough examinations to make them feel “reet-pogged”, as a Yorkshire saying goes.

For the following two years, the same routine applied. In the summer, Chris worked at Walker Bros. Gemma worked at Dunalastair Engineering. Aidan worked behind the scenes at Walker Bros, unloading lorries and working in the warehouse. Ewan gained much work experience as an intern at Gordon Morton Solicitors.

Jordan continued doing internships at Constructions Rhône-Rhin in Basel.

In June 2017, Aidan Walker graduated with a First-Class Honours degree in French and German. He started three years of PhD study in October 2017. He mentored and tutored undergraduate students to supplement his income. Aidan's study was interrupted by the pandemic in 2020, but he completed his Doctorate of Philosophy in June 2021. Within a month, he was appointed to a postdoctoral post, doing further research, tutoring, and lecturing.

A year later, in 2018, Ewan Walker gained a First-Class degree in Law with German. His work was the most distinguished in his year, and he was awarded the departmental prize for the most outstanding student. That was the start, for he took up a training position with a legal practice, Johnston, MacLean and Partners, in Edinburgh's New Town. Cheesy though it is to say it, his work was highly praised and valued. He scored highly in subsequent professional examinations. In 2021, after the hiatus forced on everyone by the pandemic, he had

qualified as a trainee solicitor. His PEAT 2<sup>3</sup> record was one of the most detailed that had been submitted to the Law Society of Scotland.

At the same time as Ewan obtained his LLB degree, Christian got his BA (Hons) in Business Administration with an Upper Second. Chris started full-time at Walker Bros. To show that he was a true member of the Walker Tribe, Christian changed his name from Salway to Salway-Walker.

Gemma, who had achieved a First in Electronics and Electrical Engineering, started a Doctorate of Philosophy sponsored by Dunalastair Engineering, but it was interrupted by the pandemic in 2020. During her enforced hiatus, there were projects that she did for Dunalastair Engineering. She completed her Doctorate in 2022.

Jordan got an Upper Second in French and German, only just missing out on a First. He started work for a document translation business, Baxter Ward Associates, in Edinburgh's New Town.

Tamsin gave music lessons to artists whose competence varied from the digitally challenged to those who would soon be snapping at her heels. Under her tutelage, Chris became a good pianist. At university, she had gained Certificates of Distinction for all her Semester examinations. At the start of her final year in 2019, it was suggested that she would do well to study for a PhD. After a year's delay caused by the pandemic, she started this in October 2021 doing research into styles of composition.

Each time the young members of the Walker Tribe went home, they noticed how Benjamin and Daniel had grown. While

---

<sup>3</sup> PEAT 2 – Professional Education and Training Stage 2, the scheme used by the Law Society for Scotland for the training of legal practitioners.

the boys were at university, the twins had transitioned from toddlers to two active and playful small boys. Like their older brother, both boys had long blond hair. Like Aidan (and Christian), they had picked up their father's good looks. Indeed, they were very beautiful children (in the nicest sense of the word). They clearly had Christian's intelligence but had not had to go through the school of hard knocks.

Brewster House was still littered with brightly coloured bits of plastic, but these reflected their ages. They loved to do adventurous things with their parents and their brothers. In September 2019, they started in Primary 1 at St Lawrence Primary. Although they were the youngest in Miss Connor's class, they could more than keep up with their older peers. They were bright and lively, always willing to try new things. Like all small children, they could get themselves into scrapes. They got themselves told off by Mrs Dalton, the Headmistress, for climbing a tree and getting stuck. The fire brigade had to get them down. Their parents were not that pleased either; Laura had a pink fit.

In the garden of Brewster House, the twins had a large lawn to play football on. They were somewhat better at footy than their older brother.

Brewster House was occupied by a family for whom success was deserved. It was not regarded as an entitlement, but as a reward for hard work and personal sacrifice. It was a family home full of love, life, and light. Aidan and Tamsin were going steady, as were Christian and Gemma. Ewan and Jordan were inseparable except for work.

The younger Walkers had their education in Primary 2 interrupted by the pandemic. As Joby was made to work at home, he had to take on the child care, as Laura's work as Senior Radiographer at the Strathie was considered (quite rightly) as

essential. The Walker twins did go into school when Joby needed to be in work. They did like being at home and doing their lessons on the computer. Joby and Laura took great care to make sure that their social skills were developed and were not impacted.

Therefore, the twins were well ahead when they started back in Primary 3. The pandemic had not affected the Region of Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil that badly.

In 2020, Strathcadden Academy was badly affected. It could only provide classes for local Caddies. The Distant Caddies had to stay at home and sign into classes remotely. Fortunately, there were surprisingly few problems, unlike in more urban regions. However, the incoming headmistress caught Covid and became seriously ill. So seriously was she impacted that she could not take up her post and Alexander McEwan was asked to stay on as headmaster.

Ewan and Jordan were inseparable, except for work. Since both of their employers were in Edinburgh New Town and the two young men were about to commit the rest of their lives to each other, it made sense that they should rent a flat together.

It was at the start of November 2019 that Ewan and Jordan took out the lease on a top-floor flat at 21, Deanhaugh Terrace. The rent was exorbitant, as it was in Edinburgh generally. The flat was not large either, but it had everything that a young professional couple could possibly want. The only drawback was that it had night-storage heating, so it could be cold in the evening. On the other hand, it was deliciously warm in the morning. Both Ewan and Jordan liked a clean and orderly house. When they were in their father's flat, all of the young men kept it nice, unlike some of their friends' flats, which were tips. When, in the future, they left the flat, they wanted their deposit back; it would help to pay for the conveyancing on their flat purchase in a

couple of years when Ewan was fully qualified. Both of them felt very grown up, having the responsibility of running their own home.

The flat was no more than ten minutes' walk from both offices. Their kitchen and living room looked out over a cricket ground and Inverleith Park. The bedroom and bathroom were at the back, overlooking the backs of other flats and the communal gardens. The furniture was of good quality and was in very good condition. All Ewan and Jordan needed to do was to bring in their belongings and have their landline and broadband connected.

Within a couple of days, they had made it their home. November and December were two wonderful months for Ewan and Jordan. Their names were printed by the landlord on the bellpush, "Melhuish, Walker". They had a camera to see who was at the door, and a phone which opened the front door to the apartment house. They felt so grown up having their own flat. It meant a lot to them.

They did lots of running and would go to the Glenogle Sports Centre for the gym. They also had membership of the University Sports Centre in The Pleasance, where they would use the climbing wall. Jordan had also bought himself a car, a 2016 Volkswagen Polo. This allowed them to do fell-running out in the Pentland Hills with their friend Ben.

Jordan spent Christmas with his dad and grandparents in Keillor. Ewan spent a couple of days after Christmas with Jordan, before they both came back to Brewster House for Hogmanay.

In early January, Jordan and Ewan started to prepare for their engagement. It would be an ideal birthday present for Ewan, as his 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday would fall on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2021. They had found a Chateau in the Loire area of France.

This chateau had been bought by a man from Northern Ireland and his wife. It had been derelict when they bought it, but with energy, determination, and a hell of a lot of money the house had been restored and earned its keep as a country house hotel. The owner had planned much of the reconstruction work and had several people who helped him. His wife was a designer of unparalleled skill and artistry who had made every room different and distinctive.

These plans were scuppered, however, by the damnable virus that led to the pandemic. Although nobody anticipated the lock downs, which started in late March 2020, foreign travel was advised against, and in early February the proprietor of the hotel rang to tell them not to come. The engagement was to be put back a year, with the engagement being on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2022, just before Ewan's 24<sup>th</sup> birthday.

More annoying for Ewan was that his qualification examinations would be delayed by a year, but there was still much work to be done for his employers, who greatly valued his work as a trainee.

For many people, the pandemic lock-down proved to be a trial of patience with their families especially for those living in small flats. For those living on their own, there were weeks of loneliness. However, for Ewan and Jordan, they were very happy in each other's company. They worked from home on their computers. They both insisted on keeping office hours and dressing up professionally for work. In addition, to keep trainee solicitors up to speed, the Law Society of Scotland insisted on regular computer-based examinations, which had to be passed before candidates could offer themselves for their diets of proper professional examinations. Not surprisingly, Ewan scored very highly in these, passing with distinction.

After work, the two young men would change into their sports gear to have a 5-k run. After showering, they would dress down for the evening. They would change into t-shirts, sweaters as the flat was cool by evening, shorts, socks, and trainers. Alternatively, they would wear short casual kilts in the manner approved by most Scottish kilt-lovers. While they were discrete about their same sex attraction outside the flat, Ewan and Jordan could be as gay as they liked inside (within their boundaries) and had many intimate private moments where they shared their mutual and deepening gentle love.

## Chapter 3

**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022**

Throughout January, Ewan worked hard for his next diet of professional examinations. While his LLB degree exempted him from the preliminary examinations, there were other examinations to be done, with the diets being in February and August. Ewan found the examinations challenging, but he did a lot of reading and was not afraid to ask more experienced colleagues for their views.

Jordan, too, was busy. Baxter Ward Associates were running a weeklong intensive training course in foreign languages for marketing executives. Jordan had established himself as one of the best linguists in the company and he was going to be senior languages tutor. Many of the executives would be twice his age, which made him anxious. However, the big boss, Shona Ward, would be there. If any executives were to step out of line with their young tutor, she would give them what for.

While Ewan was studying for his diet of examination, Jordan was busy preparing down to the last detail. After all, it was said that “prior preparation prevents poor performance”. It was an axiom that many British politicians should have heeded five years before. Jordan spent hours on his laptop preparing a scheme of work, planning tutorials, preparing presentations, and a final assessment. It had to be excellent; the executives had paid a fortune to attend.

Jordan also planned his journey. He would have to go in the car. Grantsbury Hall was a large country house hotel on the border of the South and Middle Ridings of Yorkshire. Before being sold off, it had been a teacher training centre. It was ideal for a week long intensive residential training event; but it was nowhere near a railway station. It would be a long car journey,

the longest that Jordan had done on his own. Besides he had a lot of equipment which would have been difficult to cart about on a train.

On the morning of Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2022, Ewan helped Jordan to load up the car. Everything that Jordan would need to be a senior tutor was present and correct. Even so he checked it carefully. He had keyed in the postal code for Grantsbury Hall into his sat nav. He had his two best suits and ties for the course. Although he was young, Jordan considered that if he were to lead by example, he would be dressed properly.

The two young men went upstairs to the flat, and into the kitchen. They could see the car in case some scally decided to break in. They held each other closely. It was a loving private moment. Ewan gazed at his boyfriend who, in six weeks, was going to be his fiancé. Jordan still had a boyish face. His hair was a little shorter than it had been but was neatly styled and professional looking. He looked so beautiful. Although Jordan was nearly twenty-five, he was very slim. He was cute. They cuddled and kissed.

Ewan would miss Jordan. The flat would feel different, but he had to be a big boy. Jordan was not going off to war; he was going to a country house hotel in the wilds of Yorkshire to teach some middle-aged men with big egos a bit of French and German. It was not the first time, nor would it be the last time that work would make them be apart. Besides there were all sorts of ways they would keep in touch in the evening: Skype, mobile phones, and so on.

Jordan's eyes were wide in love as he too gazed at Ewan. Ewan was pretty. His character, gentle and thoughtful, went with his looks. Ewan was twenty-three, diligent and highly intelligent, the young man Jordan wanted to spend the rest of his life with.

The week was going to be hard work from start to finish. He could not have prepared any more. He had been through it all with Shona Ward, and she had been delighted. And she had reassured him that executive egos could be put in their place quite easily. “Sock it to them, Jordan,” was her final advice on the matter.

Ewan went down with Jordan. “I’ll give you a ring tonight, Eejay,” said Jordan as he got into his silver Volkswagen Polo and started it. Ewan watched as the car went down Deanhaugh Terrace and turned left onto Deanhaugh Street. If he had a tail, it would be now drooping. The warm fuzz Ewan felt when he was with Jordan was fading.

Aidan still lived at his father’s flat at 26, Marchmont Gardens. Chris had moved out when he started full time at Walker Bros in Corscadden. Tamsin had moved in. They were not only going steady, but also Aidy was thinking of popping the question, but that would have to wait until June 2024, when Tamsin completed her PhD.

Gemma had moved in at the same time, as she was now doing her PhD at the King’s Buildings. Chris had given Aidy strict instructions not to be a dark horse with Gemma. He wouldn’t be a dark horse with Tamsin either.

Ewan made a quick phone call to his brother in Marchmont Gardens. Aidy and Tamsin had decided to go back to Corscadden, and half an hour later the three of them were at Waverley Station ready to catch the next train to Corscadden. A day’s break would do them good during a cold and depressing January. There would be good company. Mum and Dad were

always pleased to see them. The twins would be excited because there were more people to pay them attention.

Benjamin and Daniel had always had classical music in the background. They had heard their brothers and Tamsin playing as well. It was therefore natural that they wanted to coax nice sounds from the piano in the drawing room. They had a good number of enthusiastic teachers: their father, Aidy, Ewan, and Chris. At the age of nearly six, they could coax simple tunes from the instrument. They could also play simple duets and keep more or less together. After that they liked to listen to more complex music, and Tamsin was the perfect performer.

They also liked to go to the noisy room and listen to Ewan on his guitars while Aidy played the keyboard. Dad had bought them a simple composition program for their computer that they had in the games room.

Chris came in from work in the late afternoon and was thrilled to see that Aidy, Ewan, and Tamsin had landed. He ordered his mum and dad out of the kitchen. Within three quarters of an hour, a simple but tasty meal had been rustled up. The twins were now appreciating the good food their big brother produced. They also enjoyed the atmosphere of the table in the kitchen-diner, even if they didn't understand all the grown-up bla-bla.

That evening Jordan rang Ewan on his mobile. Grantsbury Hall was very luxurious. He had met some of the conference delegates. Not all of them were twice his age. There were some who were under thirty, which made him more comfortable. There were one or two who were clearly at least twice his age. At this stage they seemed friendly enough. Although sensitive, Jordan was a very sociable young man.

Jordan had gone through everything with his team of tutors. They were as enthusiastic as he was. In twelve hours or

so, he would be getting ready to smash his first presentation – metaphorically of course, not like Mr Mitchell had done with his laptop nearly seven years before.

As always there were lots of romantic sweet nothings, for Ewan and Jordan were as head-over-heels in love as Aidan and Tamsin. The fuzzy glow returned to Ewan as he thought of his boyfriend. They seemed to be even more in love each day.

Despite the abuse that Jordan had suffered at the hands of his ex-mother, he was not embittered. Instead, he always set out to make whoever he met to be that bit happier. Jordan still wanted his ex-mother and the Bell-Dick, Head of Corporate Banking at Glynn's Bank, to find a cliff at least two hundred metres high and jump off it.

The following morning, Chris was the first up. He went down to the kitchen to make his mum and dad their morning tea. The radio played Classic FM. Chris had fallen out of love with Radio Cadden with its in-your-face output of loud pop-music. Having Mum and Dad was still very important to him. At the age of twenty-five, Chris still counted Brewster House as his home, despite the fact that he had a steady girlfriend. The roar of The Cloudburst into The Colossus demonstrated to the whole house that Gemma was getting up.

As he waited for the kettle to boil, he mulled over how he was taking more responsibility in running Walker Bros. Aunt Jenny and Aunt Sarah were now in their late fifties and had told him that there was no way that they wanted to carry on for the length of time that their father had. Soon the responsibility of running the family business would be on his shoulders. He wondered if people would take him seriously as a boss. He still looked so young. He had to carry the Proof of Age card that he had had since he was eighteen. He hadn't grown any facial hair

until he was twenty-two and still had almost no body hair. Aidy was just the same. Their father's genes were responsible.

A more immediate helping of responsibility was coming Chris's way. After a year's hiatus, he was going to catch a train to Edinburgh, followed by one to London, as he was going to attend London Fashion Week. He had been tasked to buy new lines up to the value of two hundred and fifty grand. These had to sell in Corscadden, so they needed to be "sensible". This meant that they had to clothe the nakedness of their wearers with elegance and beauty, as well as being made of high-quality material. Just one pattern that didn't quite please, or a cut that was not quite right could ensure that the line didn't sell. Walker Bros would make a loss. That would not do. One mistake could be absorbed, but two or three could spell disaster with the tight margins that kept the company competitive.

He had been down the year before the pandemic with Aunt Jenny and Aunt Sarah. Now he was on his own. Some colleagues thought that it was a complete damned waste of money. One misjudgement on his part would prove them right.

Then Gemma was down, and a couple of minutes later, Tamsin came into the kitchen. Chris took the tea up to Mum and Dad, something he would not do until next Saturday. Gemma had now put the coffee percolator on, while Tamsin watched the little birds that were starting to come to the feeders outside the kitchen at first light. Chris was back down, organising the cereal and toast that formed breakfast in the Walker Tribe.

Yet again the kitchen door opened. It was Aidy. He was still in the sports shorts and T-shirt he wore in bed. He had put on a pullover, sports socks, and trainers. It was about all he was capable of doing first thing in the morning, and he was looking decidedly dozy, if not gormless.

“Oh, sleepy baby,” said Tamsin, before going over to cuddle her boyfriend. They cuddled and she fondled Aidy’s bum. They sat on the window seat, with Aidy resting his head on her shoulder. His eyes closed in bliss, while Tamsin caressed his bare thigh.

Then Ewan came in, similarly dressed as his brother. He looked more wide-eyed and bushy tailed. He was still sometimes called “Squirrel” by Auld Caddies, a reference to his resemblance to this well-loved ginger rodent that was quite common in Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil, and his ability on the climbing wall.

Then there was the scampering of little feet as Benjamin and Daniel scurried downstairs followed by Laura. Like Aidan, Joby looked sleepy and gormless. It was nothing unusual.

Daniel and Benjamin wanted to go to London with their elder brother. It sounded exciting, much better than school. Chris told them that there would be lots and lots of grown-up bla-bla, and after a day they would want to come home. They also had to look after Mummy and Daddy for him. They were to make sure that neither of them did something silly.

Aidy had almost fallen asleep into his cereal, so Tamsin got him a large cup of coffee, the first of several he would drink that day.

At the end of the afternoon, the youngsters caught the train to Edinburgh from Corscadden. Chris had a large suitcase with all the paraphernalia required for a five-day business trip. When the train got into Waverley, they wished him luck, before three of them went back to Marchmont Gardens, and Ewan went back to Deanhaugh Terrace. When Ewan got back, it was dark and cold in the flat. A call from Jordan assured him that all was alright.

Christian Salway-Walker was attending various fashion parades. He had his best camera to take shots of the models. He also had opportunities to look at the products, deciding what were sensible enough to appeal to the customers back in Corscadden. On the last couple of days, he would need to decide on his orders. Some would require some pretty large cheques.

In the meantime, Ewan would hunker down in the flat to do his revision. When he got back from work, he would go for a run before having a shower. He would hang up his business suit neatly in the wardrobe. He liked to wear sports kit. Alternatively, he would put on a short casual kilt with a T-shirt, a casual shirt, and a thick cashmere sweater, and knee-length socks. He was warm and felt free in the way that kilt wearers would explain. He would then prepare his dinner before getting down to revision. It took away from his mind that Jordan was not there. At the end of the day Jordan would ring and tell him how the day had gone. It seemed that teaching big egos was like herding cats.

One lunchtime, Ewan went out to buy Jordan's birthday present, an alpaca turtle-neck jumper of the highest quality. It was expensive. It would be a lovely surprise for Jordan's twenty-fifth birthday on Sunday. On Saturday afternoon, Ewan bought a big bouquet of flowers for his boyfriend, soon to be fiancé.

Finally, Sunday came. The jumper was wrapped up, and the flowers were in a vase on the kitchen table. After breakfast, the phone rang. It was Jordan. It was a long call, with lots of romantic sweet nothings. It could have been between Aidy and Tamsin. Ewan felt that warm fuzzy feeling. He sat cross legged on the settee. He was full of loving anticipation and excitement.

In the late morning, Jordan rang again. He was at a filling station on the A729 and had filled the car up with petrol.

Finally, Jordan said, “I should be back at about two. A good run around Inverleith Park. It’s been a hard week, and I could do with a good run to stretch my legs. Love you lots and lots.”

## Chapter 4

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022

Sophie Kitchener was always pleased to get phone calls from her friends at any time. She was a sociable woman who was part of the Cheshire county set. Therefore, a call from Celia Barwick-Green was welcome. The two women, who were in their late forties, had known each other from boarding school.

“Celia, darling, how lovely to hear from you.”

“Sophie, darling, could you do me a favour? Could you go down to our place and tell Becca that I am going to be late for the gymkhana this afternoon. Nigel’s taking her and Kit-Kat, but I can’t get him on his mobile or the landline. Becca is going to be ever so cross. She will worry about me and that will put her off. If she doesn’t get a rosette, she’ll be unbearable.”

“Where are you then?”

“Oh, I am in the wilds of the borders on the A729, near a place called Tubberbutts.”

“Where’s that?”

“Oh, how should I know? It’s on my sat nav. Oh, the traffic is so slow. I am going to get past this line of traffic. There is a right turn soon. I am going up that road. It will get me to the A7 and the motorway. Oh, why do people drive so slowly in these parts? Oh bugger! There’s something coming!”

The angry blare of a horn came over loud and clear. Then Celia shouted, “Fuck off! No not you Sophie! And stop flashing your lights at me. Good, I can get past this lot!”

Sophie was rather glad she was in her kitchen, not with Celia in her Range Rover. The Range Rover, a long wheelbase

SV Autobiography had a five-litre petrol motor. It was luxuriously appointed with every gizmo a driver would want. It was built like a tank and weighed 2.6 tonnes. It also gobbled the petrol as if there were no tomorrow. Its power output and performance were phenomenal. Celia was her best friend, but when behind the wheel, she would grow horns. She also tended to get distracted with all the gizmos, and now she was distracted by three things. Firstly, there was the mobile phone. Secondly, she was looking for the turn on her sat nav. She was steering the car with her thighs. Thirdly she was now overtaking the line of traffic and was well above the speed limit.

“I can’t find this bloody turn,” she said as she gave a running commentary to Sophie. “Oh bugger! It’s here and there’s a bloody queue...”

Sophie heard a screech of rubber as Celia yanked the great car to the right before hearing a series of metallic bangs in very rapid succession, before a shout of “SHIT!” Some silly twat has run into me.”

“Celia, darling, are you alright?”

“My car’s on its side. I’m OK. Must go!”

The line went dead. Sophie was decidedly alarmed. It sounded if Celia was driving even more like a lunatic than usual. As for her language, it appeared to have its roots from too much time in equestrian facilities.

At 12.45 on the afternoon of Sunday 23rd January 2022, an emergency call was received by the Borders Emergency Control Room. It concerned a serious road traffic accident at the junction of Lennerton Lane and the A729 main road, one kilometre from Tubberbutts village. Five vehicles were involved, and some people had sustained injuries.

By 12.54, Constables Taylor and Ingles were on the scene having raced blue lights on powerful motorcycles. The preliminary assessment was that four vehicles were involved, all of them seriously damaged. There were several injured people as reported, and the assistance of the fire brigade was needed to lift the wrecked vehicles, of which two were on their sides.

At the centre of the pile was a Range Rover. It was on its side, with its front in a wall. A stationary Mazda 3 waiting to turn out from Lennerton Lane onto the main road had had much of the front torn off. A Ford S-max people carrier had piled into the wreckage, followed by a pick-up truck towing a trailer of pigs. The trailer's rear door had sprung open, and the pigs had escaped, except two, which were dead.

On talking to witnesses, it appeared that there was a fifth vehicle, which was obscured by the Ford S-max and the Range Rover. Both were on their sides. On closer inspection, this was true. A silver Volkswagen Polo was hidden by the two larger cars. It had been crushed into the wall by the Range Rover, and then the S-Max that had piled into the wreckage. It barely resembled a car at all. They could see its driver. He was in a bad way.

Within a couple of minutes other police officers were there, followed by two appliances. A paramedic first responder was now on the scene. He made a preliminary assessment of the injured people. One at least needed the air ambulance, which he promptly summoned. Four others had sustained serious injuries that would require hospital treatment. Ambulances were coming onto the scene, as was heavy lifting equipment.

The Range Rover was empty. Its driver had crawled through the damaged car and opened its rear door. Realising that causing a major road traffic accident was going to land her in shit that was even deeper than that behind her stables, she had done a runner.

Meanwhile the Police had closed the A729 in both directions, and Lennerton Lane.

The first thing that needed to be done was to get the people out of the S-Max before they could move it. Then the firefighters could get at the car that was behind the S-Max. It was scarcely recognisable as a Volkswagen Polo.

It took twenty minutes to cut the roof off the S-Max and lift the people out. After that they got to the wreckage of the silver car. It had lozenged to two thirds of its length and half its width. The engine was crushed into the passenger compartment. There were all sorts of items of baggage that had been hurled all over the car during the impact. A heavy steering wheel lock had penetrated the back of the driver's seat and was still there.

Now the air ambulance had arrived from Edinburgh. One of the crew was with the young man trapped in the Polo. Surprisingly there were signs of life. The paramedic spoke to the young man who was passing in and out of consciousness. He placed an oxygen mask over the young man's face.

"What's your name, Son?"

"...Jordan..."

"How old are you?"

"...I'm twenty-five... It's my birthday..."

"Listen, son, the fire brigade are coming to get you out. Can you feel anything?"

"Yes...It hurts..."

The fire brigade were now using their equipment to remove the remains of the car, which currently looked like a mediaeval torture instrument.

"Where are you heading, Son?" said the paramedic.

“...Home...In Edinburgh...”

“Jordan, Sonny, keep your eyes open. We are going to get you out.”

“...I’m not going to die, am I?” The paramedic saw tears coming out of Jordan’s eyes.

“Jordan, of course you’re not. We are going to get you out of this. I need to put this into you to help you.”

The paramedic inserted a cannula into Jordan’s arm and connected it to a saline drip. He continued to hold the oxygen mask close to Jordan’s face.

“We’re going to take you to the helicopter. Have you been in a chopper before?”

“...No...”

“We’ll take you to the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary. They’ll sort you out. A few days and you will be up and about.”

By now, the fire-brigade had extracted Jordan from the car. They carefully put braces around his shattered body before they laid him on a stretcher and walked over to the helicopter which was waiting in the field opposite. They loaded him on, and the machine took off.

Jordan had slipped back into unconsciousness, but halfway through the flight, he came round, and said, “...tell Ewa...that I love...h...”

“Ewa? Who is she?”

“...He’s my partner...I’m...gay...”

Jordan slipped back into a coma.

On arrival at the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary, a large trauma team were waiting on the Helipad. All sorts of things

were inserted into Jordan, but to no avail. There were few signs of life.

“What a bloody waste,” said the paramedic. “My son is his age.”

Jordan was wheeled into the lift. The trauma team had dealt with this sort of thing many times.

He was rushed to Theatre, on maximum life support. There were, by now, few signs of life.

Most times the patients recovered after an intensive course of treatment. However, there were times when their best efforts were not sufficient. It was always sad when their patient’s next stop was the mortuary.

In theatre Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish passed away. It was his twenty-fifth birthday.

The A729 road was closed for several hours for the traffic cops to complete their investigations into the fatal accident that had occurred just before lunchtime.

Witness statements and several dash-cams had shown what had happened. A number of dangerous manoeuvres had been committed by the driver of the Range Rover SV Autobiography. The aggressive driving by the female driver had been recorded on dash-cam footage. It was clear that she was holding a mobile telephone to her ear. A rear-facing dash-cam showed her with the mobile to her right ear, and her fiddling with something on the central fascia of the car with her left hand. A lorry driver testified to her trying to steer with her thighs while fiddling with the sat nav. Furthermore, the Range-Rover had a dash-cam amongst all its gizmos. It and a tracker dropped its

driver well and truly in it. They showed that the car was travelling well above the national speed limit.

The silver Volkswagen, or what remained of it, had a dash-cam. Its memory card was still working. It revealed the Range-Rover making a sudden turn at almost full speed. It was on the right-hand side of the road as it was overtaking, then pulled to the left, cutting up the next driver. No turning indication was made. The big car was tipping over as it skidded onto Lennerton Lane. There was a momentary glimpse of the Mazda 3 being struck and pulled around. The damage to the Mazda was consistent with a high-speed angled blow from the left. Then the Range Rover struck the Polo just in front of the A-pillar, crushing the car and forcing it against the wall. The car's direction of travel had been reversed, which made it inevitable that the Ford S-max would shunt the Polo heavily from the rear. The pick-up truck, which was pulling a heavily laden trailer, shunted the S-max, while the trailer jack-knifed.

The dash-cam from the Polo showed that traffic had queued due to temporary traffic lights placed 300 metres from the national speed limit sign to the north of Tubberbutts. The driver of the Polo had correctly stopped as the lights changed in front of him. There was a ninety second wait to allow the southbound traffic to pass. The roadworks took up about 300 metres. The driver was travelling at 80 kilometres an hour as he approached the turn to Lennerton Lane, well below the national speed limit.

Witnesses had also seen the driver tossing her mobile over a hedge. It was quickly recovered to be used in evidence. Several of the motorists in the southbound side of the road detained the driver before the police attended. They had not been impressed at the way that she had berated the young man trapped in the silver car, whom she was accusing of causing the accident. There was something of a scrap as they did so, and one man ended up with a black eye. The woman was arrested on suspicion of

leaving the scene of an accident and causing serious injury as a result of dangerous driving. She was taken to the police station in Keillor.

A number of wreck trucks were needed to move the damaged vehicles. The silver Polo, which looked like it had been through a car crusher, could not be moved on its wheels. It was hoisted onto a transporter. It was well into the evening before the mess was cleared up and the A729 was reopened.

The pigs that had made their escape had disappeared into the surrounding farmland. Four were found in different places; they had died from their injuries. Another injured pig was found and had to be put to sleep by the vet. Five were later located and returned to their farm. Two others were never found and were assumed to have gone feral.

The facts of what had happened were straight-forward to establish and would form the bulk of the preliminary report to be sent to the Procurator Fiscal. The inquiry as to why it had happened was the next part of the investigation over at the nick at Keillor. Celia Barwick-Green was sticking to her story that she was struck from the left by a silver Volkswagen Golf GTI, which was clearly speeding. She was driving below the speed limit all the time she was on the A729. She was turning right at a normal speed from the left-hand side of the road. The driver must have been drunk or on drugs not to have seen her. No, she was not using her mobile phone; that would have been moronic. No, she had not fiddled with the sat nav. She always kept her hands on the steering wheel. She had been driving safely for twenty-five years without an accident, and it was all the fault of the young fool in the Golf GTI. It was all very unfair as she was part of the high society in Cheshire. They had delayed her, so that she would miss her daughter's gymkhana. Becca would be so cross.

Celia was not that keen to have tests done on her blood. That party she was at was not just drinks and nibbles. There had been some snorting.

The police were neither convinced nor impressed. The next morning, Celia Barwick-Green was notified of impending charges of causing injury by dangerous driving, driving while using a mobile telephone, and leaving the scene of an accident. Just after the charges were stated, a call came through from the local headquarters. An extra charge was to be added to the list, namely causing the death of Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish by dangerous driving. She was formally notified that she was under formal investigation by Police Scotland and that more charges were possible, depending on the results of tests. The results of the investigations would be passed to the Procurator Fiscal's office, and a decision would be made whether to proceed. She was bailed to appear at the Borders Sheriff Court on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> May 2022. She had to catch a train back to Cheshire which required three changes of train.

## Chapter 5

Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022

Back at 21, Deanhaugh Terrace, Ewan Walker was waiting in eager anticipation for his boyfriend, soon to be fiancé, to return at about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. He spent the morning reading up for a diet of mock professional examinations that he was due to take the next morning. After lunch, he changed into his running kit, before going to the bathroom with a book. From his perch, Ewan would glance into the communal garden, before going back to his book.

As two o'clock came and went, Ewan sat in the living room cross-legged on the settee, knowing that any moment, the car would pull up outside. Then Jordan would come up the stairs into the flat. They would empty the car, before Jordan changed into his running shorts, and they would go for a good 5 k.

Jordan didn't come.

As it was getting dark, Ewan started to get uneasy. What had happened to Jordan? Perhaps he was stuck in traffic. Or his car had broken down, and he was in a mobile not-spot. Still nothing.

It was late in the afternoon, and quite dark when Ewan heard feet on the stairs. It must have been Jordan, but there was a second pair of feet. Maybe Jordan had a friend along with him. That was not unusual. Ewan relaxed. But his relief was momentary, for there was a knock at the door. Jordan would not have knocked. Instead, his key would have rattled in the lock.

Ewan, still in his running strip, went to open the door. There were two police constables, Mark Richards, and Janice Dobson.

“Does Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish live here?” said PC Dobson.

“Yes, can I help?” said Ewan nervously. Surely Jordan would not have got up to something.

“Does his fiancée live here?” asked PC Richards.

“I am his fiancé,” said Ewan.

“We were expecting a girl,” said PC Richards, as a momentary look of surprise crossed his face. The tall young man in front of him dressed in fluorescent orange sports socks, red short running shorts, and a hoody top was slightly effeminate.

“Jordan and I are gay” Ewan said. “We are getting engaged at the end of next month. Is there anything wrong in that?”

“Of course not,” PC Richards replied, realising he had rather put his foot in it.

“Can we come in?” PC Dobson asked.

“Of course,” Ewan replied. “We’ll go to the living room.”

“Mark, go and put the kettle on and make a strong sweet tea,” said PC Dobson.

“How can I help you?” Ewan was feeling decidedly alarmed. Ewan and PC Dobson sat down.

“Could I ask you what your full name is, sir?” asked PC Dobson.

“Ewan James Samuel Walker. Date of birth: 27<sup>th</sup> February 1998.”

“And for Mr Melhuish?”

“Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish. Date of birth: 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1997.”

“That’s today.”

“Yes, I am expecting him any moment. He should have been here three hours ago. It’s his twenty-fifth birthday.”

PC Richards came back in with three cups of tea. PC Dobson spoke, “May I call you Ewan?”

“Of course.”

“Ewan, what we have to tell you is going to be very upsetting for you. Have some tea before we carry on.”

Ewan started to drink the tea. He looked pale.

“There was a bad road accident early this afternoon on the A729 road near the village of Tubberbutts. Jordan was involved. I am really sorry to tell you that he has died as a result of his injuries.”

Ewan pulled his legs up into the foetal position. “Are you sure?” he blurted.

“We are sure,” said PC Richards. “We found his documents in the car. It is a silver Volkswagen Polo, registration SK16...”

“Jordan is a very safe driver,” said Ewan. He was now holding a soft toy that was on the settee.

“We know, Ewan,” said PC Dobson. “He did not cause the accident in any way. We have arrested a driver of a Range Rover, and she is helping us with our enquiries. Three other vehicles were involved, and four other people have been seriously injured. We got the air ambulance out for Jordan. Sadly, he passed away in Theatre at the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary.”

“You can be sure that we are carrying out a very thorough investigation. We will keep you informed, of course,” PC Richards added.

Ewan sat there rocking as if he were about to faint.

“Ewan, you need to drink this tea to help you,” said PC Richards.

“I need the bathroom,” said Ewan. He rushed out and the two police officers heard him being violently sick into the lavatory.

“This is the hardest part of police work,” said PC Dobson to her colleague. “And the next bit is not going to be easy, either.”

Presently Ewan was back. He was as white as a sheet. He sat back down, resuming his foetal position, cuddled up to the soft toy.

“Ewan,” said PC Richards, “Could you tell us how you got to know Jordan? We’re not being nosy; it’s part of the background checks that we have to do in cases like this.”

“Jordan and I met at school in Secondary 3. Our school was Strathcadden Academy in Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil. I had just turned fourteen and he was fifteen. He’s thirteen months older than me. We hit it off straight away. I thought he was very gorgeous to look at, and he was lovely to me. We did everything together. We sat together in class. We were deeply attracted to each other. We have never done anything filthy though. He became more than a friend; he was my soulmate.

“My mum died eight years ago – tomorrow. I was badly cut up with it. I still miss her now. He helped me through it.

“Our relationship has deepened ever since. We wanted to spend all our lives together. It’s just like a boy and his girlfriend

who go on to get engaged. We were going to get engaged in France on the day before my birthday, Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> February. We chose this lovely chateau. The bloke who runs it is a retired Colonel from Northern Ireland.”

“Yes, he’s been on the telly. My wife watches the series,” said PC Richards.

“Ewan,” said PC Dobson. “We need you to do something that you may find very difficult. We need to take you to the DMI<sup>4</sup> and to confirm that the deceased is indeed Jordan Melhuish. We have to have a formal identification for the Procurator Fiscal. We have tried to get his father, but it seems he is out of the country.”

“Yes, he travels for his job. He works for an international company,” Ewan replied.

“What about his mother?”

“She has disowned him. She lives south of London with her partner. He’s a banker.”

As Ewan went with the constables to the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary, he was praying as he had never prayed before, even when his mother had died. It was all a ghastly mistake. When he got back, the silver Polo would be parked outside the tenement house, and Jordan would be in the flat. He would have something to say...

The journey seemed to take for ever and a day. Dalkeith Road seemed to stretch out to eternity, before turning into Kerr Avenue. The car turned into the grounds of the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary. It was housed in a sprawling nineteen

---

<sup>4</sup> Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary. It used to occupy a site in St Leonards, but it is now at Little Holland, about 10 km south east of the city centre.

sixties building. Ewan had little recollection of going down to the mortuary. Like all big hospitals, the DMI was like a rabbit warren. He felt scared.

Jordan's body had been laid out, covered with a clean white sheet. The attendants had done this sort of thing hundreds of times before. It was routine to them, and there was a certain gallows humour to it. It was reserved for behind the scenes, never in front of the loved ones.

The attendants pulled the sheet back with dignity and reverence. Ewan could see that without doubt it was Jordan. They uncovered Jordan's right arm. It was broken in three places, but the two distinctive pigment spots were present and correct. The rainbow bangle was also present around Jordan's wrist. The wrist, too, was broken.

Jordan's head was not marked in any way. A trickle of blood from his mouth had been cleaned.

"Jordie," said Ewan, fighting back tears, "what happened to you? How did you get into this state, my love, my baby?"

Ewan saw a piece of A4 paper under Jordan's right arm. On it was scrawled "Gay boy. Handle with care!" There was a smiley face emoticon. Such was the state of Ewan that he did not react.

"Mr Walker," said one of the attendants, "do you need to see any more?"

"No. It is Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish." Ewan did not have the least desire to see Jordan's shattered body. The sheet was put back with dignity. He turned away. Tears were running down his cheeks.

"Ewan," said PC Dobson, "when you are ready, would you be able to answer a few more questions about Jordan?"

“Of course,” Ewan replied. He was not in the least bit ready, but he wanted to get out of this god-awful place. “Please let me pull myself together.”

They left the mortuary and went into a room down the corridor. PC Dobson got out her clipboard. “Do you have the address of Jordan’s next-of-kin?”

“His father lives in Keillor. Clematis Cottage, Drumgarren Loan, Keillor. I don’t know the post code. I don’t have the mobile, but it will be on Jordan’s mobile. The land line is 01574 342985.”

“I’m afraid that Jordan’s mobile was smashed in the accident,” said PC Richards.

“Are there any other next-of-kin?”

“Jordan’s grandma and granddad: they are Richard and Celia Melhuish. Their address is Acrefair House, Selkirk Road, Keillor. Again, I don’t know the postcode, or the landline.”

“Where did Jordan work? What did he do?”

“He’s...I mean he was a translator working for Baxter Ward Associates at 34, Dundonald Lane in the New Town. Their number is 0131-225...”

The mistaken use of “He’s...I mean he was...” re-echoed through Ewan’s mind. It was entirely understandable, but it had the power to deliver another punch to his tortured soul. He started to cry again. In the background, a police radio crackled.

“Do you know where Jordan was going on the A729?”

“He had been tutoring an intensive language course at Grantsbury Hall Hotel in Yorkshire. He was coming home. He rang me at about midday to tell me that he would be home at

two. We were going to do a run. That's why I am dressed like this."

"Ewan, you have been most helpful," PC Richards said. "Look, we have been called out on another job. You can get a taxi home. Before we go, we can assure you that our colleagues will get to the bottom of this and ensure that justice is done for you. We'll give you our cards so if you need to get in touch with us; you can do so at any time we're on shift."

The two officers gave Ewan their cards and left the room. The pace at which they walked up the corridor suggested that they were going to have to deal with some scallies who had kicked off somewhere.

"What a bloody awful thing to happen to such a pleasant young man," said Janice Dobson as she started the car. "I know lots of people go on about gays. He was genuinely in love with Jordan, every bit as much as if he were a girl."

"Very innocent," Mark Richards replied. "Almost cute and certainly somewhat girly. I wouldn't mind my daughter having him as her boyfriend. I don't think the twenty-three-year-olds we're going to meet in a few minutes are going to fit that bill."

"A double whammy – he lost his mother eight years ago to the day. As for Jordan, what a shit-awful present for his birthday," Janice Dobson said.

"Life can be a proper shit-show, it really can," Mark Richards concluded sadly.

Ewan's heartfelt desire was to get the hell out of this damned building. He never wanted to see the inside of a big city

hospital ever again. He had little idea of where he was, let alone how to get out. If he ran along the corridors, somebody would shout at him. He hated being told off. Tears were streaming down his face. He turned into the corridor that he thought he had come down. Another turn, he was in the operating suite. There were a couple of people all toggled up in operating gowns. They were going to have to patch someone up who was in a bad way. He didn't want to know and turned back.

He didn't know how he managed to get to Reception. Nevertheless, he did and asked to order a taxi. "Here, son," was the surly response of the receptionist. The earliest they could get to the DMI was eight o'clock. It would cost sixty pounds. It was Sunday evening, and they were short staffed. As for the price, that was the going rate; the drivers were working unsocial hours.

Then a couple of drunks staggered through reception shouting and swearing. The receptionist told them to be quiet as there were ill patients about. They were about to take a swing at him when two burley security men came. The police were on their way.

Ewan, who was the opposite of a hero at the best of times, had scuttled behind a pillar. On this day, there had been enough trials to last him the rest of his life. He was terrified. A man, who was old enough to know better, gave him a wolf-whistle. He called out, "I fancy your shorts and your orange socks. You're a wee puiffe, aren't ye?"

A late news bulletin was being shown on a TV set on the wall. It was reporting a serious accident on the A729 near the village of Tubberbutts. One person had been killed, four had been seriously injured, and a woman had been arrested on suspicion of causing death by dangerous driving. The news report showed them clearing up. There was a silver-coloured lump of twisted metal being lifted onto a truck. There was no

way Ewan wanted to be there anymore. He was now fully in flight mode.

The wind had got up from the Firth of Forth. The temperature was a couple of degrees above freezing, but Ewan didn't notice it. He wanted to get as far away from that ghastly place as he could. He was a fast runner, but tonight he was running faster than he ever had before. The streets on the Southside were busy, but he managed to navigate a route that avoided the crowds on South Bridge. Now he was crossing North Bridge onto Princes Street. He narrowly missed a tram that hooted at him. He could hear the driver shouting. Edinburgh bus and tram drivers were a grumpy lot at the best of times. Now he was into the New Town running along Queen Street; there were fewer people. It was also darker. A bolt of lightning lit up the area more effectively than the street lighting. Ewan, who was terrified of lightning, tried to scream, but only a small sound came out as he was breathing so heavily. A few seconds later there came a loud peal of thunder.

Now he had turned right onto Wemyss Place and was heading to Gloucester Lane. Within a short time, he was back at Deanhaugh Terrace. There were three young people at the front door of the tenement house at 21. One was a slight young man in a casual kilt. The other two were lanky young women in short skirts. It was eight o'clock.

"Eejay, where have you been?" The voice was Aidy's. "We have been waiting for ages. Is Jordan behind you?"

"Aidy, I have got something to tell you," Ewan replied. He was panting so heavily that he could hardly get the words out.

Tamsin and Gemma both had carrier bags. Ewan had forgotten that his brother and the two girls were coming round to celebrate Jordan's birthday with them. "So, where's birthday boy?" said Gemma.

Ewan, being a young man of impeccable manners did not give Gemma a gob full. Instead, he panted, “Let’s get into the flat... I need to tell you something.”

Presently they were in the living room in the top-floor flat. Ewan, despite his fastest run ever, was pale. He was still panting. He put his head between his knees. The flat was rocking from side to side. He said, “Aidy, I’m going to be sick.”

Ewan rushed into the bathroom and vomited into the lavatory. Then he sat on it with his running shorts around his ankles. His head flopped towards his knees. Aidan came into the bathroom. He held Ewan’s shoulders to stop him falling off. He then called out, “Tammy, could you put the kettle on? Eejay needs a sweet cup of tea.”

Ewan started to come round. “Aidy,” said he said faintly, “the girls can see me. I haven’t shut the door.”

“Don’t worry about that. The door was never shut in our flat when you and Jordan lived there. It still isn’t. The girls have seen me plenty of times on the lavvy, and vice versa.”

“Jordan and I have never had the door shut.”

Aidan remembered the many times he and his younger brother used the bathroom together; they had done so since they were kids.

Pulling up his shorts, Ewan staggered up off the lavatory, before flushing it. Aidan was still holding him. They went through to the living room. Ewan sat back down on the settee in a foetal position next to Aidan.

In the kitchen Tamsin and Gemma knew there was something terribly wrong. “Think I put my foot well and truly in it,” said Gemma. She had now become a fully-fledged member

of the Walker Tribe. On the table the vase of flowers was blooming. There was a pile of presents for Jordan in a chair at the head of the table. There was a pile of birthday cards for Jordan to open.

They went through to the living room with the sweet tea. Ewan was shaking. Aidan was getting alarmed. He said, "What's happened, Eejay?"

"Jordie won't be coming home," Ewan replied in a voice that was little more than a whisper.

"What do you mean? Have you had a bust-up?" Aidan asked. He could not conceive of Ewan and Jordan falling out.

"No... Jordie has had an accident in the car... He was killed." Ewan was shaking again. He leant forward to take a sip of the tea. Aidan had gone pale. "It was on the news... It wasn't his fault... The police told me this afternoon... He was flown to the DMI, but died in Theatre... That's where I have been... Jordan was on the slab... He's now been filed away in a drawer that looks like a filing cabinet... It's obscene."

Yet again Ewan was in tears. He was soon joined by Gemma and Tamsin. Then he continued, "Eight years ago, our Mum passed away..."

Aidan wanted to go through to the bathroom. He remembered the scene eight years ago when he sat with Ewan in Mr Mitchell's office as Grandma and Granddad told him about the bad news from Switzerland. He remembered the office lurching from side to side, muttering something about the lavvy, before rushing into the male staff lavatory and being violently sick. Mr Farjeon had not been very pleased. Ewan had done exactly the same five minutes before, and no wonder. Aidan got up; he rushed out of the room, undoing the kilt he was wearing.

He did exactly the same as he had done all those years ago, except there was no Mr Farjeon to shout at him.

A couple of minutes later, Aidan was back. Tears were streaming down his face. They were all very fond of Jordan and felt very close to him. He was more than a friend; he was a brother to them.

“Eejay,” said Aidy when he had managed to get a grip on himself, “when did you last eat?”

“Lunchtime, I think. I don’t feel like eating anything.”

“None of us do. We need to have something light. You need a good hot bath. You have had an awful day and running back from the DMI at race speed won’t have helped.”

While Aidan ran the bath for his brother, Gemma and Tamsin went through to the kitchen to make something very light. They looked at the flowers on the kitchen table, with the pile of birthday presents and birthday cards. “What an awful birthday present,” said Tamsin before bursting into tears again. Gemma was in tears. Firstly, the shock had floored her. Secondly, she had put all four feet straight in it.

Aidan felt like a zombie. His mouth felt as if some very repulsive animal had nested in it. His stomach felt as if a tram had run over it. He was the oldest of the gathering. He was also Dr Walker, a lecturer in the languages faculty at the university. He did not feel in the least bit like a university lecturer; he felt like a very small boy. If any of his students had seen him, his authority, what little there was, would have been completely undermined. Still, he needed to take charge of the situation. The first thing he did that was remotely useful was to put Ewan’s running kit in the washing machine. It was soaked with sweat.

While Ewan was in the bath, Gemma and Tamsin had rustled up a light meal. The party meal in the fridge would wait

until tomorrow. They would all come over to look after Ewan, and make sure he at least had something to eat. The next useful thing Aidan managed to do was to help his little brother (who was taller than he) get out of the bath and get dressed. Ewan put back on the clothes he had changed from for his run. In his kilt and lambs-wool sweater, he started to feel a little bit warmer.

The bad news had to be spread. Aidan selected the number for Brewster House on his mobile.

“Dad,” he said as his father picked up the phone. “I have some bad news for you – really bad.”

“You haven’t fallen out with Tamsin?”

“No, it’s worse.”

“So, what’s happened? You haven’t set the flat on fire?”

“No. Jordie’s been killed in a car accident.”

“Oh my God! There was something on the news about a bad car accident on the A729.”

“It was Jordie. Some airhead ran into him.”

“Jordie is such a careful driver as well. Laura and I will come down later this week to see how Eejay is getting on. Aidy, look after Eejay... Can I speak to him?”

Ewan was glad to speak to his father. It was tempting to ask for leave and go home at once to Brewster House. But a small matter of a diet of mock professional exams needed to be attended to. Dad and Laura needed to ask for leave from work, but they would be down as soon as possible.

Aidan would, of course, look after his brother; they were very close, best friends as well as brothers. He remembered how,

eight years ago, Ewan had had a set-to with Mrs Learmont. Mr Farjeon had had a one-to-one with Ewan, in which he intended to show Ewan the rounds of the cookhouse. But Ewan had taken Mr Farjeon on in something that was more akin to a deer-rut. In the deer-rutting analogy, Ewan was no more than a calf, while Craigie-Boy was a stag in his prime. But Ewan had certainly got under Craigie-Boy's skin. Ewan had flounced out and had fled off the school premises. He had got himself into deep trouble in Rowallan Country Park and the mountain rescue team had been called out.

While Ewan had grown up considerably since he was fifteen, a bitter blow like this could still send him off the rails. Aidan would do everything to stop his little brother from doing so.

Gemma had called Chris at the same time. He would try to get some time off work. Ewan said he was going into work, as he had mock professional examinations, and there were the real things in early February. Chris agreed that Jordan would have wanted Ewan to do that; it would keep his mind off the pain.

Chris went over to his parents, hugged them, and cried like a child. How were they going to tell the twins? They had to know, but they were not yet six.

After that, Ewan rang his grandparents. He hoped and prayed that it would be Grandma who would answer the phone. Ewan loved Laura very dearly. She had made Dad so happy after Mum had died. But Grandma understood his deepest needs. She had listened to all his teenage angst when Mum had died. She had never condemned him for being gay and head-over-heels in love with Jordan. Indeed, she had encouraged him to commit to Jordan for the rest of his life. A deeply Christian woman, she had used the Old Testament story of David and Jonathan who “were deeply attracted to each other and loved him as he loved himself”.

Ewan's prayer was answered as he heard the familiar and deeply comforting voice of his grandma, "Hello. Corscadden 2375..." His father had done the same some eight years ago, almost to the day.

Muriel and Charles had been having a late evening cup of cocoa when Muriel picked up the phone. She listened carefully as her distressed grandson told her about what had happened. The report of the accident was on the news. She remonstrated with herself for thinking that the 25-year-old driver who had been killed had been driving too damned fast. She had felt for the family of the young man. Now it had hit home, rather too close to home. Jordan was a lovely young man. As she put the telephone down, she said, "Charles, that was Ewan. Jordan has been killed in that crash on the A729."

Charles, who had not been listening, sat up with a start. "Good grief! That is... I don't know what to say... Poor Ewan..."

He felt ashamed he could not say anything more coherent. What a terrible thing to happen to Jordan. He was a lovely young man who had been let down very badly by his ex-mother. But Jordan was always sweet and charming. He was very much loved by the family. He had been by Ewan's side, and the two were devoted to each other, just as much as he was to Muriel. How could life be so cruel?

Charles and Muriel hugged each other. They both shed many tears, as they would over the next few months. Time would heal, but there would need to be a good long period.

After the phone calls were made, Ewan sat down at the computer to write a round robin letter. It said:

*Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melbuish – 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1997 – 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022*

*It is with the deepest possible sorrow that I have to let you know that the love of my life and soulmate, Jordan, died this afternoon, Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022, as a result of a car accident. It was his twenty fifth birthday.*

*Jordan gave me life, love, and light. He did the same to all he met.*

*I am heartbroken. However, as you know, I believe in eternal life, and I pray that Jordan has entered this life, where nothing has the power to hurt. It says, "In my house, there are many rooms." I will meet Jordan again after my allotted time has expired.*

*In the meantime, I will let you know about the funeral arrangements. I know that you too will be devastated by this news, and you are in my thoughts and prayers.*

*My love to you all,*

*Ewan Walker.*

He printed fifty copies. He could have sent one message out on his social media account, but he felt it would devalue Jordan. Besides, Ewan had fallen out of love with social media with its vile trolling and the keyboard warriors. Therefore, he would buy a large number of envelopes. It would cost a fortune to post them out first class. Ewan used second class only for bills he didn't want to pay. He had picked that up off his father.

Aidy, Tamsin, and Gemma would stay overnight. They would get up early in the morning. Ewan was still feeling decidedly unwell, but insisted he needed to go back to work. This week was mostly taken up with a diet of professional mock examinations. Jordan would not have been happy about him missing work on his part.

The sofa bed in the living room would be an ideal place for Tamsin and Gemma to roost. Aidan would share the bed

with Ewan. They were used to that. The brothers had shared a double bed at home, not through lack of room, but because they liked it. They had been, and always would be, very close. In recent years, Ewan had shared a bed with Jordan. Aidan had shared one with Tamsin.

The two brothers wore clean sports kit in bed. Since Aidan was the same size and build as Jordan, Jordan's sports kit fitted exactly. At least Ewan would have a warm body to snuggle up to. There were several soft toys on the bed. Indeed, there was a menagerie of them in the flat. Ewan, his eyes still full of tears, said, "Thanks for staying with me, Aidy. I want to tell you that I love you as much as I love Jordan." Ewan bunched up around one of the soft toys and rapidly fell asleep.

Aidan lay awake in deep distress, cuddling another soft toy. He was back-to-back with his brother. It would allow Ewan to feel some normality. Aidan loved Jordan as a brother, not just a friend. It was so unfair. Life could dole out such bad turns to such lovely people. In the meantime, some of the most obnoxious shits possible would work their venom and prosper with impunity. What had happened to Jordan was an obscenity. The woman who had visited it on him would no doubt get off with it because she had an expensive sports utility vehicle with a personalised number plate. Tears flowed down his cheeks, and he slept fitfully.

## Chapter 6

**Monday 24<sup>th</sup> January 2022**

The partners of Baxter Ward Associates, John Baxter and Shona Ward were meeting in the back conference room. They always did this first thing on a Monday to plan the week's work, and review how everything was going. Most of the other staff worked Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at home, returning to the office on a Friday. The back conference room was ideal. It was quiet and they could get things done before the hundred and one people descended on them to ask one hundred and one different things.

The first item on the agenda was, not unnaturally, the intensive training course at the Grantsbury Hall Hotel. Shona reported how successful it had been.

"How did Jordan get on?" John asked.

"He was outstanding," Shona replied. "All the delegates were very complimentary about how he tutored them. They felt they could approach him at any time, and he was quick to help them. Some thought he looked far too young, but he soon had them in line. He helped some top people with some very hard technical language."

"He's been a good find. We need to think how we can use his talents more in the next few months. And he's such a lovely young man as well."

"He is. He and I were chatting during the week. Have you met his boyfriend?"

"Yes. Another lovely young man – a trainee solicitor, qualifying at the end of next year. I can't remember his name."

“Ewan Walker. They’re going to France at the end of February. They are going to propose on Ewan’s birthday at a Chateau. They are going to get married after Ewan has qualified.”

“That sounds so romantic,” said John.

“They were teenage sweethearts at school. They have been almost inseparable since then.”

“Jordan was telling me how much Ewan meant to him. His mother played away with a banker. She ditched his father at no notice. She rejected Jordan as a teenager and told him she wanted nothing more to do with him.”

“You do get some bitches in this world,” John observed sadly. “My mum kept me on the rails when I was that age.”

“He said that without Ewan, he would have gone to pieces. Ewan has made him.”

“Ewan certainly has made him. We need to give Jordan some projects for him to get his teeth into. I think he could take on a partnership in the next few years. Shona, neither of us is exactly a spring chicken.”

A police car had pulled up outside Baxter Ward Associates at 34, Dundonald Lane, shortly after nine. PC Samuel Tretton and PC Alistair Tattersfield parked on the double yellow lines outside the town house which accommodated the offices.

“Could we speak to Shona Ward?” said PC Tretton. “It is urgent.”

“She is in a meeting at the moment,” replied the receptionist. “Could you tell me what it’s about?”

“We can’t discuss it until we have spoken to Mrs Ward.”

The receptionist rang through to the back conference room, and the officers were led through.

“How can we help?” John asked.

“We need to see Mrs Shona Ward,” PC Tattersfield replied.

“I am Mrs Ward,” said Shona, “and this is my business partner, John Baxter.”

“Do you have an employee called Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish?” PC Tretton asked.

“We do,” said John anxiously. “Is he in trouble with the law?”

“Certainly not with the law,” said PC Tattersfield. “But he is in very serious trouble. He was involved in a very serious road traffic accident yesterday while travelling back from a conference you had run at Grantsbury Hall in the Middle Riding of Yorkshire.”

Both partners were looking shocked. PC Tretton carried on. “You may have seen the accident. It was on the evening news yesterday. It happened on the A729 near Tubberbutts. He died in Theatre at the DMI as a result of his injuries.”

“I always thought Jordan was such a careful driver,” said John.

“He was,” replied PC Tattersfield. “We have arrested a forty-five-year-old woman who is helping us with our enquiries. She could face serious charges.”

Tears were welling up in Shona Ward’s eyes. John Baxter looked like he had seen a ghost.

“We recovered some of your company’s property from Mr Melhuish’s vehicle,” said PC Tretton.

“Yes, he was bringing it back for us.” John replied. “Shona’s car doesn’t have much space in it.”

After the police constables had left, they found that their car had been clamped by the traffic wardens.

John Baxter and Shona Ward postponed the rest of the meeting. John typed out a whole staff e-mail calling everyone to put down what they were doing and attend an urgent meeting in the front conference room. One of Jordan's colleagues told John that he hadn't come in that morning, and they were trying to get hold of Jordan urgently. He knew it had been Jordan's birthday and had thought that Jordan had thrown a sickie.

"I'll tell you what has happened as soon as we are all together," replied John, who was trying very hard to put a brave face on things.

The front door was closed. Everyone was now in the front conference room. Shona Ward was sitting at the front, by the window. She had recomposed herself, but everyone could tell that something was seriously wrong. One or two people thought that the company was about to go into administration. Then John Baxter got up to speak:

"Good morning colleagues. I have called you down as a matter of urgency to tell you some very bad news about our colleague and much valued team member, Jordan Melhuish.

"As you know, Jordan was away last week with Shona, Jason, and Paul leading an intensive language course in the Middle Riding of Yorkshire. We took a decision to get Jordan to lead the course, which he did brilliantly. Shona was thrilled.

"You will have noticed that Jordan is not here and it's my very sad duty to tell you that Jordan was involved in a serious car accident on his way back home. He suffered severe injuries and passed away late yesterday afternoon. It is particularly sad because it was his birthday."

A gasp rose from the audience.

“I don’t have to tell you what a dreadful shock this news has been to both Shona and me. It will be a massive shock to you as well. Jordan was an amazing find for our company. He was an accomplished linguist as well as being such a wonderful colleague. In the two years he has been with us, his work has been praised fulsomely by our customers. His kindly manner was appreciated by us all. Although he was so young, he was a gentle man who was a gentleman.

“We as a company clearly wish to pass our deepest condolences to Jordan’s father, and to his fiancé, Ewan. The saddest thing is that he died on his twenty-fifth birthday. I can think of no “present” that is more obscene. I would like everyone to give some thought to an appropriate way to remember Jordan for as long as our company lasts.”

“Thanks, John,” Shona added. “Colleagues, I am lost for words, and not in a pleasant way. Just twenty minutes ago, John and I were having our weekly meeting, and we were saying what an outstanding job Jordan had done on the Grantsbury Hall course. Now we are reflecting on our colleague who has been so cruelly snatched away from us. We will get over it, but it will take time. However, we must never forget him.”

A hand went up, and its owner spoke, “Could I suggest that we name this room ‘The Melhuish Room’ in Jordan’s memory. We put a plaque or similar above the fireplace.”

“Hear, hear,” came from the audience.

“That is an excellent idea, Lucy,” John said. “I propose that we postpone the staff briefing until tomorrow. If anyone has any other ideas on how to honour Jordan, Shona and I would be grateful to hear them. Please come up any time. If you want to talk things over, do chat with your team members. You are, of

course, most welcome to see Shona and me at any time. As Shona said, time will heal, but it will need time. Above all, we will never forget Jordan for as long as our company exists.”

A few minutes later, John Baxter shut himself in his office and wept like a small child.

Ewan Walker was most grateful for the company he had had overnight. He felt awful. His muscles had seized; he had not warmed down properly after his 10 k from Little Holland. His mouth still felt as if a monster had spent the night in it. His insides felt as if somebody had punched him. He wondered if the tram with the grumpy driver had actually hit him. He had a dull headache, as if he had a hangover. Like many of Gen-Z, Ewan drank in strict moderation. He found that drunks were not at all funny; indeed, they were crashing bores.

He took some paracetamol to make himself feel less like he had been run over by a tram. Instead, he felt he had been butted from behind and trampled on by a billy goat. He put a card of pills in his jacket pocket. He would need them.

Ewan was dressed immaculately as he always was for work. He had had a shave, and his collar-length hair was neat, covering his ears so that just the lobes were visible. As he walked to Johnston, MacLean and Partners, he wondered if he had forgotten everything he had learned. Would the diet of mock professional examinations give him a bad dose of indigestion? He remembered how, eight years ago, the shock of his mother’s death had made him forget almost everything in his mock Highers at Strathcadden Academy. As a rather immature fifteen-year-old, he had become rather obnoxious, finally leading to a confrontation with Mr Farjeon. He recalled flouncing out of school, catching a train to Maunday, going over Barrock Cross and down to the Rowallan Viaduct. A lunatic escapade into

Maunder Tunnel was an intimation of Hell. The subsequent wake under Rowallan Viaduct led to a melt-down, which ended up with the mountain rescue coming out to fish him out of the shit he had got himself into.

No, he could not do anything stupid like that again. It would be demeaning to himself and dishonouring to Jordan. He had to keep it together. Work would help. He had six hours of examinations, and little bits of Scottish Law flitted around his head. That was a better portent than eight years ago, when his mind was completely blank.

“Had a night on the tiles, Ewan?” said the receptionist.

“Something worse, Janet,” Ewan retorted.

Ewan went to the office he shared with the four other trainee solicitors. It was now time to take his first course in the diet of mock examinations. Ewan worked hard to put the memories of the last fifteen hours to the back of his mind. It was like herding sheep with a sheepdog which had no clue. Fortunately points of Scottish Law continued to flit about like so many butterflies.

Once he was in the seminar room where the mock exam was held, Ewan was pleasantly surprised that he had not forgotten everything and was able to write detailed answers to all the questions.

After the exam, Ewan slinked away from the other trainees who went down to have lunch. He went back to the office where he filled the envelopes that he had bought on the way in. He could do a few at a time, before stopping with tears in his eyes. He repeated the process a couple of times, before his mentor, Alison Pearson, came in.

“What’s wrong, Ewan?” she asked. She saw the pile of letters that Ewan was sending out, noticing that they were not party invites.

“You might as well know,” said Ewan, passing one of the letters. Alison sat down.

“Why are you here today?” she asked.

“I have got these mock Law Society exams. I need to do them and the real things next month. At the moment, I just want to be at home back in Corscadden. But I am determined to do the real things next month.”

The bad news travelled about the offices of Johnston, MacLean and Partners. Many people came down to make a fuss of Ewan. Several helped with the packing of the envelopes and writing the addresses.

Eleanor Whitehead, one of the partners, came down to see Ewan. She agreed with Ewan’s plan to get his Law Society examinations done, and to take compassionate leave after that. Of course, they understood if he didn’t do that well in the mocks. They would tell the Law Society about what had happened and apply for special consideration.

The second course of his diet of mock examinations came and went. Again, Ewan was pleasantly surprised he remembered what he had studied and felt his answers were, at least, adequate.

As Ewan walked home, he was in a daze. His mind was racing. He felt so tired. He did not have a clue what to do next. Bugger it! He was training to be a solicitor and had advised many clients on what to do when a loved one had passed away. Now it had happened to him he felt clueless and helpless.

Maybe this was a horrible nightmare in which he had seen Jordan on the slab. Jordan would not have been filed away in that

monstrous stainless steel filing cabinet. Jordan would rush up to him when he got home and cuddle him. He would reassure him that all was well.

But no – the flat was dark and cold when Ewan got in. He hung up his suit, before changing into his kilt and lambs-wool jumper. The loneliness hit him, and he sat on the settee bunched up holding a soft toy. At least he knew that Aidy and the girls would be coming round soon. Ewan was very close to his brother. He still had the very powerful physical and emotional attraction that he had for Aidy since he was a small boy. It had increased when Ewan had become a teenager and was nearly as strong as the bond he had had with Jordan. The love Ewan had for his brother was one that would last for the rest of his life.

Ewan started to prepare for the meal to celebrate Jordan's birthday. The chair at the end of the table in the kitchen was set, but nobody would sit there.

Eight hundred kilometres to the south, Kathryn Chetwynd didn't mind being on her own. In fact, she was slightly irritated that her partner, Rupert Bell-Dick had decided to have a couple of days off to attend to personal business. It would not have done for him to transfer large sums of his money to offshore tax havens using the Glynn's Bank computer systems. One of his colleagues was caught out doing some insider trading and there was a God-almighty rumpus. There but for the grace of God went he (except he was a die-hard atheist). The bank had got stricter with its IT supervision policies.

Kathryn and her partner communicated as little as was needed for them to get by. They had both come to loathe Windhover Barn. A two-metre-high wall had been built on the boundary of their land, fifteen metres from the front of the barn. Glebelands Barn Avenue had been widened and passed next to

the end wall of the barn. The borders on both sides of what was their private drive had been grubbed up, and a road six metres wide had been built. It was used regularly by the contractors' lorries serving the Glebelands Farm development. Sussex Fine and Country Developments were making progress on the estate. They had squeezed some extra "affordable" homes under pressure from the local authority. Otherwise, the estate was as planned, except that the starting price for affordable homes had risen to £500 000.

Kathryn had found the builders insufferably vulgar. They regularly cat-called and wolf whistled at her. Some of them were half her age. In the summer they went bare-backed with shorts over which their beer-guts hung shapelessly. On several occasions, they had used what was left of the garden as an outside urinal. She had even found one man squatting with his shorts around his ankles. The foreman did not seem in the least bit interested. Sussex Fine and Country Developments were not in the least bit interested either, saying that their contractors were responsible for the behaviour of their staff.

Work was going on six days a week, starting at six in the morning and going on until nine at night in the summer. Any attempt to relax in the hot tub was accompanied by a chorus of cement mixers, lorries reversing, hammering, whistling, and swearing.

In Windhover Barn, all the hi-tech gizmos had stopped working. Those that had been connected to Speak-Easy no longer worked as the control boxes had failed. The appliances connected to the internet had been hacked. The internet-connected computer screen on the fridge was meant to show recipes. It now showed pornography. The internet connection for the oven was completely non-functional. The only way to make them work was to disconnect them completely from the net, and switch on the appliances manually.

The house shower room still looked sleek, but it did not work as well as it should. It was difficult to get the right temperature on the shower. Some of the decorative little blue lights had failed. The sliding door was stiff.

The central heating was troublesome. At best it took the chill off the house. At worst it would go off without reason, and the barn would rapidly chill until it was as cold as charity. It would go again if it were restarted. Getting a heating engineer to sort it out was all but impossible.

Rupert and Kathryn had argued about selling the place. With all its problems, Blomfield Estate Agents had put a price of £800000 on it. All the barns in the Glebelands Barns development had suffered a major fall in value. As far as Sussex Fine and Country Developments were concerned, that was just tough. Rupert wasn't willing to sell, because people might get to find out that his house had lost 68 % of its value. That would undermine his reputation for financial judgement at Glynn's Bank, which would not help his career prospects.

Kathryn mused grumpily over this as she sat on the leather Chesterfield watching the television on the wall. The Chesterfield still bore the marks where Boyd had lobbed the faulty light fitting from the vaulted ceiling. Rupert was busy at the computer pumping his money from offshore account to offshore account to keep ahead of the taxman.

The doorbell rang. Outside were two police officers. Kathryn Chetwynd did not look pleased to see them, but she rarely looked pleased to see anyone, unless it was to her advantage.

"May we come in?" said PC Cox.

"I suppose so," said Kathryn.

Rupert looked up from his computer. He minimised the screen. He did not want policemen seeing his transactions but reassured himself that these two were simple country coppers who wouldn't have the first idea of what he was up to. He certainly did not want them to see the porn that he was switching from. He opened the home page of *The Guardian*.

"Are you Mrs Melhuish?" asked PC Walters.

"Certainly not!" Kathryn snapped. "I am Ms Kathryn Chetwynd!"

"I am so sorry. We must have the wrong address," PC Walters replied. He got the job sheet out. "We have this address; I will show you."

Rupert had come across. He said, "You were Mrs Melhuish until you divorced Stephen."

Kathryn gave Rupert a killer look before staring lividly at the job sheet. It stated *Mrs Melhuish*. (*She may have reverted to her maiden name, Miss Cheating.*) She then snapped, "How many more times to I have to spell it out. I am Ms Chetwynd, spelled C-H-E-T-W-Y-N-D."

"Very sorry about that Ms Chet-wind."

"It's pronounced 'Cheeting!'" she snapped. "What have you come for?"

"We have some bad news about your son, Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish. He's been killed in a road traffic accident," said PC Cox trying to sound sympathetic, although the irascible woman on the leather sofa did not deserve it. She had not even invited them to take a seat.

"I don't have a son," she snapped.

Rupert, whose pea-sized conscience was kicking in, said, “Sebastian was your son until you disowned him.”

“He’s not my son anymore,” she snapped. “I am not in the least bit interested.”

PC Walters looked incredulous. “What do you mean by that?”

“In case you don’t understand it, I will explain it again. Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish is no longer my son. I disowned him when I got rid of my ex-husband. The thing is, they were so boring. My partner and I are free spirits. If it feels good, we do it.”

Kathryn took out her mobile and keyed in a number. There was an answer. Kathryn shouted, “Stephen Melhuish, how many times have I got to tell you that I do not wish to be contacted by you ever again. You and Sebastian are out of my life!”

“I didn’t contact you, Kathryn. The Police did.”

“You should not have told them.”

“No, Jordan’s boss told them. They contacted me afterwards. Jordan had put you down as next of kin.”

“Why have you started to call him Jordan?”

“Everyone knows him as Jordan.”

“It’s so common, just like you. His name is Sebastian! His boss had no bloody right to contact the police. How dare he?”

“Kathryn, you’re his mother!”

“I am not his mother. I have disowned him. I do not want him in my life ever again!”

“He’s no longer in your little life, you vixen! He is dead. He died in a car crash.”

“He’s done me a favour. Typical of him – probably driving too damned fast.”

“No! Some airhead drove into him – a member of the county set, so they tell me. You would no doubt get on with her really well.”

“I couldn’t give a shit about who was at fault.”

“Do you not care that your son, the one you carried for nine months, has been killed?”

“I couldn’t give a shit, frankly. He’s done me a favour. I suggest you do the same.”

“I don’t believe I am hearing this, Kathryn.”

“You better had. By the way, Sebastian won’t have made a will. It goes to you and me. I want at least half his meagre estate. It will replace that money that I had to give him for all that stuff he had on loan from me!”

“Jesus Christ!” shouted Stephen. His voice carried over loud and clear for everyone to hear. “You are the most shameless and mercenary bitch I have ever met in my entire life.”

“I don’t care what you think, as long as I get the money from Sebastian’s estate. It should get a pretty penny from the compensation. If that little boy who is his daffodil has changed Sebastian’s will, I will sue him. If I don’t get the money, I will sue you. Rupert’s solicitor will make mincemeat out of you both.”

“You mercenary vixen!” Stephen Melhuish shouted. The phone went dead.

Rupert’s pea-sized conscience kicked in again. “Kathryn,” he said, “he is your son, however boring you found him.”

“What I think is my own fucking business. I am a free fucking spirit! And how dare you tell any Tom, Dick, or Harry that I had a son?”

“Don’t you dare talk to me like that!” Rupert went over towards the Chesterfield. The two policemen were wondering if they were about to deal with a domestic. Kathryn stormed up the spiral staircase and shouted, “Rupert, you can bloody well sleep on the sofa-bed tonight!”

Outside, the two coppers got into their car. They had heard everything between Stephen Melhuish and his ex-wife. He was right. She was a mercenary bitch.

“I am glad she was never my mother,” said PC Cox gloomily.

“She regards her son as a used can of deodorant. It’s not professional, this, but she is a mercenary fucking vixen,” PC Walters concluded.

Whatever shred of bonding that Rupert felt for Kathryn seemed to break. She had become too much of a self-absorbed hellcat, and he wanted out. No divorce this time. They were partners, not husband and wife. They had not joined in a civil partnership, thank God. If his mother had been such an ogress, he would have ended up doing drugs, or worse. Kathryn was a harridan, with a vicious whiplash tongue.

There were plenty of other pebbles on the beach, so to speak.

## Chapter 7

### Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> January to Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> January 2022

Work gave Ewan Walker a stable reference point amongst the maelstrom that had overwhelmed him. On his way into work on Tuesday, he posted all the sad letters. He continued his diet of mock examinations. Surprisingly they did not give him indigestion.

Ewan was still hoping all of this was a dreadful nightmare from which he would awake and find Jordan next to him in the bed. He knew the story of Lazarus in the Bible, in which Jesus wept, before restoring his friend to life. Ewan had wept plenty this last couple of days. Yes, people knew how much he loved Jordan. But Jordan was still filed away in the mortuary at the DMI. The flat was still dark and cold. This was real reality, not virtual.

The flowers in the kitchen were starting to droop. Ewan had noticed the washing piling up in the laundry basket. He opened the washing machine. There was an unpleasant smell. Ewan's running kit which was soaked in sweat had been shut away since Aidy had put it in the washing machine. A hot wash would sort it out. Ewan filled the machine and put it on. It was a trivial little job, but one that made Ewan feel that there was normality in the chaos. He then put on his short casual kilt, a clean T-shirt below his casual shirt and his lambs-wool sweater. He put on his rainbow bangle, a clean pair of rainbow socks and his casual shoes. It, too, was a part of his routine, for he and Jordan had often worn their kilts about the flat after they had got in from work. It was an alternative to their sports kit. The flat was not easy to heat, and the kilts kept them warm. Both always enjoyed the freedom that a kilt-wearer would describe enthusiastically.

Joby and Laura had caught the train to Edinburgh. They arrived not long after Ewan had changed out of his work clothes.

Ewan welcomed them in and sat down between his father and stepmother. He bunched up and started to cry. He buried his face into Laura. Laura may not have been his mother but had made a very good stand-in over the last seven years. She caressed him in exactly the same way as his real mother had. Joby too caressed his son as he had done for the last twenty-three years when Ewan had ended up in some scrape or another.

Although Joby was rather better at large electric motors than matters emotional, he loved his sons dearly. Watching Ewan plunged by no fault of his own into the abyss was gut-wrenching. Ewan was no longer the feisty and immature teenager he had been when he was sixteen, but a gentle and sensitive young man with a slightly effeminate manner but a boyish innocence. Jordan, too, was so beautiful in every way. He was deeply loving and loyal to Ewan and had made him so happy. Now as they were about to commit to each other for life, Jordan had been snatched by death as a result of an airhead in a big car who was driving like a lunatic. It was obscene. Joby caressed his son.

The telephone rang. Joby picked it up. "Ewan is here," he said. "Who is it?"

"Stephen Melhuish, Jordan's dad. Is that Joby?" Stephen had got used to Seb being known as Jordan to his friends.

"It is. I am so sorry to have heard about your loss. We are down here spending the evening with Ewan. Not surprisingly, he is very cut up. Aidy told me that Ewan and he were both sick with the shock. Ewan had had to do the formal identification for the Procurator Fiscal. He had run back from the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary in less than half an hour. It's a 10 k. He was in a real state when he got here."

"Jordan told me on Saturday night how they were all going to have a meal at the flat. I heard about what had happened yesterday and got the first flight I could back from

Dortmund. I have just got into Edinburgh Airport, and I have hired a car.”

“Come up to the flat. Laura and I are here to look after Ewan. He needs all the support he can get. And so do you.”

Laura and Joby had bought some food so that Ewan would at least eat something. Ewan was a tall and skinny young man with a slight build. He had always been slightly underweight for his height. The same was true for all of Joby’s sons. It was good for running and none of them wanted to be muscle men; muscles would degenerate into middle-aged spread. Ewan, being the tallest of them, now looked decidedly scrawny.

Presently Stephen Melhuish was up in the flat. He too was in tears as he saw Ewan. Joby and Laura had two men in distress. Big boys do cry. No wonder.

Once everything had calmed down, Laura and Joby started to prepare supper. Ewan felt that he had to be useful, so he emptied the washing machine and put the clothes in the tumble dryer. At least his running kit didn’t stink any more, not that he could do a run in the state he was in. He still felt as if a billy-goat had rammed him up the arse.

Ewan was kept out of the kitchen, while his mum and dad cooked the meal. Stephen and Ewan sat in the living room. Stephen was an older version of Jordan. Jordan would have looked like that in his late forties, but Jordan would always be twenty-five (and look rather younger). Would Ewan ever get over it?

With tears in his eyes, Stephen said, “Ewan, I want you to know how much Jordan loved you. He would tell me often how you made him so happy. You helped him to get over how his mother treated him. You won’t believe this, but we were happy until she met that banker. Then we were too boring, and she

ditched us. She got rid of me like a used can of deodorant. As for Jordan, she might as well have put him in the bin. I will continue to find it very hard to forgive her.”

“I do as well,” said Ewan. “She was the pits. I truly feel for you. You should never have had to put up with what she did to you. And you should not have to put up with this. I saw what had happened on the telly. It was an airhead in a huge Range Rover with a personalised number plate. She stole your son from you and my soulmate from me...”

Tears welled up again in Ewan’s eyes. And they did in Stephen’s as well. Twenty-three and forty-six – yes big boys cried.

After the two had got a grip of themselves, Stephen said, “Did you two ever make a will?”

“We did,” Ewan replied. “We did it at Gordon Morton Solicitors in Corscadden.”

“Why didn’t you do it yourself?”

“Conflict of interest – it can cause a lot of problems. We did ours in front of a qualified solicitor, so no-one can argue. We agreed that if one of us died, the other would get half the estate, and our families would get the other half. We laughed, as our estates would be a couple of fivers. We also agreed that our funerals would be in Corscadden.”

“I understand. Jordan really liked Corscadden. He liked Keillor as well, but his friends were in Corscadden, including you and your family. I asked about the will, because of my ex. She’s after Jordan’s money. She wasn’t interested in what had happened to Jordan and told me yet again to keep out of her life.”

“A vixen,” Ewan commented, “– a mercenary vixen. Mum and Dad need to know.”

Ewan called Joby and Laura through. Stephen told them about the ghastly call he had received. They were shocked and promised that they would alert Andrew Yeoman, the senior partner, at Gordon Morton Solicitors.

Stephen Melhuish said his goodbyes and went down to his hire car before he left for Keillor. He had twenty days compassionate leave; Constructions Rhône – Rhin was a generous employer. Joby and Laura suggested that he come to Brewster House the following weekend. Ewan had shed plenty of tears into his step-mum and dad. He would do the same with Mum and Dad at Acrefair House. He was devoted to Jordan and felt bad that his work had often taken him away to far-flung corners of the world. Now Jordan was in the morgue.

Christian was on his own in Brewster House, looking after his twin brothers, who were six, going on seven. Like their big brother, they were skinny. For their size, they could pack away an enormous amount of food, just like their big brother and stepbrothers. Chris was devoted to them. He would play with them, read stories, and play music to them. He was, by now, quite a good keyboard player.

Benjamin and Daniel had developed a powerful bond with their big brother. They liked to do lots of things with Chris. They loved the trampoline. They would go for walks with him, each holding his big brother's hand. They would come into the bathroom when Chris was perched on *The Colossus*. He didn't mind at all. He would bath them. He had started to get them to bake and do some simple cooking.

They had been told about Jordan, and did their best to comfort Chris, who did his best to keep his sadness to himself but did not always succeed. Chris was very close to Jordan. If he

had not started to pair-bond with Gemma, he was sure that he would have now been dating Ryan Fleetwood.

Chris was still in his work-clothes. He had gone into work early, and left work early to pick up the boys from St Lawrence Primary School, where they were in Primary Three. He had played with them, after which they had gone through to the kitchen to cook their evening meal. They had watched *Thomas the Tank Engine* on the video player, before Chris gave the boys their bath. While they were splashing about in the bath, Chris took time to have a perch on *The Colossus*.

Once in their sports kit that served as their pyjamas, Chris took them down to the drawing room and read them their bedtime story.

Now the two boys were in bed. They were now sleeping in the back bedroom where Aidy and Eejay used to sleep. The spare rooms were now on the second floor, where Mum and Dad had done a complete makeover, and had a Jack-and-Jill bathroom installed between the two rooms.

Chris was glad that Mum and Dad had explained what had happened to Jordan; he was with Jesus. They had a child-like and simple faith in Jesus. Chris had, thanks to Aidy and Eejay, regained the same faith in Jesus of Nazareth that he had had as a child. He was not at all interested in religion. Having seen what it had done to Mum's parents, he did not want anything to do with it. By contrast, Dad's parents demonstrated a gentle godliness that made Chris believe in its reality. He was genuinely thankful for it. He certainly believed that God had helped him through that time his drink had been spiked with ketamine and that other shit whose name he had forgotten.

Chris put on a CD on the hi-fi. He sat cross-legged on the sofa, shoes off, as he often did. Brewster House was never an easy house to heat, but his jacket, jumper, kilt and knee socks

kept him warm. He could not concentrate on the music; it flowed around him. Instead, his mind was in turmoil. He was missing Jordan. It was sore. Jordan was a close friend, more than a friend, more like a brother. He had never heard a cross word from Jordan. He had never heard Jordan being anything other than gentle and polite. Eejay would be hurting far more. Chris was very close to his half-brothers, and he had had chats with Aidy and Eejay. Eejay was trying so hard to keep stable. His job was what had kept Eejay going over the last two days. It felt like two months. All because an airhead socialite had selfishly driven her very expensive car like an idiot. Eejay needed to be kept stable; the professional examinations in a fortnight's time would be career defining. He hoped that Eejay didn't do what he did with his mock Highers eight years before. It was not unknown for Johnston, MacLean and Partners to sack a trainee for bombing out of their professional mocks.

He started to cry again. He wanted Mum and Dad, but they were with Eejay. It didn't matter; nobody from Walker Bros would see their future boss crying like a small boy. There would be plenty more tears shed in Brewster House, that lovely home normally so full of laughter, love, light, and life. Death had left its obscene calling card and had polluted Chris's home with its obnoxious stench. Chris was not one for tears, but he had buried himself into Mum. She had called him "pet" which she used for moments of great intimacy. And Dad had hugged him. Even though he was nearly twenty-six, having both his parents meant so much to him. At moments like this, he needed them more than ever.

Unbidden, a thought went through Chris's head, "*He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared.*"

Chris curled up on the sofa and fell asleep for a couple of hours. He was still exhausted. He had intended to do some

painting in the games room. He had not touched the picture since Saturday. Tonight, he was emotionally exhausted and on autopilot. He went upstairs to check on his little brothers. They were fast asleep in their bunk. They looked so peaceful, their long blond hair covering their faces. Daniel twitched. Chris kissed them both. They looked so innocent, as if butter would not melt. He prayed that they would never again have to face the obscenity that had been visited on the family.

The next morning, Ewan, who had slept on the sofa bed to allow Joby and Laura to have his bed, got up, and showered. Ewan's routine was a piece of driftwood that helped to keep him afloat in this storm. He made them a cup of coffee before he made himself a couple of pieces of toast.

"Thanks so much for coming, Mum and Dad," he said.

"Eejay, you look a picture in that suit," said Laura.

Ewan smiled. It was a gentle smile that seemed to enhance his natural beauty.

"Grandma and Granddad will be here tonight," said Joby.

"I won't be late, Dad, I promise. Remember to pop the key through the letter box."

With that Ewan went out to sit his fifth and sixth courses of mock professional exams. They, too, dulled the pain of his loss.

The pain would return as he walked back to the flat. Grandma and Granddad were staying with him tonight. Ewan was truly grateful for the way the family were there for him. This was the third day. No stones would be rolled away. Jordan was still filed away in that foul room: probably forgotten as well. He had heard diddly squat from the DMI. He had phoned at

lunchtime, but nobody seemed to know anything, and they didn't seem to care less.

Keeping his routine helped Ewan. He changed into his sports kit after folding his suit carefully. The washing needed to be ironed. His shirts were always neatly pressed. The doorbell rang just after he had finished. Grandma and Granddad were there. Ewan hugged them both before they sat down on the settee. Not surprisingly he was still hurting, and tears started again, as they had done so many times that week. Sunday seemed to be such a long time ago, but the pain was still raw.

Charles went to make some tea, while Ewan cuddled up to Muriel. Muriel remembered Joby when Mary had passed away, a forty-year-old teenager, lost and bewildered. Ewan was exactly the same, except he was little more than half that age. Like Joby and Aidan, Ewan was very clever, but not that worldly wise.

Ewan said quietly, "Thanks for coming, Grandma. Everyone has been so kind. They have been so kind at work as well. The runners have sent me a card. It helps, but it's hurting like hell..."

"Of course, it is, Eejay," said Muriel. Her voice was soothing. She spoke in a gentle voice, which had elements of Morningside, without the airs and graces. "Your dad and step-mum told us how you are keeping up your routines. It's a very good idea. It sounds silly, but things like putting the washing in the washing machine and tumble dryer are things that you can keep normal. That's exactly what your dad did when your mum passed away."

"Jordan and I kept this place neat and tidy, just as we kept Dad's flat in Marchmont nice. I will do the same. You ought to see some flats our pals live in. We need to wipe our feet as we go out. I am doing everything for Jordan... I can't and won't forget him... I am making a little shrine for him."

Granddad came in with the tea. He added, "We have told all our friends. They are so sad to hear about Jordan. He was a beautiful young man in every way."

"He was, Granddad," Ewan replied. "I'm sorry I keep going on. I sound like a stuck gramophone record, but I loved him. I loved him like a brother - more than a brother. He was my soulmate. I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him. Every day that I was with him I was so happy. In all the time we knew each other, he never said a cross word. When Mum died, I nearly went off the rails, as you know. I was offish with everyone including Jordan. I am so sorry I did that. I want to say it again to him now..."

Ewan started to cry again. He got a grip on himself, before continuing, "I learned my lesson then. Every day I got closer to Jordan and loved him more and more. People said it was against God's Law. Why has God done this to me?"

"Eejay," said Granddad, "none of us can answer that. All of us are hurting for you. I am not going to give you simple pious platitudes. That's the last thing you need. I do want to share one quote though. *Even though I go through the deepest darkness, I will not be afraid, for you are with me. Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me.*"

"Granddad, I am terrified. When no-one's here, I feel so lonely. It's been great while everyone is here, but people can't be coming round for ever..."

"Eejay," said Granddad, "God understands. That is all you need to get hold of. He understands all our feelings, however raw. You can shout at God; he is big enough to take it. It happened to him."

"Keep up your routine," Grandma replied, "just as you are now. Don't let things fall apart. Now we must get on and make ourselves some supper."

“Grandma, Granddad, do you need the bathroom at all?”

Charles smiled. He knew what his bookish grandson was going to do next.

Ewan picked up a book and went through to the bathroom. He had forgotten how loudly the bathroom door creaked when it was closed. Jordan and he never closed the bathroom door. Ewan’s perch gave such a wonderful vista of the communal garden. Except that it was dark, and it was raining.

Later, as Ewan lay on the sofa-bed, it seemed that Jordan’s voice came into his head. “Eejay, all will be well. In our father’s house, there are many rooms.”

It was now Thursday. Ewan showered before making Grandma and Granddad a cup of tea. He had his breakfast, before going through to the bedroom and hugging his grandparents and thanking them for coming. They wished him luck for the last day of his mock exams.

The seventh and eighth courses of his diet of mock professional exams did not give him indigestion. Instead, they took his mind off the pain. Ewan was glad that that there were no more courses in his diet. By the time he had finished, he was running on fumes. Another course, he would certainly have had indigestion.

As Ewan walked back to the flat, he wanted to believe what had come into his mind. It sounded so like Jordan, right down to the accent he had picked up in Corscadden. It was the sort of thing that he would have said. He wanted to believe it, but everything at the moment was far from well, as the empty flat and the pile of birthday presents on the end chair of the kitchen table would demonstrate. Ewan knew that time would heal his wounds, but it would need a lot of time. At the moment, they

were bandaged. At least the mock exams were over. Bombing out didn't bear thinking about.

Ewan met Christian on Gloucester Lane. They hugged. Soon they were in the flat. The first thing that Chris did was to open his rucksack. "We're going on a run," said Chris firmly as he got out his trainers, socks, running shorts, singlet, and sweater.

"I haven't done a run for ages, since Sunday," said Ewan. "Jordie and I were going to do a run on Sunday afternoon..."

Ewan was in tears again, and Chris hugged him, holding him close. "Eejay, get your running kit on. I heard that you did the DMI to here in record time."

"I did," said Ewan. "The next morning, I felt as if I had been hit by a tram. I didn't warm down properly. I think I had something."

"No wonder. Aidy told me your kit was soaked in sweat. It was cold on Sunday evening. I haven't done anything since Saturday when I got back from work. It feels like ages. It's only Thursday today."

Ewan had put his suit away and put on his running kit. This time, the bathroom door remained open, just as it always did when Jordan was in the flat. Then Chris and Ewan did their warmup routine in the hall. Ewan considered his half-brother as beautiful as Jordan. Chris put his long blond hair into a pony tail and put his sweatband around his forehead.

The run made Ewan feel a sense of normality. It was the same course that he and Jordan had run many times. It was a 7 k, which they did in less than twenty-five minutes. They went up to the flat to warm down, just as Ewan and Jordan had done many times.

“It’s nice to have someone to run with,” said Christian. “The twins are a bit small. I have got them doing a 2 k now, and they are pretty good. They love it. I then go and do my run, but I would love to have Aidy and you with me. And Jordan...”

Chris started to cry. So did Ewan. They held each other closely. What had happened was abominable.

“Thanks for coming, Chris,” said Ewan. “I really have needed you all this week.”

They went through to the kitchen. Grandma and Granddad had left a neat pile of envelopes on the table. There were several sympathy cards. There was one from work, and Baxter Ward Associates. The two young men found the next card particularly moving. It contained a handwritten letter that was on Strathcadden Academy notepaper. Both recognised the handwriting as that of Andrew McEwan, the Headmaster. They knew that he should have retired five years ago; he was nearly seventy. They had not found a suitable replacement after Mr Mitchell had retired, and the pandemic had made things worse. They read it:

*Dear Ewan*

*Joan and I were deeply shocked to hear of your sad news about Jordan, which we received this morning. It is, therefore, with a very heavy heart that I write to express my deepest condolences to you. I have also written to Jordan’s father.*

*I have told the bad news to the staff. Many were deeply shocked, and tears were shed. I have taken the liberty of sharing your address, so that they can send you a card.*

*Joan and I felt that Jordan’s untimely death was especially poignant in that he died on his twenty-fifth birthday. We know how your pain has been made more intense with the memory of your mother’s passing away.*

*We remember well how close you were to Jordan when you were here at Strathcadden. Your relationship was one of teenage sweet hearts, every bit as intense as those between boys and girls. Your pain will be intense as well, and we share your grief.*

*Jordan was unfailingly kind and courteous to staff, students, and visitors alike. Jordan was a much-loved member of our community, and we will miss him terribly.*

*I want you to know how much you supported Jordan in the earliest days while he had those terrible times during his family break up. He really appreciated your help. I also remember how much you appreciated Jordan's support in your own loss.*

*I also want you to know that Jordan spoke to me at length about spiritual matters. He took on board much of your interest in Celtic Christianity and appreciated how you could see God in nature. He may not have shouted from the roof tops. However, I was honoured that he took me into his confidence about what he considered to be such a private matter.*

*You, too, were a highly valued member of our community and your contribution was much appreciated. We assure you that you and your family, especially Aidan and Christian, are very much in our thoughts and prayers at this very difficult time for you.*

*If you feel you need to talk to me, you know where you can find me, and we will find a convenient time to talk.*

*With kindest regards*

*Andrew McEwan.*

Christian and Ewan both found the letter a tear-jerker. More would, no doubt, follow. It may have felt like four months, but it was four days since Ewan had received his shattering blow.

Christian and Ewan started to cook. It was yet another tiny routine that kept things stable.

“I’m staying with you tonight, Eejay,” said Chris.

“What about Gemma?”

“She said I should. You need me more than she does.”

“Chris,” said Ewan, “I need everyone I can. One of these days, I’ll be a big boy and stay here on my own. I’ll be home more often. You know, I want to be at home, in Corscadden. I have really come to miss it this week. Edinburgh is fun, but I think the gloss has started to peel off.”

“I know what you mean, Eejay. It will slowly get better. It did when your mum passed away. You have another year in your traineeship and then you will qualify. You may well feel different.”

Christian and Ewan had their dinner before they showered. Since they wore sports kit in bed, they changed into it. Anyone coming to the flat would see two young men dressed in shorts, socks, and T-shirts. At half-past ten, they turned in. Each felt safe under the duvet with the menagerie of animals.

“Chris,” said Ewan, “thanks for everything.”

“Eejay, that’s what we are here for. I am so glad that you are my brother. Aidy, you, Mum, and Dad mean so much. You gave Mum and me a family, and that is more precious than anything else. Eejay, I love you so much.”

The two men hugged and cuddled under the duvet. Then Ewan started to twitch. He had fallen asleep. Christian was still awake. Ewan was a beautiful young man – he was, after all, a fashion model. Like Aidy, he was young looking and certainly could continue to model clothing for eighteen- to twenty-year-olds for a while. Aidy and he could as well, except he was behind

the camera. Christian always had a powerful emotional bond to his half-brother. He was so similar to Uncle Alex, who had made Aunt Imm so happy. That night Christian felt a great physical attraction to Ewan as well. He concluded that he was Bi. Gemma might get jealous. He knew well enough that Gemma had a powerful attraction to Tamsin, so she couldn't talk. The less said the better.

Christian and Ewan had breakfast together, toast with lashings of hot coffee. They hugged before Ewan went to work. Today would involve long hours listening to the Training Partner, William McCullough, going through the eight mock papers. He could drone on at times. Ewan would have to concentrate. He hoped that he hadn't made a complete mess of everything: understandable in the circumstances.

When he got into Reception, Janet, the receptionist, told him that Mr McCullough wanted to see him in his office. Ewan's heart started to race. He went pale. Had he bombed out after all? Would he be sacked? It would be the final straw after one of the worst weeks in his life. He was like a dead man walking. It seemed ages as he went up the stairs to the first floor.

William McCullough's office was a large and spacious room, as befitted the elegant townhouse that Johnston, MacLean and Partners occupied. Shyly, he knocked on the door.

"Come on in, Ewan," said Mr McCullough. He was beaming. "Have a seat."

Mr McCullough pointed to an armchair, while he sat on the sofa. "Thank you so much for coming up so promptly. How has everything gone this week? It can't have been easy. You still look a bit pasty."

"It has not been easy, to be truthful."

“It won’t have been. But I do have some good news for you, for a change. Your mock exams were outstanding. You had an average of 95 %. Some of the points you raised, I had forgotten myself. With one or two, I had to go to the Law Society Library and check. You were right. I will admit that there are one or two things I have learned from reading your papers.

“Ewan, you should walk the exams the week after next. Just do what you are doing now, and you will be fine, laddie.

“Quite honestly, I don’t think I need to go through the papers with you. In the circumstance, I think it would be far better for you if I gave you the day off.”

Ewan smiled shyly and said, “Thank you.”

“I’ll give you the papers now. There are one or two points I have raised, but they are very minor.”

Ewan looked at the papers. There were annotations in light red pen.

“A lot of these scribbles are really just me thinking aloud... I think here, you could have made reference to *Pearson vs Denton*. It gave judges a more solid precedent...”

Waves of relief swept over Ewan. There was something that had gone right for a change.

“Now, Ewan,” said Mr McCullough, “there is something that I would like to propose. It all depends on how you get on this year and in your final year, but I am sure that your results will be as outstanding as they are now. I don’t mind telling you that your results were far better than mine were when I was a trainee, more years ago than I would care to admit. Would you consider training as a solicitor-advocate? I was chatting to Andrew Yeoman, the Senior Partner at Gordon Morton in Coruscadden. I know him well from my days of being a trainee. You will know

that he took over from his dad, Derek Yeoman, a couple of years back. I mentioned you to him. You have done an internship there, as well as previous work experience. He was telling me how valuable the work you did for them was. He agrees with me. When you qualify, would you do me a great favour? Apply for the Solicitor Advocate post he's making at the end of next year. It's tailor-made for you."

Ewan replied, "I certainly will. Thank you... Would it be possible for me to do my study leave next week at home in Corscadden?"

"Of course. In fact, I'm giving you an instruction that you should. You look as if you could do with some looking after. If you need anything, ask Andrew Yeoman. In fact, you should go down and chat to him about the Solicitor-Advocate post. Andrew is expecting you. Let me know how you get on."

Ewan was grateful for the day off. He rang Chris to find that he was still in the flat.

"Another run, Eejay," said Chris. "We'll go round Holyrood Park. Then we'll go to Dad's flat and meet Gemma, and Tamsin. Aidy is lecturing until half past two. We'll get the 16.10 train back home."

"Cool" said Ewan. Chris detected a more joyful tone in Eejay's voice.

When Ewan got back, Christian was already in his running kit and was just about to occupy the lofty perch with the vista of the communal garden. Christian and his half-brothers always did that before taking any kind of strenuous exercise, a life-long habit they had picked up from their father. Ewan got changed before going across to join Christian to await his turn to enjoy the vista of the communal garden.

“I’m looking forward to doing this run, Eejay,” Chris said. He gazed out of the window.

“I am too,” said Ewan as he sat on the side of the bath. “It’s making me feel normal again.”

There was a momentary pause before Christian said, “Have you heard about your mocks?”

“Mr McCullough called me in first thing. He gave me my papers and told me I did really well: ninety five percent average. I was scared I was going to bomb out this week. He told me to take the week off, and do my study leave at home.”

Christian paused again for a few seconds, before saying, “That’s brilliant!”

“I’m thinking of doing more rowing,” said Christian.

“I want to do some as well,” Ewan replied. He paused for a few seconds, before carrying on, “when all of this is over.”

“Are you thinking of rowing down here?”

“No. I want to come back to Corscadden. Mr McCullough has had a chat with Andrew Yeoman.”

“Aunt Jenny and Aunt Sarah get him to do our legal work. Granddad got Derek, his dad, to do it.”

“Yes, I know.” Ewan paused again for a few seconds. “I saw him come in when I was doing work experience.”

“So, what did Mr McCullough say to Andrew?”

“He said that once I have qualified at the end of next year, I should apply to Gordon Morton for a new post of solicitor-advocate. It takes three years of training. There are more professional exams. I’ll be twenty-eight when I’m fully qualified.”

“Sounds good,” said Chris.

“When I get back for good, I’ll renew my membership. But I’m not counting my chickens,” said Ewan. He paused again for a few seconds. “I did well in the mocks, but I could still bomb out on the real things. And there are the final exams next year.”

Chatting like this all felt so normal, just as it always had been both in Brewster House, and at Dad’s flat. It was another little routine that helped Ewan and Christian to overcome their loss.

Christian and Ewan’s run was fast. Both young men were natural runners. Holyrood Park was almost empty. It was a cold day, but neither felt it. And both were happy when they got back to the flat. It must have been the endorphins.

Once they had showered, Christian and Ewan got dressed and packed their rucksacks. They decided to take Jordan’s presents for Aidan and Christian. Jordan was slightly taller than both of them, but the clothes would fit. They would have a good home. It seemed so sad, but their recipient was in no position to use them. It brought tears to Ewan’s eyes.

Gemma had taken the day out of the department to work on her thesis. Most of it was completed, but Gemma wanted to check it over. She was due to make a report to her sponsors at Dunalastair engineering in April, before final submission in June. She wanted it handed in before the deadline. There were always those who wanted extension after extension.

Tamsin was working on her PhD. She had another two years to go before she had to write up her thesis. Part of her studies consisted of research into the music of Notre Dame de Paris, the cathedral in the centre of Paris. The great church had been catastrophically damaged in a fire on the evening of Monday 15<sup>th</sup> April 2019. Repairs to the ancient masterpiece still had a long way to go, but many of the priceless artworks had been saved.

Repairs were continuing apace, and it was hoped that the great church would be finished for the Olympic Games in 2024<sup>5</sup>.

When Chris rang Gemma, they were thinking of coffee. What better excuse for the Walker Tribe who drank the stuff by the litre? Soon Christian and Ewan were round at 26, Marchmont Gardens. All four of them hugged each other. It brought them great comfort. The coffee was nearly down.

“How has your week been?” Tamsin asked.

“Difficult,” Ewan replied. “Everyone has been so kind. But it still hurts. Seeing the flat with all Jordan’s stuff in it – it chokes me up. The flat won’t ever be the same.”

Gemma and Christian had come through with the coffee. It was easy to remember; all the Walker Tribe had it black, no sugar. Tears were yet again in Ewan’s eyes.

“One of these days, I’m going to have to stay there on my own. It will be lonely, but I’ll have to get used to it... I am making a little corner of remembrance for Jordie... I’m sure things will get better, but it’s still painful... I loved him... I cannot forget him.”

“Of course, you can’t,” said Gemma. She hugged Ewan and held him close. It was something that Ewan still momentarily found a bit strange. Although he had plenty of hugs from women, they were always from the likes of Grandma, Mum, Laura, and his aunts. It was a relatively new experience to be hugged by a woman of his age. His previous physical experience of such women was with Chloe Grey when she had smacked him one in the gob in Secondary Three. And Ms Bryant had gone mad at him for assaulting Grey. He had been suspended and got

---

<sup>5</sup> Notre Dame had not been completed in time for the Olympics. But in November 2024 the massive job had been completed. The cathedral reopened and was rededicated. As well as being repaired, it was cleaned, and a lovely job was done.

what for from Mum and Dad. As a teenager, Ewan was scared of women. And he still was. His physical attractions had been more than satisfied by his teenage sweetheart. Jordan was still filed away in that refrigerated drawer. He had still heard nothing from the hospital.

Christian said, "Tell them about your mocks, Eejay. You did really well."

"That's true," said Ewan. He smiled shyly. In normal circumstances he would have been bubbling excitedly at everyone. He would have been bright-eyed and bushy tailed. His tail would have been wagging, and no end of other excited animal metaphors. It was still less than a week since the bottom had fallen out of his world. Ewan had hung on to his work and routine; it had stopped him being swept away by the torrent.

"So, what did you get?" said Tamsin.

"Ninety five percent," said Ewan. "Mr McCullough was really pleased. He told me to take today off, instead of sitting in the seminar room listening to the training partners droning on. He told me to have my study leave at home."

"You deserve it," said Tamsin. "Your mum, dad, and Chris will pamper you. When are your real exams?"

"Week after next," Ewan replied. "I may have done well in the mocks, but I could end up bombing out."

"Don't be silly," said Gemma. "You must have known your stuff. The questions can't be that different."

"It has kept my mind off things," said Ewan. "I'm not going to spend all my time swotting. I'm looking forward to being back in Corscadden and seeing Mum, Dad, and the twins."

It had been a hard week for all the young men and women in the Walker Tribe. It was not yet seven days since the tragedy of Jordan had overwhelmed them. They would all need to pamper each other over the weekend. The loving nature of the family in a lovely family home would act as balm to dull the intense pain of bereavement.

## Chapter 8

**Monday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022 to Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2022**

Ewan felt secure in Brewster House. It had been described as a ‘gentleman’s residence’ with large and spacious rooms – a seven-bedroom detached villa in half a hectare of garden. The house was one hundred and thirty years old, being built at about the same time as the Great Central Main Line. Despite its size and magnificence, its value would buy a small cottage in the Southwest of England. Property prices in Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil were some of the lowest in Scotland, despite the easy access to Edinburgh, Glasgow, and other major cities by fast electric trains.

It was where he was born. His mother was a doctor, and with the aid of a midwife, he had popped out into the world quite easily. It had been the house where he had grown up with Aidan, his elder brother. He was very close to Aidy. He had gone to St Lawrence Primary School, before going to Strathcadden Academy, the large secondary school which was a rarity in that it had boarding provision for its Higher and Advanced Higher students, since its catchment area was very large with Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil being such a remote and sparsely populated area.

Jordan had joined Strathcadden Academy as what was affectionately known as a ‘waif and stray’. He had ended up in Ewan’s class in Secondary Three, although he was over a year older than Ewan. He had very quickly become Ewan’s closest friend, and their relationship blossomed so that they became teenage sweethearts. That they were both boys didn’t matter a jot.

Christian had arrived as a friend that was adopted by the family. Mum had died suddenly in January 2014. Not long after,

Dad had caught Christian's mum on the rebound. And Christian was Ewan's half-brother, as a result of Dad's being a naughty boy not long before he married Mary.

Now there were lively seven-year-old identical twin half-brothers in what had been his and Aidy's room. They both looked like Christian had at that age. Ewan had adopted the room next door when he and Jordan were going steady. It had been one of three spare rooms. The other two had been adopted by Aidan and Tamsin, and Christian and Gemma.

There had been tears, especially when Ewan's Mum had died. Christian's mum had stepped up to the role, and both Aidan and Ewan had become very close to Laura. Brewster House had a wonderful atmosphere of a happy family home, even though it was not easy to heat. There were going to be more tears as the Walker Tribe mourned for Jordan.

Ewan's extended family lived at various points around the town. Since Brewster House was the largest of their houses, it was a natural place for the family to land. The Walker Tribe were naturally lively and sociable. In the atmosphere of laughter, life, love, and light, Ewan felt very safe and wanted.

Playing badminton with Aidan, Christian, and their girlfriends kept Ewan's mind off things on Sunday afternoon. Otherwise, it would have been an even more difficult day as it was one week to the day that Jordan had met his untimely end. It was difficult enough when Aidan, Tamsin, and Gemma caught the train back to Edinburgh on Sunday evening. At that time last week, Ewan had had to make the unpleasant confirmation that the young man lying in the mortuary was indeed Jordan. The memory would fade eventually, but it was still fresh. It seemed so recent, yet it seemed to have happened so long ago. And the DMI had not rung about anything.

Ewan loved playing with his little half-brothers. They had a playful sense of humour, which made anyone laugh. While Christian could seem reserved, almost shy at times, a rather serious young man with a big sense of responsibility, the same impish nature was only just under the surface. It helped to keep Ewan running level.

Christian and Ewan made the evening meal before the twins went to bed. The little ones helped as well, while Mum and Dad were banished to the drawing room. Doing things for Mum, Dad and his little brothers meant so much to Christian. Ewan and Christian bathed the boys before getting them in their sports kit, which they had started to wear in preference to jim-jams. Ewan read a bedtime story to the twins, while the little boys snuggled up to their big brother. Afterwards they snuggled into bed. It was a cute scene as the little boys cuddled up to their favourite soft toys. Sixteen years before, Ewan and Aidan had done exactly the same in the same room.

The next morning, Ewan and Christian were up early. They had got into the habit of getting up early during the week now that both had to be in work by half-past eight. The radio was no longer on *Cadden FM*. At the age of twenty-two, Christian had found that something terrible had happened to pop music. As a result, he had tuned the radio to *Classic FM*, where it had stayed for the last nearly three years. It was a bit of grown-up time before the twins charged down the stairs and settled in the kitchen chattering away loudly.

Christian always took a cup of tea to his parents before they got up. It was a small and regular routine which he valued; having Mum and Dad meant so much, especially during this difficult time. Jordan's death had hit him almost as hard as it had Ewan.

Ewan was taking the twins down to St Lawrence Primary School. It was a short walk. Each boy had one of Ewan's hands and was skipping alongside his half-brother. It had been twelve years since Ewan had made this journey. Mrs Dalton was his form teacher when he was in Primary Seven. She was now the headmistress.

In Edinburgh, Ewan did not wear his kilt outside the flat, unless he was going to meet his friends who were doing the same, going to events at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, or attending Gay Pride events. In Corscadden, many young people liked to wear their kilts. It was an expression of their pride in their home area. It was natural for Ewan to do so. There was a stiff, cold breeze from the North. It was threatening to snow; that was not unusual for Strathcadden at the start of February.

Mrs Dalton was there to meet the pupils in the playground. Mrs Jackson, who was the form teacher for Primary Three, was there as well. Ewan had been taught by Mrs Jackson when he was a very little man.

"Ewan Walker!" Mrs Dalton called out. Although Ewan was not far off 1.9 metres tall, rather taller than both Mrs Jackson and Mrs Dalton, the voice made him freeze, just as it did when he was six.

"My word, you have grown since I saw you last," Mrs Dalton continued.

"I think I have," said Ewan with a shy smile. He remembered how Mrs Dalton looked so big. And it was not just that she was plump. Now he stood over her.

"I thought you were in Edinburgh," said Mrs Dalton. If anyone should know everyone else's business, it would be the headmistress of a Corscadden primary school.

“I still am,” Ewan replied. His short casual kilt was flapping in the wind. He pressed it down as he did not wish to share the official secrets act in front of Mrs Dalton, or for that matter, a couple of hundred little people who were running about in the playground. “I am at home at the moment on study leave. I do my second year Law Society professional exams next week. I brought my little brothers to school.”

“It’s wonderful to see you,” said Mrs Dalton. “Must go.”

Mrs Dalton turned round and started clanging a handbell. It was probably the same bell that had summoned Dad from the playground in the late seventies. Ewan had not wanted to discuss Jordan with her in case it brought back the tears.

Ewan was a slight young man. Although tall, he was skinny. At 67 kilograms he was underweight, even though he normally could out eat a horse, just like his brothers. Over the last week, he must have lost weight. His kilt was normally comfortably loose, and his belt was on the last hole. Now, even with a T-shirt and shirt under the belt, the kilt felt decidedly loose. As he walked home, he wondered if it would fall down revealing that he was a true Scotsman. When he got home, he lifted up his thick sweater. It was true. He could put his wrist under his belt. A visit to the bathroom scales showed that he had lost two kilograms and his weight was little more than it was when he was a teenager. In other words, he had become rather scrawny. People were noticing.

Back in the staff-room Mrs Dalton and Mrs Jackson were chatting.

“I always said that Ewan Walker was a bit of a wee Jessie<sup>6</sup>,” said Mrs Jackson.

“Like his brother,” replied Mrs Dalton. “Aidan’s going out with Tamsin Heady. Don’t know what she sees in him; he’s a wee drip.”

“Not surprisingly, Ewan has a boyfriend.”

“Typical,” said Mrs Dalton. “I knew he was gay when he was six.”

Both did a parody of Ewan’s manner of speech which had become pure male Morningside since he had been in Edinburgh. It was not a conversation whose level was remotely professional. But it was part of the gallows humour that was strictly kept within the staffroom. Gone were the airs and graces of the schoolmistress. Instead, was the rather coarse chatter of a couple of Central Belt fishwives.

Now Ewan was alone in the house. It would be good practice for when he got back to his flat in Edinburgh. He got his law textbooks from his rucksack. The rucksack was heavy; it was just under a third of his weight. He went through to the games room and put the radio on to *Classic FM*. He sat cross-legged on the old settee, which he had bounced on when he was little. It was comforting. He had his mock papers which Mr McCullough had marked. He checked his books to follow up on the feedback. Ewan felt a genuine sense of achievement. If he could satisfy Mr McCullough, he must have done pretty well.

After a couple of hours, he heard the front door open. Grandma and Granddad let themselves in. They had always done so when he, Aidy, or Chris had been unwell. It always seemed to

---

<sup>6</sup> An effeminate young man or a coward. Ewan Walker was both. And the same was true for Aidan Walker.

happen in the holidays. Ewan had always rushed up to greet his grandparents like an excited puppy. He hugged Grandma.

Grandma could feel Ewan's ribs under his thick sweater. Although Ewan's ribs were naturally prominent, they seemed to be standing out even more than before. Muriel asked, "Eejay dear, are you eating properly? You feel so skinny."

"I think so, Grandma," said Ewan.

"I don't think you are, my laddie," she said.

"I think I might have lost some weight," replied Ewan. "My kilt feels loose. I did weigh myself earlier."

"Upstairs to the bathroom and we weigh you again."

The studying he had done was something that involved making new connections in his brain. It involved intellectual food, not real food. This was evident as he stood on the scales. He was now 65 kg. With his clothes off, Grandma could see how thin her grandson was.

"We'll need to feed you up, laddie," said Granddad. "Grandma has just the thing."

It was, of course, no surprise that Ewan had become so thin in the past few days. He had eaten but was running on adrenaline with the shock of his bereavement, and the mock Law Society exams. He had a genetic make-up that many people would envy. Some people only needed to think of food, and they would put on weight. Ewan could eat like a horse and remain skinny. Most people in Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil fitted the classic stereotype of the wiry Scot.

"You're like your dad," said Muriel. "He ate like a horse when he was your age. He never put anything on."

“He still does, Grandma,” Ewan replied. “Aidy says he eats like a pig.”

“Cheeky!” replied Grandma.

Ewan got dressed again. He went downstairs. Grandma had gone out to get something nutritious for all three of them. Ewan offered Granddad a coffee. The Walker Tribe functioned on coffee. When the coffee machine had finished, Granddad settled down on the Windsor chair. Ewan sat cross-legged on the settle that was on the long side of the kitchen table, next to the wall. It had been a pew at St Columba’s church.

“You did well in your mocks,” said Granddad. “Your dad told me.”

“It has been the only thing that went well last week,” said Ewan. “I am not complaining, though. I got an average of ninety-five percent. Mr McCullough marked it, and he is strict.”

“I was talking to Derek Yeoman,” said Charles. “Andrew has been chatting to Will McCullough. Andrew wants a solicitor-advocate. It’s a new post, starting at the end of next year. Andrew is expecting you to ring him this week. Have you done it yet?”

“Mr McCullough said the same to me,” Ewan replied.

“Well, have you done it yet?”

“No.”

“Well, do it now, laddie,” said Charles, passing the phone to his grandson.

A few minutes later Ewan had made the call, and Muriel had come back in carrying a large bag of groceries. Ewan was going in on Thursday. While Muriel was starting to make a hearty

soup, Ewan fetched his laptop and e-mailed Mr McCullough to report what he had done.

Grandma's soup was thick and hearty, just as Ewan always remembered it. It was accompanied by fresh French bread, with butter. It made him feel warm inside. Ewan wanted more than ever to come back home to Corscadden, back to Brewster House where he felt so, so safe.

All too soon, it was time to pick up the twins. Ewan walked down Priestfield Avenue. He held hands with Grandma. Nobody would see him. He had often done it as a child. Yes, he was a fully grown man, but in the circumstances, he felt like a small child, bewildered and devastated. Grandma's hand was safe and familiar.

On the corner of Priestfield Avenue and Priestfield Crescent, Charles and Muriel said goodbye to Ewan. Ewan then walked on towards St Lawrence Primary School. He stood with those waiting to pick up their children. The wind was still cold and threatened to whip up his short kilt. He held it down. Another man was doing the same. Eventually the little people came pouring out, as did Benjamin and Daniel. A little hand went into each of Ewan's hands and the little boys skipped excitedly alongside their big brother. They did not make a distinction between true brothers and half-brothers.

After taking the twins to school the next morning, Ewan did more revision, sitting cross-legged in the games room, with *Classic FM* playing softly in the background. The familiar smells of Brewster House helped to soothe him. Midway through the morning, Ewan took a break and set the coffee machine running. He knew that Dad was coming home early, as Jordan's father, Stephen, was coming to stay. As the coffee came down, Ewan again tried ringing the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary. He had

not been able to get through earlier in the morning. The bereavement office was not taking phone calls. The bereavement counsellor only worked part time and phone calls were strictly by appointment. No, they could not possibly tell him when the report on the autopsy on Jordan was going to be made available. It was confidential information only to be shared with next of kin. As far as they were concerned, the fact that Ewan and Jordan were going to be engaged at the end of the month was not relevant. Ewan was just his boyfriend. He could be one of many. Ewan could have got into a shouting match, but it would not have helped. Like doctors' receptionists, hospital receptionists were a law unto themselves.

Ewan was in tears. As a lawyer with a bright future, he could have quoted all sorts of legal stuff at the receptionist, but the latter would not have understood any of it. The receptionist would have said, "Yer heid's full o' mince<sup>7</sup>," and "Oan yer bike, ya bampot<sup>8</sup>." Besides Ewan was very particular about avoiding his own legal work; he considered it a conflict of interests.

Ewan was now in the kitchen. On *Classic FM* the Welsh Lullaby *Suo Gan* was performed by a youth choir with an organ accompaniment. Ewan had heard the stately and hymn-like tune many times. He had played it on the piano and the organ in the noisy room. He had heard the lyrics in Welsh but didn't know any Welsh. This time the lyrics were in English.

The tune was a bit of a tear-jerker. Combined with the imagery of a baby at peace, sleeping peacefully at his mother's bosom smiling back at angels was too much for Ewan's fragile emotions. Ewan laid his head on the kitchen table and sobbed as he had not sobbed before.

---

<sup>7</sup> You are a brick short of a full load.

<sup>8</sup> Please leave me alone, you foolish person.

Joby hurried into the kitchen, having arrived with Stephen Melhuish. He held his son. It was gut-wrenching to see Ewan in this state. But it was hardly surprising; the accident had happened only ten days before.

“Eejay, I am here,” said Joby. He felt clumsy. He was doing his best, but three-phase electricity generation came to him more easily than dealing with intense emotion. Holding Ewan was the best he could do. He was relieved when Muriel and Charles arrived. Muriel had a big bag of shopping. She sat down and held her grandson.

Like the baby in the lullaby, Ewan buried his face into her bosom. It was something that he had done rarely, only in moments of intense stress and emotion. She caressed him, saying, “Grandma’s here now. Let it come, Eejay. You snuggle up to Grandma. You’re safe here.”

Ewan looked up at Muriel. His eyes were red. His expression was pained. The tears formed rivulets that ended up in damp patches on Muriel’s dress. Muriel continued to hold him. She had done the same with Joby when Mary had passed away. Charles was pouring out the coffee from the coffee machine.

“Sorry, Grandma and Granddad,” said Ewan as he tried to recompose himself. “There was a song on the radio called *Suo Gan*. It’s a Welsh lullaby. It’s a bit of a tear-jerker.”

“You can say that again, laddie,” said Granddad. “I’ve done you a coffee. I have put sugar in. You need it. Grandma’s going to make another hearty soup to build you up.”

“Thanks, Granddad,” said Ewan weakly.

In the drawing room, Joby and Stephen had sat down with their coffee. Joby asked, “How are you bearing up?”

“I am keeping it together... Just,” Stephen replied. “I have had moments like that myself, with Mum and Dad. How’s Ewan in general.”

“He’s taken it very hard, Stephen. Jordan was more than Ewan’s boyfriend. He was his teenage sweetheart. They were head over heels in love with each other. Jordan made Ewan really happy. Before they met, Ewan could have his moments. He was like my Mary – out of the family, she could be a bloody difficult woman at times. She wore the trousers in this house. I was her tomboy’s toy-boy. She was nine years older than me. Jordan calmed Ewan down in the last years at school. Ewan is now very gentle, like Aidan.”

“Ewan did the same for Jordan. When Kathryn ditched us both, Jordan could have totally gone off the rails. Jordan was very mixed up and found it hard to cope with. Ewan was there for him. I was so glad that Strathcadden Academy was there to support us. It was lovely to see them together. There was real love between them in the nicest possible way.”

“It was,” Joby replied. “Ewan said that they had never had a cross word in all the time they had been together. Jordan was truly loved in my family. We have all taken it hard. But Ewan has been knocked for six. He has lost a lot of weight in the last ten days. He has been running on adrenaline, doing those mocks as well as everything else.”

“There’s not much of him, anyway,” said Stephen. “There wasn’t much of Jordan, either. There was not much difference in their weight, but Ewan was that bit taller.”

“There’s even less of him now,” said Joby. “Mum weighed him yesterday and gave me strict orders that we are to

build him up again. Easier said than done. Ewan can eat like a horse and still put nothing on. All my sons are like that.”

Lunch consisted of another of Muriel’s warming and hearty soups with French bread, butter, and cheese.

Back in the drawing room, Stephen asked if Ewan and Jordan had made a will. He said, “The reason I ask this is that Kathryn, my ex, has her greedy eye on any money that Jordan has left. We had a horrible conversation the day after the accident. I don’t want to recall it, but to be quite honest, she was not in the least bit concerned, until she suddenly thought about wills. She is such a money-grubbing vixen.”

“We did,” Ewan replied. “We went to Gordon Morton, the solicitors that Granddad used for Walker Bros.”

“You’re training as a solicitor,” said Stephen. “Why didn’t you do it yourself, just as a matter of interest?”

“Conflict of interest – should there be a dispute, nobody could accuse either of us of fixing things. We laughed a lot. We said my estate would be worth a fiver at most. Jordan’s would be five pound fifty.”

“I think it will be worth a bit more,” said Joby. “Jordan’s estate will get a pretty massive pay-out from Celia Barwick-Green’s insurance.”

“Who’s Celia Barwick-Green?” said Ewan.

“She was the airhead who drove into Jordan,” said Stephen. “Range Rover with a personalised number plate, top-of-the-range model, worth a hundred and fifty grand. On her mobile, on the limit for alcohol, but over the limit for Class A drugs. She was racing back to get to Cheshire to her precious daughter who was competing in a gymkhana – allegedly, of course.”

“She’s innocent until proven guilty beyond all reasonable doubt,” Ewan added. “I don’t really care about the pay-out. I just want my Jordan back.”

“So do I,” said Stephen. “It’s just that my ex wants to get her grubby mitts on at least half of it. She told me she would go to court and strip me of even my shirt.”

“Jordan and I have exactly the same will. Half would come to me, and the other half to you. We were very careful to state that it should come to you, not his ex-mother. Jordan was very cut up by what happened.”

“I don’t want to see her getting a single penny, but her partner uses a legal practice that does a lot for the present government, all sorts of hedge funds, banks and other high-ups. They can screw a litre of water from a dry dishcloth.”

“We did the will at Gordon Morton, the solicitors in town. My aunts still use them all the time for Walker Bros. They are no push-over. I am going in on Thursday about something else, but I can go early, and we can discuss the will with their probate executive. I have to be careful – conflict of interest.”

Ewan rang Gordon Morton to make an appointment with the probate executive for an hour before he was due to see Andrew Yeoman on Thursday.

Ewan then mentioned the registration of Jordan’s death. It was clear it was difficult; his eyes were filling with tears. “I spoke to the office at City Chambers in Edinburgh. They can’t do anything until the Procurator Fiscal has had the death certificate from the DMI. The Procurator Fiscal’s office in Chambers Street has not received the death certificate.”

This was not unusual at the time of year for hard-pressed hospitals. The mortuaries were understaffed.

“I didn’t get far trying to chase the hospital this morning,” said Ewan. “You have to get an appointment first thing in the morning to make a phone call. It’s a matter of luck if you get through. Once you have done that, it’s still a matter of luck if anyone answers the phone. When I did get through last week, they had no idea of what was happening. He’s been filed away in that terrible filing cabinet drawer...”

Ewan was crying again. Joby held him, just as Grandma had held him eight years ago.

“Eejay,” said Stephen, “I’ll try again for us. You never know, I might have some luck. I am a close relative, after all; I am his father. What is the DMI?”

“Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary,” Joby replied.

Stephen looked up the number and keyed it into the mobile. Surprisingly he got through straight away; the bereavement office always forwarded its calls to the mortuary staff room while it was closed. The attendants were instructed that they should tell the caller the hours of opening and no more.

“I am so glad I have managed to get hold of you. My name is Stephen Richard Melhuish...,” said Stephen.

“I recognise that name. We’ve got one in under that name,” said the attendant. He realised that he could get into all sorts of trouble for unauthorised disclosure of information. “What’s your relationship with the job?”

“Job?”

“The deceased.”

“I am his father.”

“What’s his name?”

“Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish, date of birth 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1997. Died on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022. His 25<sup>th</sup> birthday.”

“Can you identify yourself?”

“Stephen Richard Melhuish, date of birth 14<sup>th</sup> May 1972. My address is Clematis Cottage ...”

“So, what do you want?”

“I would like to know what is going on. Jordan’s fiancé has been trying to find out, but with no luck.”

“Brice!” the attendant called to his mate, “how are we getting on with the Melhuish job? Have we started yet?”

“Job? Job? This is my son you are talking about!”

In the background, Brice was calling back, “Mr Taggart has been on holiday. He’s back tomorrow. He might make a start on it then. He’s at a meeting on Friday.”

“This is my son you are talking about. I am with Jordan’s fiancé, and we are deeply upset. We are trying to get his funeral arranged. The Procurator Fiscal’s office is jumping up and down about it. My son-in-law to be, has been trying hard to get things going.”

“We cannae help it if the pathologist goes off on his holidays. There’s a backlog of work.”

“Don’t you have another one?”

“No way. We cannae get one. Hey, Brice! This one is talking about a fiancée for Melhuish but talked about a son-in-law.”

“Aye, ah ken,” said the disembodied voice. “Melhuish was the gay one. He’s got a rainbow bracelet. The laddie who came in shorts, he was his boyfriend. He looked like a... [Brice

used a foul and very vulgar homophobic pejorative]. ...Ye ken, Walker. He had the orange socks, and shorts that barely covered his arse. He called Melhuish ‘my baby’...”

Brice went into a parody of Ewan’s Morningside accent.

“How much more of this have I got to listen to?” Stephen yelled. “Presumably you still refer to loved ones as ‘the meat’ and the trolleys as ‘meat wagons’. I am disgusted at the conversation I have just heard. I shall be making a formal complaint.”

“Oan ya trolley, ya fandan<sup>9</sup>!”

The line went dead. Stephen had a friend at university who, as a holiday job, had worked as a hospital porter. He had told Stephen a lot about the gallows humour that went with the job. The terms were familiar. However, the porters were very careful about what they said in front of loved ones. On this occasion, the care had lapsed.

“How did you get on?” said Joby.

“Not very well: the pathologist has been on holiday. Might get round to looking at Jordan tomorrow or Thursday. He’s away at a meeting on Friday. You ought to have heard them. I shall be making a complaint to the highest level.”

The next morning, Mr Hewitt from Hewitt & Sons, the undertakers, arrived after Ewan had got back from taking the twins to school. Stephen had agreed that the funeral should be in Corscadden as Jordan had always said how his heart was there. Jordan had given instructions that he should be buried in a woodland cemetery if the worst happened. It had. Although Stephen did not count himself as religious, Ewan had a quiet and

---

<sup>9</sup> Please go away, you pretentious idiot.

private faith inspired by the Celtic tradition of Christianity. Both wanted Jordan to have a Christian ceremony.

The Reverend Matheson of St Columba's Episcopalian Church had retired two years before. After a long interregnum, a new minister had arrived, Alexander Witton. He was a young man in his early thirties. He had already made a name for himself as a thoughtful and reflective priest with a great empathy for his parishioners, so willing to share his love for the Lord Jesus with everyone, regardless of who they were. He was particularly popular with the young people. He would take the service for Jordan.

Ewan wanted Andrew McEwan, the Headmaster at Strathcadden Academy to make the eulogy. He was pleasantly surprised that he got straight through to Mr McEwan, who immediately agreed. Mr McEwan would come the next day.

Jordan would have wanted everyone to wear bright colours – no suits, no black. Ewan wanted the ceremony to be a youthful celebration of life, love, and light – an event that would speak to everyone who loved Jordan, regardless of whether they had a faith or not. Ewan wanted there to be a Celtic element to the ceremony, reflecting the way that he found God, not in the liturgy or the purple poetry of the hymnal, but in nature, art, and music. Jordan was his *Anam Chara*, his soulmate who walked with him on his spiritual journey. Jordan had sat with him on his favourite outcrop of rock on Corr Hill when he had sat with God. Ewan had sat there many times, just being with God. With Jordan there, he was sure that he had felt the true love and beauty of God as well as the loyal love of his soulmate.

Now his soulmate had been so suddenly and cruelly snatched away as the result of the selfish action of a society airhead.

Not unnaturally, Ewan would have preferred to be doing anything else other than making arrangements for the funeral of his teenage sweetheart.

Nor was it any easier for Stephen doing what no father should ever have to do, to bury his son. He remembered the public-school Anglicanism of his youth. It was all about discipline, tradition, responsibility, getting into the right networks, old boys' networks, and voting Conservative. What residual faith he had had withered in the school chapel. That said, he had little time for what he called evangelical atheists, who were as intolerant as any Ulster bigot. As one who declared no religion, he was at total ease with those who did, as long as they didn't burst in on him and ask him whether he had been washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Stephen knew that Ewan had talked to Jordan about his faith, and Jordan had certainly found the Celtic tradition very attractive. Despite the best efforts of school chaplains, Stephen knew that the Bible had some very comforting things to say about life, the Universe, and everything. All the atheists had to offer was 42 and decay back to simple molecules. Jesus of Nazareth had much to commend him, even though his teachings had been largely blotted out by many a chapel sermon that was underpinned by freemasonry.

The thought that Jordan, his only child, the one who stood by and helped him through the trauma of Kathryn ditching him, would end up as a kilogram of ash, repelled him. It was, to him, not only obscene. It was a blasphemy.

Although Stephen could see that Ewan was devastated, somehow the bottom had not fallen out of his world. Something seemed to be supporting this gentle and sensitive young man. It was more than just having a lovely family being there for him. There was something extra that words could not describe – an

extra depth of this truly beautiful young man. There seemed to be some hidden truth in what Jordan had told him.

On Wednesday morning Ewan went down to St Lawrence Primary School with the twins, who were, as usual, holding him by the hand and skipping along. He delivered them and made himself scarce before Mrs Dalton saw him. He had always been afraid of her, as were many of the boys. She used to shout at him. The sound of her voice still gave him goosebumps. He knew now that it was his fur standing up to make him look bigger. She was not the scariest. The prize for that was awarded to Ms Bryant who had been his form tutor in S3CB at Strathcadden Academy. He was terrified of her. Fortunately, she had disappeared from the school, never to be seen again. There were lots of rumours, most of which were embellished by nosy Caddies.

As he was about to head back home, Ewan saw Lisa Hopwood and Abigail Burwood walking towards him along Dallennan Road. He made to greet them. They noticed him and walked straight across the road, dodging the traffic. They were in Ewan's year, and he had got on well with them. They were in the Strathcadden rowing squad when rowing was being introduced to the school. Lisa still rowed with Corscadden Rowing Club.

The news of Jordan's accident had got about the town. Ewan had told many of his Caddie friends. It hurt Ewan. Was he now some kind of leper now that his soulmate had died? He could see that they were embarrassed. Yes, death was an obscenity. It was as if some noisome fluid had been hurled over him to make him a pariah. It was easier to walk across a busy main road than to risk talking to him. What would have they done if, say, their boyfriends had met a grotesque accident?

As he turned up Priestfield Avenue, Ewan started to cry. He wanted to get back to Brewster House and hide.

Instead, he met two familiar figures going up Priestfield Avenue. A familiar looking black dog accompanied them. They were Andrew and Joan McEwan with Jake. Jake was that bit older than when he met him last. So was everyone.

Jake was excited to see Ewan and pushed his nose up Ewan's kilt. He could tell that Ewan's pheromones had a superior quality to them. At least Jake didn't run across the road when he saw Ewan.

Ewan unlocked the door, before they went through to the kitchen. He put the coffee machine on. Although it was a dull and cold day, the garden room would be comfortable. The little birds were gorging at the feeders before flitting back to the shrubs and having a commotion.

"Ewan," Joan McEwan started, "it's been a long time since we have seen you. Too long. We're so sorry about what happened to Jordan."

"Thanks," Ewan replied quietly. "And thank you for your very kind letter."

"It's the very least we could do," said Andrew. "Thank you for asking me to do Jordan's eulogy. What kind of service are you having?"

"Stephen, Jordan's dad, and I agreed on a colourful celebration of Jordan's life. We shared beauty, life, light and love. We want it to have a Christian theme, and everyone to wear bright colours. You know that I was into Celtic Christianity when I was a Caddie."

"Of course, we do."

“I still am, although I have had some hard times these last ten days. It feels such a long time ago, but it still hurts like hell.”

“Of course, it does,” said Joan.

“I have tried hard to keep it together and keep going,” said Ewan. His eyes were filling with tears again. “I had just dropped off my little brothers at school. They are in Primary Three. I saw a couple of my female friends from Strathcadden Academy, Lisa and Abigail. They ran across the road to avoid talking to me. It hurt.”

Jake was sitting next to Ewan who was stroking him. Ewan wanted to have a dog like Jake in the family, but it would have been cruel to keep him on his own when everyone was out at work.

“They are embarrassed; they don’t know what to say. It’s a very hard thing for young people to discuss,” said Andrew. “As you know well yourself.”

“It was eight years ago when Mum died,” Ewan said. “I made a fool of myself, as you know. I’m still embarrassed by it.”

Stephen came in, with Muriel and Charles. Ewan got up to serve the coffee. Despite his distress, Ewan was always polite and hospitable.

While Muriel started to make yet another hearty soup, Stephen talked to Joan and Andrew McEwan. Mr McEwan went through the eulogy to make corrections and add extra material to cover Jordan’s time at university and at Baxter Ward Associates.

Ewan had met The Reverend Alex Witton only a few times. Grandma and Granddad, who were regular church goers, knew the new minister well. The bar had been raised high by Robert Matheson, but Alex was rising to it. He had come from a parish in the Borders, where he had been a curate. He was a

married man in his early thirties with a goatee beard. Ewan and Stephen warmed to him.

“Mr Hewitt tells me you don’t want a formal church service,” said Alex.

“No,” said Ewan. “We would like a celebration of Jordan’s life. We have asked for people to come in bright colours. We want the service to be in modern English. God didn’t stop work in 1662. I want people to feel that God is as relevant to them now as he is to me.”

“I have something that I have put together. It has some bible readings, instrumental music, as well as, for want of a better description, a contemporary liturgy.”

The Reverend Alex passed three pieces of A4. Ewan and Stephen looked at them.

“It seems spot on,” said Stephen. It bore no resemblance whatever to the public-school Anglicanism that emasculated Jesus of Nazareth, other than using the words God, Jesus, and Lord. It expressed the raw grief of the congregation. Those who knew Jordan would certainly be feeling it. There were also words of comfort from the Bible and other readings. There was one hymn, *Brother, Sister, let me serve you*. It was one of Ewan’s favourites.

“We had that at the Leaver’s Celebration event a few years ago,” said Andrew. “Christian, Ewan’s half-brother, was head-boy. He chose it, and I based my talk on it. By the way, I have been asked to do the eulogy. I was senior depute at Strathcadden Academy when Jordan was there. I am now the headmaster, just. I retire at the end of the academic year.”

“Who’s taking over from you?” Ewan asked.

“Mrs Spencer. She joined the senior management team when Mrs Horsefall retired.”

Ewan said, "Aidy has talked to several Auld Caddies to play a couple of pieces. He's played the organ in the church. Tamsin, his girlfriend, is really good as a pianist."

"I have heard them," replied The Reverend Alex. "I've heard you as well. You're quite a dab hand on the keyboard."

"There is another thing I have thought of," said Stephen. "If any young people have anything like pictures or other mementos of Jordan, they could come up and lay them at the altar or Jordan's coffin."

"I have heard of that being done," said The Reverend Alex. He was jotting all sorts of notes down on his draft. "Have you organised a date?"

"That's the problem," said Stephen. "Jordan's still in the mortuary at the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary. They aren't doing the post-mortem until tomorrow. They call it a 'job'. The pathologist went off on holiday, is coming back today, and has a meeting on Friday. The people in the Procurator Fiscal's office are hopping mad about it. They told me this morning that they are always having this sort of thing, but they can't do anything about it other than complain."

"It reminds me of what happened in my previous post," said The Reverend Alex. "An old lady had a fall. She went into hospital and had an operation. She sadly passed away. The report didn't get to her daughter for ten days. The consultant sat on the report for ages. Some senior doctors are so arrogant."

Andrew McEwan left as Charles and Muriel served lunch. He needed to get back to Strathcadden Academy as there were still one hundred and one different things to get done at once, if not sooner. Joan stayed with Jake.

After lunch, Ewan excused himself and went to the games room to do more revision for his exams the following week. The discussions about undertakers and funerals were depressing. At least his legal studies would take his mind away from it.

Stephen announced that he wanted to go for a stroll up into Corr Wood. Jake was getting restive, so Stephen asked if he could take him for a walk.

“That would be lovely,” said Joan. “He’s getting fed up.”

“I like walking and love it when I’ve got a dog with me,” Stephen replied. “I would have a dog, if it weren’t for my job taking me all over the place. A dog gives me time out to relax. I certainly could do with it now.”

At the sight of his lead, Jake got excited. He snorted, his tail wagged, and he went around in excited circles. Shortly afterwards, the front door closed.

Joan asked, “How’s Ewan coping?”

“He’s quite tearful at the moment,” said Muriel. “But wouldn’t we all be if we had lost someone as close? He’s trying very hard to keep it together. On top of everything, he has had mock Law professional exams. He has got the real thing next week. He’s gone off to revise.”

“He got a grade A in his mocks,” said Charles. “In normal circumstances, Ewan should walk them. He’s very afraid he’s going to “bomb out” in his words. I was talking to Andrew Yeoman the other day. He was talking to William McCullough, the senior training partner where Ewan works. Will thinks Ewan has the potential to make a top lawyer.”

“Jordan made Ewan so happy,” said Muriel. “They were going to France at the end of this month. They were going to

stay at a Chateau and propose on Ewan's birthday on the 27<sup>th</sup> of this month."

"How old is Ewan now?" said Joan.

"He's twenty-three, about to turn twenty-four. He does look younger, though," said Charles. "Someone said he looked as if he were still a teenager. That applies to all our grandsons. Christian and Aidan still carry an age identity card, and they're both twenty-five, twenty-six in August. Joby was exactly the same. Came from your side of the family, dear."

"Poor Ewan has had a basinful in the last few years," said Muriel. "Eight years ago, our Mary died very suddenly."

"Yes, I remember that well," Joan said. "He got into a real state when he had a set to with his tutor."

"I don't think that will happen now," said Charles.

"He seems to have lost weight," said Joan.

"He's been running on coffee and adrenaline these last ten days," said Muriel. "He has lost some weight, which he can't afford to do. He's skinny enough as it is. It will take him ages to put it back on."

"I wish I could be like that," said Joan. "I only have to think of food, and I put on weight. When I diet, I slim Andrew off as well."

"All of them eat Joby and Laura out of house and home, including the twins," said Muriel.

In Corr Wood, Stephen Melhuish was ambling along with Jake who was snuffling and snorting at lots of interesting smells, as he always did. Occasionally Jake would present his calling card. The walk was familiar. Stephen came up to the bench

where there was a panoramic view of the town. He could see why Jordan had liked it. After what the vixen had done to them both, Jordan had felt safe and wanted in Corscadden. He had had a wide circle of friends at Strathcadden Academy. They didn't mind that Jordan had a boyfriend. Many gay boys in many schools had several boyfriends, and that was the case at Strathcadden. Jordan, by contrast, was loyal to one, and that was Ewan. And Ewan was the same to Jordan. He knew that a good number of students, both boys and girls at the school had had crushes on Ewan. No wonder: Ewan was outstandingly good looking then, even pretty, and now. Momentarily he fancied catching Ewan on the rebound. However, he was nearly fifty, while his potential boyfriend was not yet twenty-four, over a year younger than his late son. It would have been taking advantage, and that was not his style.

It was her style, the vixen. She was interested in Jordan, not because of any affection for him, but because she wanted to get her grubby mitts on the money. She was shackled up with that ghastly obese banker with the shaven head. He was welcome to her. Jordan had written his will, thank God, and it had been done properly. Barford and Partners LLP were shysters, though, adept at using old boys' networks to pervert the course of justice. However, Gordon Morton were no push over.

Ewan had told him how he would sit up on an outcrop at the top of Corr Hill listening to God. It would be snowing up there, and there was a stiff breeze. Stephen tried to sit cross-legged like Ewan did. Although he was not at all fat, he found it difficult, so he sat normally on the bench. God didn't expect his people to adopt strange positions like they did in yoga. Stephen put things out of his mind, simply being. Jake lay at his feet, sniffing the air. The heavens were not riven with angels singing. Nor were they with glory ringing. There was still a cold stiff breeze. However there seemed to be some kind of peace. It was

something he could not understand. Instead, he let it flow. As a teen, he had called it “good vibes”.

After a few minutes, Jake got bored and wanted to get back into the warm. So, they did.

Jake flopped down in front of Joan’s feet. He was getting on for a dog and appreciated the comparative warmth of the garden room. Muriel and Charles were still there. They hadn’t seen Joan for a while and had had a long chat about Andrew’s imminent retirement. When Keith Mitchell had retired at the end of July 2016, Andrew had agreed to keep going for a couple of years until they had found a suitable replacement. In 2020, they had finally found a new headmistress, Mrs MacFarlane. However, just before she was due to take up her post, she was taken seriously ill with that damnable virus that had caused the pandemic. She was blighted with Long Covid and could not take up her post. Therefore, Andrew McEwan continued in post while the whole process started again, even though he was well over retirement age.

In August 2016, Dr Cuthbert became Senior Depute. Mrs Horsefall retired in 2018, and Mrs Spencer was her replacement. Finally, in late 2021, Mrs Spencer was appointed as headmistress. Andrew and Joan were looking forward to taking it easy. They were not far off seventy.

Stephen joined them. They heard the sound of the cloakroom door shut, followed shortly by the roar of *The Venerable*. Ewan poked his head round the kitchen door and announced that he was off to pick up the twins.

“Gosh,” said Joan, “is it that time already?”

“Time for another coffee,” said Charles. He had always had a cup of coffee in the middle of the afternoon, from when he

had started at Walker Bros all those years ago. It had become a life-long habit.

“Did you enjoy your walk?” Joan asked.

“Very pleasant,” Stephen replied. “Jake was very good. I had a sit down on that bench with the views over the town. It was useful to clear my mind.”

“Our Ewan does that,” Charles said.

“I know. Jordan used to tell me. There is an outcrop of rock where he sits cross-legged, just to be. Jordan would do it as well. He found it very peaceful. He so loved Ewan. There was so much more than just a pair of gay young men. I know how much it hurts me, what has happened. It must be even worse for Ewan. I can’t thank Ewan enough for how he helped Jordan.”

“Ewan will get over it,” said Muriel, “but it will take time. Ewan said that Jordan was far more than a boyfriend. He was his soulmate. On Tuesday, he said to me through his tears that he could never forget Jordan, to the day he dies. He doesn’t feel that he would ever find one like Jordan. Stephen, I know it hurts, but you should be proud of Jordan.”

“And you should be proud of Ewan: Joby and Laura as well. His nature is as beautiful as his looks. He is a lovely man in every way. My Jordan was very lucky. I am glad he never picked up any of his ex-mother’s nature.”

Stephen went on to tell them about the behaviour of his ex. She had walked out on him while he was away on business, leaving Jordan to find an empty house and to get on with it. After that, she sold the house over their heads as it was in her name. She had sold off or given away Jordan’s possessions, saying that they were hers, on loan to her son. The divorce was bitter. She had rejected him despite his best efforts to get back together. Rupert Bell-Dick was so much more interesting as he

was a free spirit, like her. If it felt good, she did it. He shuddered as he remembered how she had summoned him and Jordan to Compton Parfitt Manor and so unceremoniously and publicly ditched them for good. The only thing that tickled him was Jordan showing Rupert his T-shirt with the legend “Sorry girls, I love boys”.

Joan, Muriel, and Charles had heard bits of the tale from both Ewan and Jordan. They still found it repulsive. They wondered how much lower Kathryn could stoop. They found out.

“Kathryn wants at least half of Jordan’s estate,” said Stephen. “She wanted nothing to do with him, until she realised that his estate would get a very large amount in compensation.”

“No!” said Joan. “This is too bad. Did Jordan make a will?”

“Yes. Ewan and he went down to Gordon Morton. It has been done properly, but she’s contacted Barford and Partners in London. They will argue that black is white and persuade a jury to return a verdict that black is white beyond all reasonable doubt. Secret handshakes are the key. They do a lot of work for banks, hedge funds, high-ups and the present government.”

“Andrew Yeoman is very good,” Charles replied. “Since the will was written here, it will go to Buchanan Sheriff Court. I have had experience of Barford and Partners. Funny handshakes will not be in it. They will be well out of their depth here. They might have to do something strange – they will have to handle the truth.”

“Ewan and I could do with it like a bullet in the head.”

“You’re going down to Gordon Morton tomorrow. Leave it with them. In all the years I ran Walker Bros, I always got them to do my legal work. They never let me down once.”

The front door opened and there followed the noisy scurrying of little feet. The two little boys rushed up to Grandma and Granddad, as they always did. It was starting to get dark. Joan said, "I must get home. It has been wonderful to talk to you."

As she got up, Ewan came in. She went up to Ewan and said, "You are doing really well. We are thinking of and praying for you all the time. All your teachers were very upset."

"I know," Ewan replied. "Please ask Mr McEwan to thank them for me. I got lots of cards from Caddie-land."

Ewan smiled gently, and added, "Everyone has been so kind to me."

After that, Ewan said, "Come on Ben and Dan, let's go upstairs and get changed out of your school clothes."

The two small boys raced noisily up the stairs to their bedroom, stripping off their school clothes and putting on their home clothes. Ewan tidied up the discarded clothes and stacked them neatly in two piles.

When Ewan got back to the kitchen, Grandma and Granddad were getting ready to leave, but not before Stephen said, "Ewan, I have taken the liberty of talking to the rental agency for your flat and the landlord. Mr and Mrs Aitken know what happened. They would like you to continue renting the flat until their daughter comes back at the end of 2023. They know how well you and Jordan have looked after the place. I have paid Jordan's share of the rent until the lease runs out at the end of December 2023. All you need to do is to keep paying your share of the rent. It is at least one thing less to worry about."

"Thanks, Stephen," said Ewan quietly. He smiled bashfully. "It is. I was worried about how I could afford to pay the whole rent myself."

## Chapter 9

**Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> February to Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2022**

Ewan, who modelled clothes for his grandfather's department store, always looked elegant, even in casual dress. In his well-cut suit and slim-fit shirt, he looked a stunner. When he was in his suit, Ewan always put on a tie. Without it, he was not fully dressed. It made him feel professional. Despite Grandma's hearty lunches, the slim-fit shirt felt decidedly loose, as did his suit. Stephen was in his jeans and a sweater. His jeans were loose as well. He too had not had much of an appetite over the last ten days.

Bridget Carr was the Wills and Probate Executive. She was waiting for Stephen and Ewan and made them welcome. To offer them coffee was a routine. The Walker family was known for its appetite to drink the stuff by the litre.

"The will is straight-forward enough," said Bridget. "Stephen, you will get half of Jordan's estate. He did give specific instructions that it should come to you, not your ex-wife. The other half goes to Ewan."

"That's what Ewan told me," Stephen replied. "But there is a problem. My ex-wife disowned Jordan seven years ago when she dumped me. She very clearly told us both that she wanted us out of her life, and neither of us was ever to contact her again. She had her partner with her in the drawing room of the Compton Parfitt Manor Hotel.

"Jordan's employer had given the police her address after the accident. They went to see her in her fancy nest in North Sussex. She straight-away rang me and gave me a flea in the ear about contacting her. Then she realised that there might well be money due to Jordan's estate from the woman who caused the

accident. She wants at least half of it and has threatened to sue for it. She was going to contact Barford and Partners in the City of London.”

Bridget got out a piece of paper from her file. Stephen and Ewan could see the letterhead *Barford and Partners*. “We got this letter this morning. Your ex has been pretty sharp off the mark, I’m bound to say.”

“What do you think about it?” Stephen asked.

“She will not succeed. Ewan, you were quite right to get the will done by an independent party. You could have done it yourself. You have a legal background. In this case, a DIY will might have been vulnerable to a contest, but you are very aware of conflicts of interest. You did the right thing to do it properly. You even went to the lengths of getting one completely independent witness to sign. Stephen, your ex-wife is not entitled to anything, and I am writing to Barford and Partners to tell them that they are wasting their time and advising them not to proceed. If they do insist on taking it forward, the case will be heard at Buchanan Sheriff Court.”

“The problem as I see it,” said Stephen, “is that Barfords have a reputation for wringing a litre of water out of a dry cloth.”

“Everyone knows about them,” said Bridget. “They might have influence in London, but I can assure you that they have none whatsoever here. Sherriff Jonathan Kimmerghame will see them off in no time. Your ex-wife has no claim whatsoever on Jordan’s estate. If they choose to contest it, I guarantee that they will lose. So much so, we will run the case on a no win, no fee basis. By the time your ex-wife has paid all the legal costs, she will just about have the clothes she stands up in.”

Stephen allowed himself a wry smile at the thought of the mercenary vixen with all her airs and graces reduced to penury.

Would the Bell-Dick, Head of Corporate Banking bail her out this time?

Bridget carried on, "We will be writing back today that we reject any claim from Ms Chetwynd, and that we will contest the case at Buchanan Sheriff Court. However, it will make the case stronger if you two could attend court as witnesses. We will pay your expenses, of course. We will also get the witnesses to Ewan's and Jordan's signatures to attend as well. You must not worry about a thing. The only bearing it would have on you is that the completion of probate will be delayed until after the court hearing."

"At the moment, Jordan and I have saved about ten thousand pounds towards a deposit on a flat," said Ewan.

"I think that Jordan's estate will be rather more than that," Bridget replied. "There will be a six-figure, or even seven-figure pay-out for Jordan from Mrs Barwick-Green's insurers."

"I would rather have the ten thousand and Jordan," said Ewan. His eyes were filling up with tears again. Stephen put his hand over Ewan's shoulders. Bridget got a tissue.

"We've both taken it hard," said Stephen.

"Of course," said Bridget. "I totally understand."

Bridget was appalled by the account of Kathryn Chetwynd's behaviour towards Stephen and his son. It made her determined more than ever to ensure that Ms Chetwynd should lose the case. The pronunciation of the name, *Cheating*, seemed so appropriate.

Stephen remained in Bridget's office in order to discuss his own will. He did not want the mercenary vixen that was his ex to get a penny.

Ewan was now in Mr Yeoman's office. "How are you bearing up at the moment?" Mr Yeoman asked.

"It's hard, to be honest," Ewan replied, "but my professional studies are helping to keep my mind off things."

"Are you ready for next week?"

"I have done a fair bit of revision this week. I still have tomorrow."

"Well let's see how well it has sunk in," said Mr Yeoman.

Andrew Yeoman and Ewan had a conversation in Law. Much of it was probing Ewan's advice on how he would handle one of Mr Yeoman's more complex cases. Ewan's answers were detailed and thorough. Mr Yeoman was staggered at Ewan's depth of knowledge and insight from one that was so young. The discussion made Mr Yeoman take notes, as there were aspects of the case that he had not thought about. He promptly checked them out to find that all were correct.

"Now, Ewan," said Mr Yeoman, "I don't mind admitting that you have taught me a thing or two today. Next week, you go and smash those exams. You have potentially a brilliant legal mind. Will McCullough and I did our studies together. I don't mind saying that we had one or two close scrapes with the exams. Neither of us worked particularly hard, but I can tell you have done the work and more.

"In my previous practice in Stirling, I trained to be a solicitor advocate. My dad was one here. He used to do the legal work for your granddad when he ran Walker Bros. Your aunts continue to use me. I came here to take over from my dad when he retired a couple of years ago. As you know, there aren't many solicitors' practices in Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil. Our bread-and-butter work is property conveyancing. However, I have enough advocacy work to keep me going, if not more. Now this

is where you would come in. I don't have much expertise in EU law or the legal systems in other countries. I have to pass the cases to others, or I have to consult a specialist, which costs me an absolute fortune. You are an excellent linguist, especially with legal German.

"Now I would like you to come and work with us when you have qualified at the end of next year. Once you have about a year's experience, I would like you to train as a solicitor-advocate. I have about fifteen years to go before I retire, and you will be in a position to take the business over from me. What do you think?"

"I would love to take you up on your offer," said Ewan. "I am very keen on using my languages as well as my legal skills. At the moment, I want to come back to Corscadden. It's where I belong. It's easy to get to Edinburgh when I need to use libraries and other facilities."

"I am looking forward to having you. William McCullough will be thrilled to hear it as well. He has worked you hard, but he really believes you have a first-class legal mind. You are one of the best trainees his practice has had for a long time. I know your loss is very raw at the moment, but please take what I have said as a small crumb of comfort."

It was a crumb of comfort for Ewan in his anguish, a chink of light in his darkness. Tonight, he would tell Chris and Gemma about it. Aidy was doing a race back in Edinburgh with the Haries. He was the youngest on the staff team. Tamsin would go out and support him.

Ewan changed out of his suit back into his kilt, thick cashmere jumper, casual shirt, brightly patterned knee-length socks that Jordan had bought for him at Christmas, and his

house-shoes. He switched on his lap-top and added an entry into his PEAT 2 diary. He was meticulous about its maintenance. He would write notes in the shorthand he had learned in Secondary Three. In later years he continued to keep a diary diligently so that he had a detailed record of his work.<sup>10</sup> It gave a detailed account to which he could refer when cases were appealed. He e-mailed a copy of the day's entry to Mr McCullough.

Ewan took his usual position, sitting cross-legged on the settee in the games room. The radio was playing quietly. He looked forward to coming back to Corscadden. Two weeks ago, he was looking forward to buying a flat with Jordan in Central Edinburgh. It was going to be expensive, and they had already made a start on saving for the deposit. They would have got a mortgage, the repayments for which would have been a lot, but less than their rent. They had fantasised about having a flat in the New Town, but one look at the property listings put them off the idea pretty quickly.

Now, Edinburgh's charm had paled somewhat. He had fallen out of love with it. He felt safe in Corscadden, in the lovely home in which he had lived from the time he was born. It wrapped itself around him like cotton wool, which he needed. Brewster House was hard to heat, but in his kilt and cashmere sweater, he was warm. The bits of Scottish Law drifted about his head like bumblebees visiting lavender in the garden on a warm June day.

Maybe he would rediscover Edinburgh as the exciting place it once was, once time had had a chance to heal his wounds.

---

<sup>10</sup> Ewan kept the diary for all the legal work he ever did. It recorded the background and references for all his casework. He used it regularly as part of his preparations for his work as a judge, and as Advocate General in Scotland. Ewan continued with his legal work well into his late nineties, maintaining his records with his usual diligence. He was still working on legal matters when he passed away. His archive became an authoritative source for the Law Society of Scotland.

After an hour and a half, the front door opened, and Grandma and Granddad were there. Grandma made him go up to the bathroom to see if he had put on weight. His weight remained stubbornly at 65 kg. Ewan was still scrawny.

Stephen had come back. He was catching the four o'clock train back to Keillor. Joby and Laura had come back early from work. Again, a hearty lunch was prepared with lovely hot soup, French bread, butter, and cheese. It made Ewan feel safe. He needed it.

After lunch, Joby took Stephen down to the station. Stephen felt a lot better. He had been well looked after, and Charles had told him how he was a much-loved part of the family. Ewan retreated to the games room, curling up round his textbooks. Charles, Muriel, and Laura were in the garden room enjoying their coffee.

"Thanks for looking after Ewan," said Laura.

"It has been a pleasure," replied Charles. "He needs a lot of tender loving care."

"And feeding up," said Muriel. "He is so skinny at the moment."

"His normal weight is 67 kilograms," Laura said. "That is underweight for a man of 1.9 metres, but you know how he eats like a horse. Chris and Aidy are just the same."

"Joby was just the same," said Muriel. "I totally sympathise. That's where they get it from. Eejay has lost weight though, at least two kilos."

"Little wonder, with what he's been through," said Laura.

"He is very intelligent, much more than me," said Charles. "He knew more at fifteen than I will ever know. But he is still so very young, and so vulnerable at the moment."

“Ewan said to me that he feels so safe at home. We will be seeing a lot more of him in the next few months,” said Muriel. “A worse thing could not have happened to such a gentle and lovely young man.”

Friday was very much a repeat of the safe routine that Ewan was working out for himself. He took the twins to school and picked them up at the end of the day. He loved having them hold his hand and skip alongside him excitedly. They looked so like Chris with their long blond hair. Their characters were developing as well. Both were sensitive to others. They laughed a lot. They could be noisy. They were developing the common sense that was the hallmark of their older brother. Chris was nearly twenty-six, going on thirty-five.

After getting back from taking the twins to school, Ewan would curl up in the games room to do his revision. About midday Grandma and Granddad would come in to make them a hearty lunch. He would open up to Grandma and Granddad about how he felt. His emotions were still fragile. They seemed to have the right word that would soothe and comfort their twenty-three-year-old grandson, who was so young and vulnerable. After lunch there was more revision before Ewan went down to the school to collect Benjamin and Daniel.

Once back home he would occupy himself by getting the boys into their ‘at-home’ clothes, putting their school clothes neatly away. Ewan was very neat and tidy himself. Ewan would take the boys down to the kitchen and get them to do their homework. Like all small children, it could be a challenge to get them going, but they would get it done in the end.

By this time, Laura and Joby were home and took the twins off Ewan’s hands. Ewan would do some work on the laptop, responding to e-mails from work. Christian would come

in from work at about six o'clock. Ewan and Christian would make the family dinner, while Laura and Joby would play with the twins. There was a lot of laughter. After dinner, Ewan and Christian would read to their little brothers, before bathing them and putting them in their sports kit that had taken over from jim-jams.

Half an hour's cuddle from Mummy and Daddy would ensure that the little boys were ready for sleepy time. After the twins were in bed, Chris would snuggle up to Mum and Dad. He was nearly twenty-five and a half, but having Mum and Dad meant everything to him. Ewan would snuggle up to his "new" mum. She, too, was a great comfort to him.

It was now Sunday, and Ewan had to go back to Edinburgh. Gemma had come up on Saturday and was going back first thing on Monday morning. Ewan had thought of doing that himself but wisely decided that he should get a good night's rest in his flat before going to Chambers Street for the exams. (These were normally held in the Law Society's Offices at Morrison Street, but much of the building was being refurbished, so they hired examination halls from Edinburgh University.)

When Ewan got back to his flat at 21, Deanhaugh Terrace, it was cold and dark. There was a pile of post on the kitchen table. Aidy had been in to pick it up. Most consisted of sympathy cards. Ewan had thought about putting them around the living room but decided against. Instead, he found a plastic filing box and put them in there. He would keep them. It may have seemed mawkish, but he wanted reminders of Jordan.

Ewan unpacked his rucksack, putting his dirty laundry into the basket in the bedroom. He had brought some food from Brewster House to cook when he got in. It was all part of the routine that kept him steady. This night, he was going to be in

the flat on his own. He just had to be a big boy and get on with it. The last thing he felt was a big boy.

After he had had his dinner, Ewan washed up, making sure that the kitchen was tidy for the next morning. He and Jordan disliked mess. The state of the kitchens in some student flats was stomach-turning.

The flat was starting to get warm, but Ewan appreciated his short kilt and cashmere sweater as he nestled on the settee with a couple of soft toys. He turned on the Hi-Fi and listened to *Classic FM*. After a while, he picked up a book of Celtic Poetry and went through to the bathroom. When he returned to the living room, a gentle and calming voice came unbidden and said, "I am here. I will sit next to you."

Ewan had come through that night on his own. He had slept surrounded by the menagerie of soft toys that he and Jordan had in their bed. As always, Ewan did his breakfast before having a shave and a shower. The professional exams were serious, so he dressed appropriately before taking himself and the allowed books to Chambers Street. He had done many of his university exams there. There were a good number of nervous people waiting outside in the cold. Ewan was among them. It was no different to before. He was always suspicious of those who claimed that they knew it all. He had been diligent with his revision. The points of Scottish Law flitted about his head like butterflies swarming about the Buddleia bushes in the garden at Brewster House. He hoped he could catch the relevant ones for the questions.

Now they were in the examination hall. Ewan had all the right equipment. His mobile was deposited with the front desk. He had seen his fellow trainees from Johnston, MacLean, and Partners. He was glad to have missed Mr McCullough's running

through the mocks. They had not finished until nearly half-past seven. If Mr McCullough had done that at Strathcadden Academy, the Caddies would have rioted. Mr McCullough was a good lawyer, but not an inspirational teacher.

The invigilator called out, “Ladies and Gentlemen, you are now under full examination conditions... You have three hours to do this paper... You may start now.”

At least Ewan had done better than a number of candidates who had walked out early, for he had just finished checking his work when the invigilator told the candidates to stop writing. Three hours down – twenty-one to go. It was going to be more intense than the mocks, as these were the proper professional examinations – potential career makers or breakers.

Ewan caught up with his fellow trainees, and they had lunch in a vegetarian café not far from their office. None of them had walked out early. They agreed that there should be no post-mortems after any of the exams. It was an unfortunate expression, as one had been carried out on Jordan, who was still filed away in that repulsive stainless steel filing cabinet. Ewan felt rather withdrawn. Although good manners made him look interested, the chatter passed over him.

The second course of Ewan’s diet of examination went down with no ill effects, although it was clear that it had given several other candidates severe indigestion. It was the case for the following six courses. By the last course of the diet of examination, everyone including Ewan was pogged<sup>11</sup>.

Ewan had kept himself together surprisingly well. As he went back to his flat, he came down off his adrenaline high, which, along with caffeine, had sustained him over the last four

---

<sup>11</sup> A Yorkshire word for *replete*. It was picked up by pupils from Strathcadden Academy after its use by Mr Mitchell, the headmaster of the school who came from the Yorkshire town of Bradford.

days. He had tried to ring the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary with no success. It occurred to Ewan that the DMI regarded the death of a patient as a negative outcome, an unacceptable embarrassment. Patients who died on its wards were to be refused further treatment and never talked about again (in polite company, of course). It reminded him of the schools in England that removed weak pupils from public examinations to maintain their standing in league tables. Teachers of such pupils would be aggressively called to account by senior management.

That they had given houseroom to a young man who had died in the operating theatre was totally beyond the pale.

When Ewan got up to his flat, a white envelope had dropped onto the mat. Before looking at it, Ewan got changed as usual, before picking up the envelope

Ewan sliced the envelope open with a knife. He always did it like that at work. Using a knife was more professional; it was vulgar to rip the envelope apart. He read the contents:

*Dear Mr Walker*

*We enclose the autopsy report on the late Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melbush, date of birth 23/01/1997.*

*Our records show that you have not registered the death. Failure to register a death is an offence under the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953, with a maximum penalty of £200.*

*You will need to make an appointment with the Registration Office at City Chambers, The Quadrangle, 253 High Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1YP.*

*You need to get in contact with funeral directors as soon as possible as the body is taking up valuable space in the mortuary, which is needed for other patients. If the body is not removed within two weeks, it will be cremated by the City Council at your expense.*

*There are some personal effects of the deceased. These should be collected by reporting to reception. You will need to bring two pieces of identification. (Examples include a driving licence and a utility bill. Further acceptable identification examples are listed on the reverse of this letter.) Please quote reference 2D7 JP 45 S. If these are not claimed within 15 working days, they will be disposed of.*

*Yours faithfully,*

*The Registration Team*

Ewan looked at the autopsy report. There were many fractures to Jordan's ribs, limbs, and pelvis. There was serious internal bleeding due to a ruptured spleen, as a result of the steering wheel lock striking his back. Jordan had been smashed to pieces.

Ewan tried hard to keep it together and failed completely.

Ewan felt so lonely in the flat. He wanted someone to talk to. Stephen would be feeling the same if he had received that letter. There seemed not a milligram of compassion. It was like a letter from the council reminding a householder that it was an offence to leave a wheelie-bin out on the street after the refuse had been collected. Indeed, they seemed to regard Jordan as so much refuse.

The tears flowed. Ewan was glad that all the trainees at Johnston, MacLean, and Partners had been given the day off on Friday. The others would be relaxing at home – probably sleeping. He wanted to do the same. He wanted to sleep the whole of Friday, ignoring the world entirely in the hope it would get fed up with him and go away.

The tears seemed to flow for ages, but it was really no more than ten minutes. Ewan picked up the phone and spoke to Stephen. As he did so, he scanned in the letter from the DMI

and e-mailed it. He was right. Stephen was as upset as he was and shared the same thoughts.

Much as Ewan wanted Friday to go away, he had to make a journey to the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary. Little Holland was in the former coal-mining area some ten kilometres to the southeast of the city. The bus took ages as it went down Dalkeith Road. It turned left onto Little Holland Loan. It was no longer a rural lane, let alone a path to a field. Instead, it went through a housing scheme of depressing nineteen sixties and seventies brutalism. The Little Holland (The...ae...Hollen) Estate was one of several that ringed the city. Edinburgh had little inner-city decay, but plenty in the outer city. When the city council had redeveloped the nineteen twenties schemes of Craigmillar and Niddrie, many of the residents were rehoused in Little Holland.

Presently the bus turned left into Kerr Avenue and stopped outside the DMI. The place looked so depressing. It was no wonder that Ewan had run so fast along Kerr Avenue and Little Holland Loan on that cheerless Sunday evening less than a fortnight ago. Ewan wondered if he had lost more weight. His skinny tight-fit jeans were loose-fit. What would Grandma say when she weighed him tomorrow?

No wonder Ewan had run from the place. Little Holland was one of the most depressing places he had ever set eyes on. It was not quite as bad as parts of Carlsborough in the unloved and unlovely English County of Sowerland, but not much better. He had only seen the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary once, and that was at night. It certainly looked better at night. In the dull and grey daylight of a mid-February Friday, the hospital's presence was revealed by the fact it was a different shade of grey. There was an eight-floor tower surrounded by low-rise buildings of unadulterated nineteen-sixties ugliness.

The inside of the hospital could not be described as homely. Its walls were painted in institutional magnolia, with grey-green tiled floors. Somebody had made the effort in the past by screwing framed prints to the walls. These had faded to a faint monochrome. The paint was peeling in places; the roof had been troublesome from the start. The floors no longer gleamed. The in-house cleaners had been replaced by a private contractor who charged a fortune for a minimal service. While the middle of the corridors looked clean enough, the sides had layers of fluff and dust that had accumulated between the deep cleans.

There was no shortage of signposts to the various departments that had a room numbering system that was far from intuitive. It was meaningful to an administrator, however, but not at all helpful to patients and their visitors.

The Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary was clearly the poor relation to its newer neighbour, the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

Ewan was deposited near the front door, so finding reception was relatively easy. The receptionist was nearly as grumpy as the bus driver. She was brusque in her manner and curt in her speech, the bulk of which was accent. “Where’s your identification?”

Ewan got his driving licence out along with the council tax bill for the flat.

“Name?”

“Ewan Walker.”

“Nah! Your full name, sonny, and your date of birth.”

“Ewan James Samuel Walker. 27<sup>th</sup> February 1998.”

“Reference number? The reference number on the letter.”

“It’s here,” said Ewan.

“Read it out and will ye no hurry up?”

“2D 7JP 45S”

“Gae tae Room ED023.”

“Where’s that.”

“Dinnae ken, and dinnae care.”

Ewan was a highly intelligent young man, but even he was soon lost. If he asked someone, they either replied in more accent than speech, or came out in a series of grunts. Maybe they were mocking his male Morningside<sup>12</sup> voice.

Finally, a porter grumpily agreed to take him down to Room ED023. It was a waiting room with hard plastic chairs and a hatch through to an office. A man came to the hatch and demanded, “Yer letter.”

Ewan handed it to him. Without a word, the man disappeared. Two other men seemed to be sniggering in the background. He could not tell whether they were sniggering at him, or they were having some kind of private joke. Ewan did not want them to share it. The man came back.

“Yer Walker fae Melhuish, aren’t ye? How auld are ye, sonny?”

“Twenty-three. I have got my driving licence,” Ewan replied, getting it out.

“What’s that? Yer moped licence? Ye dinnae luik more than seventeen. Ye have to be eighteen to pick up the effects.”

---

<sup>12</sup> Morningside is a very desirable suburb of Edinburgh, about 4 km to the south-west of the city centre. Although clearly Scottish, the accent is characterised by its refined and trilling tones. It is generally more associated with women, but men use it as well. With some men, it can sound effeminate. As Ewan Walker was somewhat effeminate as a young man, a male Morningside accent fitted. He retained it throughout his life.

Somehow Ewan managed to persuade the man that he was over eighteen. It was probably because the man wanted him out of the way so he could get back to his coffee and his tabloid newspaper.

The memorabilia of Jordan's twenty-five-year life were contained in a plastic A4 envelope. Ewan decided not to open it there and then. He knew he would cry. People would think he was a loony that had flipped and bring him back to this damned place (there was a psychiatric department in the hospital). He wanted to be in private, and his flat was certainly private.

Although he had been tempted to lay trails of rice behind him as he searched his way about this dismal place, he had resisted the temptation for the simple reason that he did not have any bags of rice. Somehow, he managed to find his way to the front door. As he reached the bus stop, the driver closed the doors and the bus to the City Centre pulled away. Ewan had another twenty minutes to wait before the next one.

Ewan was pleased when the next bus arrived. A number of scary people went past on the pavement, shouting and swearing. In one or two cases, Ewan could not decipher what they were saying. They might as well have spoken in a very foreign language, certainly not one that he, as a skilled linguist, could recognise. Not that he wanted to; they all sounded so hostile. One of these days he would be representing them in a solemn procedure in the Sheriff Court. Perhaps he should go on a language course to translate Outer Edinburgh to English. That could wait. He couldn't wait to get back to the flat.

Eventually he did. Ewan cut the plastic envelope carefully. Neatly cut envelopes were very useful for holding documents together. He removed the items. There was Jordan's mobile. It was wrecked. There were Jordan's car keys, not that they would ever be any use. There were his house keys for the

flat and Clematis Cottage. There was his wallet with one hundred pounds in it. Jordan's bank card was there as well. For all their character defects, at least those revolting men at the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary were not thieves. There was Jordan's driving licence and a small photo of Ewan. Jordan's rainbow bracelet was there. There was the silver necklace with *Ewan to Jordan* engraved on it. It was identical to the one that Ewan was wearing. They had bought them in July 2015 when they decided to commit the rest their lives to each other. Jordan was eighteen, and Ewan was seventeen. They were teenage sweethearts then as they had been until less than a fortnight ago.

An envelope containing a card dropped from the plastic envelope. *Eejay* was written in Jordan's neat handwriting. Ewan sliced the envelope open with the knife. Inside it said:

*My Darling Eejay*

*I have been missing you this week. Being away from you has made me want to be next to you, to fondle and caress you. I love you more and more each day. I am so grateful for the last nine years that I have had you and you have had me. I am so looking forward to your birthday when we are in France. I so want to hold you for the rest of our lives. You are, without doubt, the prettiest man I have ever set eyes on. I get excited as I think of you. When I go to bed, I think of you with me, cuddling and loving.*

*My dearest Eejay, I am head-over-heels in love, my sweetie.*

*Love*

*Jordie.*

Ewan went into the bedroom and burst into tears. Would this nightmare ever end? Jordan had written the card less than a fortnight ago. Now all that was left of Ewan's teenage sweetheart was contained in a polythene envelope, a hospital letter, and a report from a pathologist to whom Jordan was just another one

of hundreds of cases he saw every year. If he never saw the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary again, it would be too soon.

At least the Registration Office didn't require a long bus ride to the outer ring of decay. Ewan could walk it in about twenty minutes. His appointment was soon. As Ewan hated being late, he decided to go at once. He would have his coffee and lunch as soon as he got back. He hoped that people wouldn't notice that he had been crying. The notion that big boys don't cry was not only utter bollocks; it was utterly cruel.

An hour later, Ewan was back in the flat. Now he had several copies of something that he had never conceived of – Jordan's death certificate. He put everything together into his rucksack. It would all go home with him to Brewster House, where he would store all his precious memories of Jordan in a file box.

The doorbell rang. It was Aidy and Tamsin. They were going home to Brewster House with him. That day, Chris had come down to Edinburgh to visit suppliers to see what new lines they had that would sell well at Walker Bros. Therefore, it would be a good opportunity for Chris to stay in Edinburgh with Gemma for the weekend.

An hour later, Tamsin and Aidan were cuddled together on the train. Ewan sat opposite and tried to relax. There was something intensely appealing about his brother and his girlfriend cuddled together. Aidy was twenty-five, while Tamsin was twenty-one, but both looked rather younger. They needed the age-cards. Aidan felt that being asked for his proof-of-age card rather undermined him as far as his students were concerned. The same was the case for his father, and it didn't stop until Joby was twenty-eight. In other words, they were cute.

Jordan was cute as well, but there was nothing at all cute about what had happened to him as the result of the actions of a

society airhead to whom the laws of motoring applied just to the little people. Ewan stopped going down that track if one could pardon the pun. Otherwise, he feared he would make a public display of himself. He had become self-conscious because he could end up bursting into tears at the drop of a hat. Some people might think he had lost it. Instead, Ewan closed his eyes. The gentle rocking motion of the electric train lulled him to sleep as it sped across Fife, Perthshire, and into Buchananshire. He did not wake up until Aidy prodded him as the train clattered across Coruscadden South Junction.

Grandma and Laura weighed Ewan up in the bathroom the next morning. This was something that Ewan did not want the whole world knowing about. It was not that he didn't trust Muriel and Laura. Nor did he find it humiliating to undress in front of his stepmother and grandmother, any more than he would in front of a doctor. They were interested in one thing only – his health. They did not care one jot that as far as his kilt was concerned, Ewan was a true Scotsman. But if someone nosy found out, they would laugh at him. The last thing that Ewan needed at the moment was anyone laughing at him.

He was still sixty-five kilos. It would certainly take some time to get his weight back to sixty-seven.

Stephen Melhuish arrived at Brewster House late on Saturday morning. Ewan passed all the effects from the polythene envelope to Jordan's father, including the death certificates. Ewan had kept several of these depressing documents back at the flat in case he needed them. Stephen was staying for a few days to help to organise the funeral. Mr Hewitt was coming on Monday.

In the early afternoon, Aidan and Ewan went out for a run up to the top of Corr Hill. Normally Ewan would have taken

it in his stride, but today he felt as if he were carrying an extra twenty kilos. He had not run for several days and his fitness was definitely suffering. His heart was not in it either. Instead it was threatening to leap out of his chest. Dad would have told him he sounded like an old 4F. Aidy was well ahead. At the top of Corr Wood, Aidy turned back to come down to his little brother. Ewan was in tears again. Aidan knew better than to push him; Ewan was simply not in the state to do an intense run.

Compared with the cold outside, Brewster House was tropical. Aidan and Ewan showered in the wet-room next to the utility room. Passing through the kitchen wrapped only in a towel, it was clear how skinny Ewan had become. His ribs were prominent.

Grandma and Grandad were cooking with Dad and Laura helping. The Twins were playing noisily in the games room. Their seventh birthday was going to be Monday 21<sup>st</sup> February, and their party was going to be the day before. Everyone was looking forward to it. Lots of noisy children would fill the house with joy and laughter. That was what Brewster House was for. Like Aidan and Christian, Ewan loved children. It would take his mind off the hole that had been so cruelly punched in his life.

The next day, Aidan and Tamsin were going over to Maunder to have lunch with Tamsin's parents. It was natural that Ewan should be invited as well. Ewan asked if he could drive while Aidan held his hand, metaphorically of course. Since Jordan had been killed in a motor accident, it was entirely possible that the shock could scare Ewan from ever driving again. If he could cope with the busy A825 road, he would start to feel confident again.

Aidan, Ewan, and Christian still used Mary's old Ford Fiesta, which was now eleven years old. It was stored in the garage and was covered with a fine patina of wood dust from

their father's activities with his big boy's toys which continued to make a large amount of noise and use lots of electricity.

Ewan's driving had not changed. Like his brothers, he was a steady and careful driver who always kept within the speed limit. The busy A825 road did not spook him. Presently they had arrived at Tamsin's house.

David and Ann Heady had produced a wonderful lunch. Tamsin was on fine form. Her knowledge of music was unsurpassed. It was her parents, however, who did an impromptu folk music session, and Ewan joined in with a guitar. He enjoyed playing music with others, but had not done much since his days with a boy-band from Strathcadden Academy that had played at the Corscadden Festival. They had had a big following among teen girls. It was a shame for the girls that all those gorgeous boys were openly gay.

Jordan had latterly played guitar in the band.

David and Ann Heady had heard about the accident, and Ewan appreciated their kindness. He succeeded in holding it all together, although inside he was crying out with pain. Although it had been only two weeks from the accident, it seemed like two years ago.

## Chapter 10

**Monday 7<sup>th</sup> February to Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2022**

Ewan was back at work as usual on Monday. He was busy. He liked it that way; it kept his mind away from the accident. At lunchtime, he rang home to find out how the arrangements for the funeral were going. The funeral would be delayed because Celia Barwick-Green's defence team were asking for a second post-mortem. Jordan would be spending more time in that stainless steel filing cabinet. Ewan also received a call from Police Scotland to tell him that a Victim Information and Advice Officer (VIA) would call on him that evening at about six o'clock.

When Ewan got home to his flat, he continued his routine, changing out of his suit and work shirt, and into his sports kit that he would often wear in the evening. As Jordan's feet were the same size as his, this evening he would wear Jordan's socks and jumper as it was cool in the flat. It was a very trivial action, but it reminded him of how very close he was to Jordan.

At six o'clock prompt, the doorbell rang, and the VIA came in. Ewan may have been intensely distressed, but he never forgot his manners and sociability. He offered Anna Bates a cup of tea with biscuits before they went through to the living room.

"First thing I want to say is how sorry we are concerning your loss," said PC Bates. "Which do you prefer, Mr Walker or Ewan?"

"Ewan."

First of all, she had to fill a form in... Ewan James Samuel Walker... Date of Birth - 27<sup>th</sup> February 1998... Age - 23... Occupation – Trainee Solicitor. Loved one – Sebastian

Jordan Stephen Melhuish – Date of Birth 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1997...  
Age 25... Occupation – Technical and Industrial Linguist...

“So, what was your relationship with Jordan?”

“We were more than just boyfriends. We had been together since I was fourteen. We were going to get engaged in France on the 26<sup>th</sup> February. That is my twenty fourth birthday. So, he was my fiancé. We were going to get married when I qualify as a solicitor. We were going to buy a flat together. He was much more than a boyfriend. He was my soulmate.”

“My job is to tell you about how the investigation into Jordan’s accident is going. At the moment we have conducted the preliminary report into the accident. It has gone to the Procurator Fiscal. Would you like me to go through the facts?”

“I suppose I ought to know.”

“On Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022...”

PC Bates went through the sequence of events that had been reported to Police Scotland by several witnesses. A Range Rover SV Autobiography personalised registration CEL... had been driven aggressively for a considerable period of time. An on-board security tracker had been installed on purchase of the car. By a total coincidence, the driver had activated the tracker by accidentally pressing the correct combination of buttons on the sat nav. The tracker had been monitored in the background, giving the position of the car to the nearest three metres. The data had been analysed and interpreted as showing an aggressive driving manner from the time the car had left the hotel. The aggressive driving included several serious speeding offences. Dash-cam footage from several vehicles was consistent with these observations. The facts were corroborated by at least ten witness statements.

Measurements of tyre marks indicated that the big car had taken a very sharp right turn at a speed of at least twenty metres a second. The Range Rover had started to roll. It had collided with a stationary Mazda 3, registration KP 20 ... at an angle to the front of the Mazda, shearing the engine from its mounts, and destroying the front of the car. The Mazda ended up at an angle of fifty degrees to the direction of travel. The Range Rover had rebounded back into the main road. Therefore, the Range Rover had struck the silver Volkswagen Polo, registration SM 16 ... from the right forcing the Polo back at a speed of fifteen metres a second. A Ford S-Max, registration YJ 19... struck the wrecked Volkswagen at a speed of twenty metres a second, crushing the passenger compartment to about a third of its original length. The accident had caused fatal injuries to Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish, aged 25.

PC Bates discussed the junction between the A729 main road and Lennerton Lane, outside the village of Tubberbutts.

“It’s entirely up to you, of course, but many people do find they need to visit the site where their loved one has died,” said PC Bates. “If you do decide to go, you will need to park on the main road. There is a lay-by 150 metres before the junction. Don’t park on the junction itself. The junction is on a bend, so parking would be dangerous.”

PC Bates showed Ewan the site on Google Maps. She mentioned that a female passenger in the Ford S-Max had received serious injuries from which she had since died. She mentioned that the driver of the Range Rover was under investigation for a number of very serious charges and that she was on police bail. They could not discuss the details of the charges, as the matter was in the hands of the Procurator Fiscal. Although it was a source of irritation to Ewan, he had to accept it so that a fair trial was not prejudiced, and that she was innocent

until proven guilty beyond all reasonable doubt. He was a trainee solicitor.

Ewan asked about Jordan's possessions that were in the car.

"We have returned them to his father, Stephen Richard Melhuish of Clematis Cottage, Selkirk Road, Keillor. Jordan was also carrying some boxes and property belonging to Baxter Ward Associates. We have returned these to Baxter Ward. We know that a couple of boxes caused Jordan some injury. He also suffered injury from a steering wheel lock. The pathologist believes that it caused the fatal internal bleeding.

"We did find a donor card in his wallet. I can confirm that several of his organs were transferred to the Royal Infirmary for transplant."

"He had a lot of fractures," said Ewan.

"True," said PC Bates, "but they can work miracles with fractures."

Ewan thought about Jordan being welded and bolted back together. He said, "I wish they could work a miracle to bring my Jordan back. He died on his birthday. It would be my best birthday present ever to have him back."

PC Bates held Ewan, as he had started to cry again. He may have been twenty-three but looked and seemed like a seventeen-year-old, a vulnerable and confused boy. What a bloody awful birthday present for Jordan. The funeral would be around the twenty seventh. What a bloody awful way for Ewan to spend his twenty-fourth birthday. The laddie had been given a larger than average helping of shit.

PC Bates discussed with Ewan about the things he needed to do. Ewan knew all about it. He was well on the way to

qualification as a solicitor and had advised clients about what to do when a loved one died. Now his own loved one had died; he had not done a great deal in winding up Jordan's affairs.

There were perfectly good explanations for this. Ewan had been in denial, expecting Jordan to come through the door, or some kind of miracle that would have brought Jordan back to him. Ewan had tried feebly to bargain. He was going to get compensation, but he would have given every penny of it to get Jordan back. He was thunderously angry with that society airhead that had driven that huge car into Jordan and smashed him to pieces. On the other hand, she was entitled to a fair trial without prejudice, and she was innocent until proven guilty beyond all reasonable doubt. Even if she spent the rest of her natural in the slammer, it would not bring Jordan back.

When Ewan was younger, he would go into fight mode, before flight. At school this had got him into one or two scrapes with senior members of staff including the headmaster. The last time was when he was sixteen and had tried to have a stag-rut with Mr Farjeon. It was as one-sided as a deer calf taking on a full-grown stag. Now he had turned his anger on himself. Although logically Jordan's accident was nothing whatever to do with him, Ewan felt he should have done something to stop it. If only he had kept Jordan on the phone a few more seconds, that bloody car would have gone over the road into the wall. Jordan would have easily pulled up. He would have gone over to help. He would have rung up to say that he would have been a bit late. He would have got home. They would have done their run. Ewan would have done Jordan's birthday dinner. Now it seemed that the colour control was turned down, almost to the point it was in greyscale. He had become somewhat withdrawn and rather tearful. Ewan recognised he was depressed but was not

sure how to deal with it. He certainly didn't want to go onto antidepressants for the rest of his natural.

Besides, getting through to the GP practice with which he and Jordan were registered was an ordeal by telephone. The practice seemed to regard the seeing of patients as something of a chore. There was a computer-generated message when the telephone was answered, which seemed to go on for ever, but could be summarised as "Go to the hospital. We don't want to see you, so bugger off?". After that one could wait for an hour listening to computer-generated "music" of unbelievable monotony that was looped repetitively, before being assured that one was number 30 in the queue. Finally, one was spoken to by a human being, a grumpy receptionist who seemed to detest her job.

Ewan knew that he would have to accept what had happened. He had to when Mum died. Jordan had helped him no end with that process. Jordan had been through the same process when his mother rejected him, so he understood how he felt. Ewan had become so close to his boyfriend in those days, so much so that they had decided to commit their lives to each other just after they had left Strathcadden Academy. Ewan had a very close family to help him through things; he needed all the help he could get.

The week continued in a regular pattern which helped Ewan to keep on as even a keel as possible. His fitness seemed to have suffered a bit. Fortunately, he had Inverleith Park on his doorstep, so he decided to make it part of his evening routine to go out running when he got home from work. Half an hour was sufficient to start with. He and Christian would go out at weekends.

Ewan continued to keep up his other home routines. He kept his flat neat and tidy, including the hoovering, and cleaning the kitchen and the bathroom. Twice a week he did his own ironing. A properly pressed shirt was part of looking professional. Having a nice flat was as well. He did not take piles of washing home for others to do. His step-mum had enough on her plate with Ewan's father (forty-nine years old, going on seventeen and a half) and their active twin sons.

Ewan would have his evening meal at about half-past eight, after which he would relax and read a book for twenty minutes. He would put on his computer to read his e-mails and do his household accounts. He was meticulous about keeping track with his money. He would write up his work diary. That he could do shorthand was very useful. There were times when he would look through the hundreds of pictures of him and Jordan that made a visual diary of their lives together over the previous nine years. At the age of fourteen, he was a tall and gawky youth, emphasised by his slightly short kilt. Jordan was fifteen, and outstandingly good looking. There were pictures of when they went walking together, or played music, or scrambled on the climbing wall. There were a few which were in more dubious taste. Ewan would look back at the pictures with nostalgic affection.

When Ewan got back to Brewster House that weekend, he found out that the date for the funeral had now been set for Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> February. The Reverend Alex Witton had written the service. It reflected Ewan's desire that it should give comfort and hope to all who came, regardless of whether they identified with Christianity or not. He had not known that Aidan had contacted Peter Struther at Strathcadden Academy and that the choir was going to sing *Be still my soul, the lord is on your side* in the original German. The English version was printed out on the

sheet. The congregation were to sing *Brother, Sister, let me serve you*. Tamsin Heady and a friend of hers from the Reid School of Music, Lisa Bronton, were performing *Bring Him Home* on piano and cello. Aidan was going to play a Celtic Lament, Jay Ungar's *Ashokan Farewell*, and finish off with *Band of Brothers*.

Ewan was touched with what had been suggested. He was going to contribute a poem about his and Jordan's journey over the last nine years.

Saturday afternoon saw Brewster House full of lots of small boys and some girls. Chris had come home early from work, and Aidy had caught the train from Edinburgh that morning. Aidy, Chris, and Eejay really liked children. The party, which was noisy, distracted Ewan from his inner pain. Fortunately, it was a rare fine day and not that cold either. The brothers organised kick about footy games on the lawn. The trampoline was in great demand. Aidy remembered how he and Eejay used to spend hours bouncing up and down on the thing. Mum and Dad did so when they thought that their sons were not looking. Dad and Laura did the same.

The party came and went, leaving Brewster House a tip. Everyone, including the Twins mucked in to clear it up. Soon the house was ship-shape and Bristol fashion. The Twins went upstairs noisily and excitedly to play with their presents.

Later Ewan was talking about his meeting with the VIA officer. He said, "Lots of people visit the accident site. I would like to do that myself, to be with Jordan."

"Are you sure that it's a wise thing to do, Eejay?" Laura asked. "It could make you even more upset."

“I have asked myself that, Mum,” said Ewan. “I know what you mean. But I want to be there to see where our ways were so torn apart.”

“Well, you have clearly thought it through,” said Laura. “How are you going to get there?”

“I was going to take the Fiesta,” Ewan replied. “I need to drive so I don’t lose my mojo with a car.”

“Who will go with you? Aidy and Tamsin are going back home early tomorrow, and Chris is working tomorrow.”

“I’ll go,” said Joby. “The twins are going to Aunt Imm and Uncle Alex tomorrow for the day. It’s the least I can do for you Eejay. I’ll drop you off at your flat afterwards.”

Joby rang Stephen to see if he wanted to be picked up, but he had already visited the site.

It was a long drive to the Borders. Keillor was an hour on the train, but nearly three hours by road. Then there was a long drive across country to Bircher Brae where they turned right onto the A729. The lay-by north of Tubberbutts was just as the VIA officer said, 150 metres from the junction with Lennerton Lane. Ewan parked the car. Joby got out the bunch of flowers that they had bought in Keillor. A Police Scotland sign still stood next to the road which bore the legend, *Serious accident occurred here, 23<sup>rd</sup> January. Can you help?*

The spot where Jordan had come to grief was obvious. A large section of a wall bordering a garden had been demolished. There were tyre marks and scrapes of teal paint where the Range Rover had started to roll. Bricks still lay at the hole in the wall. There were clear silver scrape marks. The grass verge had been torn up and there were still scraps of plastic, many of which were silver. Part of a headlight was there as well. The distinctive VW

logo was clearly visible. In the garden was the badge from the back of the car.

Ewan and his father stood by the verge. The road was not that busy; the temporary traffic lights north of Tubberbutts village had been removed. Ewan was crying. Joby put his arm over his son's shoulder. Ewan laid the flowers next to the other flowers that had been laid.

A man appeared from the house. "Can I help you?" he asked in a manner that suggested that it was the last thing that he wanted to do and that he was heartily fed up with people staring at the hole in his wall. He had made a claim to have the wall repaired but had as yet heard nothing. Then he noticed that Ewan was visibly upset. Ewan picked up the flowers to show to the house-owner.

"We are making a visit," Joby replied. "My son lost somebody very close and important here."

"I am sorry I sounded a bit brusque," the man replied. "I have had no end of people standing and gawping. Come on in."

Matt Walters introduced himself to Joby and Ewan. He made some coffee. "Who was it you lost here, Ewan?" he asked.

"Jordan Melhuish. He was driving the silver Volkswagen Polo," Ewan replied. "The accident happened on his birthday."

"Oh, God!" said Matt. "I have never seen anything like it. I'll tell you what I saw..."

Matt described how he had seen the Range Rover coming up past the lay-by on the wrong side of the road, well above the speed limit. Horns were blaring. He saw the indicator go on. He thought that the car would never make the turn, especially as there was a car waiting to turn right. It seemed to be in slow motion as the Range Rover tore into the car on the junction

before rolling over. Immediately after, there were three more loud bangs. He rang the police immediately.

“It was a mess. Your friend’s car was pushed through the wall into the garden and buried. They had to get people out of the third car. They had to take the wall apart as well, before they could get at your friend. He was in a bad way. They got the air ambulance out. Later I found out that he had passed away in the chopper.”

“Jordan was more than just a friend. I have known him since I was in Secondary Three. I was thirteen when he first came. He was a year older than me. He had come from England. They put him in Secondary Three because he was struggling with the Secondary Four work. They often did that with pupils who came from England. He and I became best pals. It went on from that... We were both gay... We didn’t do anything revolting. We just loved each other, just like you love your wife...”

Matt smiled. His wife could be a bit of a handful at times.

Ewan continued, “We went to university together. We shared a flat in Edinburgh. I’m a trainee solicitor, while Jordan was an industrial and technical linguist. We were getting engaged in France next Saturday, which is the day before my twenty-fourth birthday. Jordan’s accident happened on his twenty-fifth birthday.”

“That is so terrible,” said Matt.

“It has hit Ewan really hard,” said Joby. “Eight years ago, my first wife died suddenly, and that hit Ewan really hard as well, but not as hard as this. Jordan was more than a partner; he was Ewan’s soulmate. Their relationship was very romantic, one of true and pure love.”

Matt continued, “A lady in a Ford S-Max was badly hurt. Unfortunately, she too has passed away. She left three children.”

Ewan felt for the lady’s husband and children. What her husband and children were going through didn’t bear thinking about. His loss was bad enough, but he did not have three children to support.

Matt continued, “I gather the police are throwing the whole book at her. She got out of the Range Rover and tried to leg it, but she was stopped. She tried to blame the driver of the silver car. She needs a good time in the nick.”

Ewan couldn’t help but agree, even though he could not say it. He resisted the temptation to shoot his mouth off in front of a person whom he had met for twenty minutes. The airhead with the personalised number plate was entitled to a fair trial. She was innocent until proven guilty beyond all reasonable doubt.

When Joby and Ewan went back to the car, Ewan allowed himself to let rip. He had known his father for nearly twenty-four years. Dad would not mouth off to anyone; he would have forgotten about it as soon as he did his calculations on the next three-phase traction motor.

Joby dropped Ewan off at the flat and came up with him. Coffee was on the brew almost immediately, while Ewan cooked a simple lunch. Joby and Ewan did a short run after lunch before Joby got back into the Fiesta for the run back to Corscadden. He arrived home before Aunt Imm and Uncle Alex brought the twins back.

Ewan immediately went back into his Edinburgh routine. The flat was cool, as it was mid-afternoon, but Ewan’s kilt, cashmere jumper and long socks kept him warm. Ewan snuggled up on the settee with a book and *Classic FM* on the radio. It

helped him as he started to come to terms over what had happened just four weeks before.

Ewan's regular routine was certainly not one that would have pleased that doyenne of the free spirit, Kathryn Chetwynd. If it felt good, she did it. It felt good that Kathryn Chetwynd had instructed Barford and Partners LLP to get hold of Jordan's entire estate. She would use a made-up story that Stephen had abused her and her son, so she had left home and gone to the south. That the divorce was acrimonious was entirely Stephen's fault.

Barfords had written to her that Gordon Morton had told Stephen about this development, and he had told them to fight the case to the end. She had expected Stephen to cave in, and she would get the entire estate, which would amount to at least five hundred grand with the compensation from the woman who had caused the accident. Kathryn was not best pleased that Stephen was determined to fight the case. She was determined to get the money and screw Stephen dry at the same time. As for the skinny drip that was Jordan's boyfriend, he would not get a penny. Ideally, she would have liked to have bled his family dry too.

It was not surprising that Kathryn decided to ring her ex-husband to try to warn him off. One Friday, she rang him, despite the fact that her partner, Rupert Bell-Dick was having a weekend at Windhover Barn.

"Stephen Melhuish!" she shouted down the phone when he answered his mobile. "What do you mean by telling Gordon Morton to oppose my claim on Sebastian's estate? I am going to fight this all the way and take away every last penny off you."

“You can’t do that Kathryn. Jordan wrote his will in front of witnesses. Typical of you – you lie and cheat as naturally as you breathe.”

“Sebastian was very close to me. I am his mother. You put him up to reject me.”

“WHAT?” The exclamation could be heard across the room. Rupert, whose love for Kathryn had faded years before, pricked up his ears. He didn’t mind a bit of salacious tittle-tattle. He was finding an excuse to ditch Kathryn, but their relationship was now one of marginally mutual convenience.

“That’s right,” Kathryn said angrily, “you put Sebastian up to turn against me. And I am going to screw you for doing so.”

“Kathryn,” Stephen shouted so he could be heard across the room, “you know full well that you are a bloody liar. I remember full well that day just after Jordan left school that you said, ‘Stephen, Sebastian, I want you out of my life.’ When Jordan died, you rang me and screamed at me because Jordan’s employers had told the police of your address.”

The phone call carried on for several minutes in this confrontational and unconstructive tone. Rupert listened in carefully. He remembered that incident while the coppers were there. Kathryn had done a dirty on him the previous year. She had reported him to the Inland Revenue for some tax dodging, and he had got hit for a hundred grand of unpaid tax. There had been a reward for those who reported underpaid tax. If she thought there was money in it for her, Kathryn would be interested.

Rupert was looking for a way of getting his own back. Besides, his pea-sized conscience was becoming active. He didn’t like what she was trying to persuade Barfords to do. If she succeeded, she would have perverted the course of justice. If the

truth got out, it would come back on Barfords, and, more importantly, him. His dealings with them would destroy his reputation. He didn't want a stretch for perverting the course of justice either.

He tried to talk her out of it. There was a row, and he ended up on the sofa-bed.

## Chapter 11

Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> February to Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2022

Ewan had requested that people attending Jordan's funeral should wear bright and colourful clothing, the brighter the better – anything to raise the mood of a solemn occasion. Ewan and Stephen would not criticise anyone who came in their best suits. For Richard and Celia Melhuish, it was right and proper that they should send off their grandson in appropriate dress. The request about bright colours did not apply to the undertakers, although they wore rainbow ribbon lapels. The Reverend Alex Witton wore a rainbow sash over his cassock and surplice.

Although the service was Christian in nature and took place in a church, it was not going to be pious. Nor would it be a laugh a minute. It would be a celebration of Jordan, a young man so full of light, love, and light. Many of those who attended knew Jordan and Ewan from Strathcadden Academy or from Edinburgh University. Mr McCullough, Ewan's training mentor, took the day off to attend. Jordan's bosses, John Baxter and Shona Ward, were there to represent Baxter Ward Associates.

The hearse parked outside Brewster House. Next to the coffin was a rainbow floral display making up the word *Jordan*. The hearse and the two funeral cars also had a rainbow ribbon hanging off each door mirror. Despite the colourful nature of the proceedings, Ewan felt that his colour control was only just above greyscale. It was a grey day and rather cold. The snow line was at about four hundred metres.

Aidan, Tamsin, and Lisa had already gone down to St Columba's Church in Kirkstoun Place to practise. Now the cars

were making their way down to the church. There was no funeral director walking in front of the cortege; blocking the A825 would have not made them popular. When the cortege got to the church, Ewan could see that there were people milling about the main door.

Ewan, Christian, Ryan, Stephen, Uncle Alex and Joby were pallbearers. They put the coffin on their shoulders, walking it in while Aidan played *Highland Cathedral*, Jordan's favourite Scottish tune. There were about two hundred and fifty people in the church. Most were young and in brightly coloured sweaters, kilts, and trousers. They placed the coffin on a table at the front of the church.

The Reverend Witton started, "We have come together in the presence of God to give thanks and to celebrate the life of our friend Jordan through readings, music, and reflection. We are also here to gain comfort for our pain and sorrow at his untimely death. We start with a sentence of hope from The Bible. *'Do not be worried and upset,' Jesus told them. 'Believe in God and believe also in me. There are many rooms in my Father's House, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so. And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am.'*"

The wording of the service that Alex had put together was pitched at the right level to help not just those who were Christians, but also those who professed no faith. Ewan's hope was that it would show to his many friends that Christianity was about life before death, not just after. It celebrated Jordan's life but acknowledged the deep hurt and sadness that affected everyone.

The choir from Strathcadden Academy, accompanied by Aidan, sung *Be still my soul* in its original German. The English translation was on the sheet.

Ewan read a poem he had written.

*Forever Twenty-Five*

*We loved and laughed as we walked to Barrock Cross.*

*Our close paths were of light, life and love.*

*We were teens frolicking with no care,  
Through heather and sun in Cadden's clear, clean air.*

*We went to Auld Reekie hand in hand.*

*Together we braved its raucous crowds,*

*For not all understood our rainbow love*

*And seethed at us with raging threats.*

*Yet in our nest we hugged so free*

*Close embraced to love, enjoy*

*Each rainbow hour in our rainbow love,*

*As we always did at Barrock Cross.*

*Our paths separated for just a week.*

*Forward I looked to your return,*

*But cruelly were you snatched from me and wrecked*

*In a cockle shell of mangled steel.*

*My love, they kept you in a drawer.*

*They laughed and teased our rainbow love,*

*They marked you mockingly as gay,*

*Writing you should be 'handled with care'.*

*We brought you home to Auld Caddie Toun,*

*Dear in Alba's heart and home.*

*My soul's friend, on angels' wings you fly*

*To life and joy in the Father-heart of God.*

*Noble trees tower like a cathedral roof*

*Forming a nave with dappled light.*

*And songbirds make an angelic choir*

*In Andrum's peaceful, noble wood.*

*You, my love, will rest in holy, sacred peace,*

*At Caledon's gentle bosom fair.*

*You will not grow old, nor will years wear you out,*

*For you are forever twenty-five.*

*As I trek alone to my journey's distant end,*

*You are always there in my heart.*

*For all my days be they long or short,*

*Your love and life will I ne'er forget.*

*My pilgrim's journey is now alone,*

*As you, my soulmate, are now gone.*

*But on that last day I will come,*

*And you will be there to take me home.*

As Ewan finished, there was applause. It washed over him, as his eyes were now full of tears. Later he said that he had shed tears by the litre.

The theme of *Bring Him Home* was taken up by Tamsin on the piano and Lisa, her fellow Reid School of Music student, on the cello.

The congregation sang the beautiful song, *Brother, Sister, let me serve you*. It had taken on the role of an informal school song at Strathcadden Academy. As there were so many Auld Caddies there, it was familiar. Even though others didn't know it, they soon picked up the simple tune. The singing was not the embarrassed mumbling normally experienced in many churches; it was confident.

Mr McEwan went to the front. His task was to give the eulogy for Jordan, "We have come together in deep sorrow to share our memories of our much-loved friend, Jordan Melhuish, and to give comfort to his fiancé, Ewan Walker. It is particularly poignant to consider that Ewan and Jordan were due to catch a train to France today, so that they could propose to each other on Saturday, which is the day before Ewan's twenty-fourth birthday. It is even more poignant that the tragedy that befell Jordan happened on his twenty-fifth birthday.

"As a teacher of more years than I would care to admit, and as headmaster for the last six years, I have had the sad duty of telling my students several times of the untimely death of one of their number. As a minister, I have had to support the bereaved over their loss. It is hard enough when the deceased is old, but at least they have had a full life. When it involves a young person..."

Mr McEwan mentioned how Jordan had come to Strathcadden Academy as a "waif and stray" from a school in Northern England. He was shocked when Jordan told him about the acrimonious divorce between his parents. Jordan had struggled in Secondary Four, so he was moved to Secondary Three. There he had met Ewan and the two became close

friends. They became more than friends; theirs was a teenage romance in all the beauty of the word. It was every bit the same as David and Jonathan in the Bible, who were deeply attracted to each other and loved each other as he loved himself.

He described how Jordan had failed to get into a public school in the south of England, which was a major disappointment to his mother. While Jordan was considered by his school in Northern England to be an average student, or even below average, he had started to thrive at Strathcadden Academy as a result of his friendship to Ewan. Jordan's results at National Five exams, Highers, and Advanced Highers were outstanding. Stephen, Jordan's father, was thrilled when Jordan got a place at Edinburgh University. This was somewhat tarnished by the fact that Jordan's mother refused to share in his joy.

Jordan continued to thrive at Edinburgh University, leaving with an upper second in Modern Languages. He immediately got a job as a Technical and Industrial Linguist at Baxter Ward Associates, where he was a highly valued employee with a bright future.

Ewan's friendship with Jordan was one of love, loyalty, and laughter. Jordan had done much to help Ewan to cope with the tragic death of his mother just before his sixteenth birthday. As their love deepened, Ewan and Jordan had never exchanged a cross word, let alone had an argument. There was perfect peace and contentment in the flat they shared.

Mr McEwan mentioned how Ewan had passed on his love of Celtic Christianity. In Secondary Six, Jordan, to whom faith had not come easily, had spoken to him quite often about how he and Ewan found God in the natural environment, and how trees formed the vaults of great cathedrals, and rocks their altars.

“...They had agreed just after they left our school to commit their lives to each other. Their joy was going to be made complete as this very week, indeed this very day, they were due to set out to go to France to stay at a château. This Saturday, the day before Ewan’s twenty-fourth birthday, they were going to propose marriage to each other, as soon as Ewan had qualified as a solicitor. Indeed, I had agreed to marry them in this very church.

“Like everyone else in this church, my heart is heavy. I cannot explain why our loving God has allowed this to happen. A woman takes it on herself to drive a large and excessively powerful car dangerously down a main road, and smashes into four other cars. Our dear friend was in the wrong place at the wrong time. It has certainly tested the faith that sustains my ministry. I have no time for pious platitudes, but I will give you a couple of Bible verses that I hope will give you some comfort:

*“Good people die, and nobody even understands or cares. But when they die, no calamity can hurt them. Those who live good lives find peace and rest in death.*

*“And Jesus said, ‘Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and put it on you, because I am gentle and humble in spirit; and you will find rest. For the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on is light.’*

“Jordan was gentle and humble in spirit. May his rest in Andrum Wood be peaceful, sacred, and holy. I can assure you that the desire expressed so beautifully in Ewan’s poem, will be fulfilled. We brought him home. When we go home, Jordan, forever twenty-five, will be there to greet us.”

Joby held his son close, for he was again in tears as the emotion rushed over him like a torrent. Laura and Celia held Stephen close. Other young men and women were in tears.

Alex Witton invited the congregation to leave a memento of Jordan at the front of church. Ewan placed Jordan's training shoes and running kit. Others laid a wide range of objects, including an electric guitar, books, and records. The largest was laid by Craig Farjeon. It was a rowing blade from Strathcadden Academy. While this was going on, Aidan played Bach's *In You is Joy*, and his own composition, *Jordan's Lament*.

At the start of the service, Alex had invited the congregation to write short prayers. There were a great many of these, even from those who were not religious. These were placed on an orange tree that normally lived up at The Rectory. He chose several at random and read them out, before leading the congregation in The Lord's Prayer.

The service finished with Alex Witton saying a prayer by the American preacher Martin Luther King: *And now to him who can keep us from falling and lift us from the dark valley of despair to the bright mountain of hope, from the midnight of desperation to the daybreak of joy, to this God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the glory, now and forever, Amen.*

Aidan played out the service with Michael Kamen's *Band of Brothers*.

Ewan was, not surprisingly, feeling very emotional. He went to the back of the church to thank all those who had come to support him. Lisa Hopwood and Abigail Burwood made a beeline for him. They had shed many tears.

"Ewan," said Lisa, "I am so sorry about what Abi, and I did a couple of weeks ago. We didn't know what to say. We are so ashamed. Please forgive us."

"There isn't anything you can say," replied Ewan. "I haven't got my head around it either. Please don't worry about

what happened. The important thing is that you came today. I really appreciate it.”

“We are with you,” said Abi. “We were very fond of Jordan. He was truly lovely.”

Many others came up to Ewan, including Mr McCullough, John Baxter, Shona Ward, Craig Farjeon, and Dr Cuthbert. Simon Cairns was deeply upset. A few went to see Alex. Although they were young, the idea of their mortality had slapped them hard around the face. They were scared.

The mementos were picked up at the end of the service and returned to their owners, while The Reverend Witton made arrangements to see those who had come up to him at the end of the service.

Now the immediate family were back in Hewitt’s funeral cars heading along Bracklennen Road towards the Andrum Woodland Burial Ground. Grandma and Granddad had gone back to Brewster House to get some lunch on. Ewan looked ahead but registered nothing. Alex Witton followed in his car. The burial ground staff met them at the car park; they were very kind. The pallbearers carried the coffin on their shoulders for the solemn final journey. The event was dignified and stone-cold sober. Jordan’s resting place was in a clearing, around which tall trees stood like the cloisters of a cathedral. Near the open grave was a rock. To Ewan it was the holy altar.

Alex Witton led the interment summing up with a sentence, “*But the righteous live on for ever. The Lord will reward them; the Most High will protect them. He will give them royal splendour and a magnificent crown. He will shield them with his powerful arm.*”

The coffin was lowered. Stephen and Ewan started the filling in of the grave, with the others joining in. Tears were running down Ewan’s face, off the end of his nose.

Benjamin and Daniel Walker were really too young to understand what the funeral was about. They knew that Ewan was very sad, and they would not see Jordan again. The rest of the family were very sad too. It upset them. Mummy and Daddy had told them about Jordan going to be with Jesus. Jesus was the son of God. That they knew. It said so in their children's bible. While the funeral was going on, Mrs Dalton and Mrs Jackson took Ben and Dan out of class and explained to them about what the rest of the family were doing. Lots of people knew Jordan, and they were very sad. They had come to say goodbye to him. They said prayers, and Mrs Dalton and Mrs Jackson held them.

Two days later, the Walker Tribe returned to Andrum to Jordan's grave. They had ordered a slate plaque from Andrum Woodland Burials. There was a simple Celtic cross on top, below which was *Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1997 – 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022*. The plaque was placed on the pile of earth, and fixed with a plain stake, so it could be removed when the staff maintained the area.

The family said their own prayers, while Ewan recited his poem. He, Aidy, and Chris sat close together, cross-legged on the rock that was near the grave. They said nothing, but their prayers were beyond words. After a while, Ben and Dan hopped up onto the rock and hugged their big brothers.

It was not exactly what Ewan had wanted to do on his twenty-fourth birthday.

It was a dull grey day. Ewan felt cold. He had his outside jacket on over a thick cashmere sweater, a warm shirt, and T-shirt. His kilt and long socks were normally warm, but not today. He was shivering. At first, he put it down to the emotion of the

last few days. He had been through the mill and felt shredded. He had a muzzy headache.

“Eejay,” said Chris, “you are looking a bit pale. Are you feeling alright?”

“A bit green about the gills,” said Ewan who was rarely ill.

Although it was warmer at Brewster House, Ewan was still cold and was grateful to sit next to the fire in the drawing room. He was losing his appetite and was quite happy just to sit there while the world went by. This was a shame, because a nice birthday meal was being prepared.

At seven o’clock that evening Ewan felt like death warmed up, although he did not fancy going into one of those stainless-steel filing cabinet drawers. He excused himself and decided to go to bed. He found it hard to get up the stairs. He was feeling faint. At least if he fainted in bed, he wouldn’t have far to fall. He still managed to fold up his kilt and other clothes and put them in a neat pile. He put on his old pullover and sportswear that he normally slept in. Even in his socks, his feet were cold. Aidy brought up a hot-water bottle.

In the early hours, Ewan felt a horrible feeling. He had to go to *The Colossus*. He just managed to get there before he was violently sick into it. There followed the distinctive roar of *The Cloudburst*. His needs had not been fully met, and he had to drop his swimming trunks around his ankles.

The second roar of *The Cloudburst* woke Christian up. He then heard Ewan being sick a second time. *The Cloudburst* roared again. A moment after that, there was a heavy thump on the floor. He rushed through to the bathroom to find Ewan out for the count. He had been trained at work to put people into the recovery position. He did it for Ewan, before rushing over to get Mum and Dad.

Laura was alert in the same way that Joby was not. Saying, “Oh shit!” was his only contribution to the proceedings. It was said with the same conviction as when an experimental electric motor dissolved in a shower of sparks and blue flashes in the lab. Laura ordered him back to bed. Ewan was coming to. Laura sent for an ambulance to have Ewan checked out at the Strathcadden General Infirmary. As she had mentioned her name, the ambulance was dispatched immediately, if not sooner, and within minutes was at Brewster House.

Ewan spent Sunday morning at the Strathie in an isolation room. They did not want Norovirus spreading around the hospital. The main reason for his stay was that he had fainted and could have bumped his head. They had also rigged him up to a heart monitor just in case all of this was brought about by an undetected heart condition. Fortunately, they found no evidence that he had. They took all sorts of other tests, which they called “The Obs”. Ewan felt like a pin cushion. The most urgent results would be back on Monday or Tuesday. The Strathcadden General Infirmary had a pathology department that was busy enough to justify its existence, but not so busy that results took ages.

Chris came down and picked up Ewan. He was weak and was grateful that he was taken out to the car in a wheelchair. When he got home, all Ewan wanted to do was to snuggle into bed and be useless. He had little appetite for food. This was a sure indication that he was not well; normally Ewan could out-eat a horse. Sweet tea was about as much as he could manage. He did not need to take any sudden exits to *The Colossus*.

Ewan spent most of the next day in bed, drinking water, but not being up to eating more than a soup that Grandma had made. He felt as if someone had punched him hard in the stomach. He was very weak; it was an effort to go down to the kitchen. He chatted with Grandma and Granddad before having

the soup. Even that was exhausting and after lunch he crawled back into bed. He could hear his heart pumping; he described it as “the slush-pump”. For Ewan, the slush-pump was a good indication that he was not well.

That night, Ewan had a very vivid dream. He was sitting cross-legged at the foot of a Celtic cross. He often did this while out in the countryside, sitting on a rock on his own or with his very close friends and family. Sometimes he called it “getting good vibes”, but for him it was sitting with God, saying nothing, but expressing feelings that words could not express. Since his mother died, Ewan had gained a quiet but deep Celtic Christian spirituality.

In the dream he saw a bright light from behind the cross. He had seen it plenty of times in religious paintings. The crucified Christ was on the cross but not supported by anything. Ewan heard Jordan’s voice and saw him sitting cross-legged next to him. His body was no longer broken. Instead, he was dressed in shorts, a jumper, a T-shirt, training shoes and blue socks. He had often dressed like that when he was alive. The third figure whom Ewan recognised as the crucified Jesus came down, and sat beside them

Jordan said, “Eejay, I loved you in life and, even though I am no longer with you, I still love you dearly. I know how much you loved me too, and I will love you for ever. My journey is over. I have reached the end, and I have come home. It is true; there are many rooms in my father’s house. We will meet again, but your journey will be long. For me, seventy years will be just as seventy minutes.

“Be determined and confident, for your best days are ahead. Do not be afraid of anything. Your God, our God, the Lord himself, will be with you. He will never fail you or abandon

you. He is faithful and true and will always do what is right and fair.

“The Lord knows what you have been through. He understands and feels for you. His father-heart cries for you and wants to give you comfort. He was there on Thursday. He cried for all who were in the church. Many were comforted. They will come to him over time.

“He knows how much you love him. He delights in the time you spend in silent prayer. He knows your prayers are beyond words. And beyond words he will nurture you.

“Eejay, your best days are ahead. Remember the Lord in everything you do and say, and he will show you the right way. He gave you considerable talents in Law, and he wants you to use them selflessly to help others. Follow his way to your fulfilment.

“You will always treasure me, and I will always treasure you. In life, light, love, laughter, and joy, we are going to meet again. We will both be forever twenty-five. Eejay, I love you so dearly. I know you will never forget me. I want you to know that God’s blessings will be on your family and all those you love. You took me in when I needed it most and loved me. Jesus said, ‘when you did it for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for me.’

“Eejay, the Lord knows how you were my soul-friend, and I was with you. However, do not look back, but look out for your new soul-friend who is coming, and will walk with you for your whole journey. The Lord is going to do something new, and completely unexpected.

“Remember this and treasure it. For you, the journey will be long. For me, you will be coming to me soon, and I am waiting for you, ready to open the door for you.”

Ewan awoke with a start and put on the light. He went over to his desk where his computer was. He wrote everything that he had heard onto a piece of A4 paper, so that he didn't forget it. After that he collapsed back onto his bed. He was still feeling lousy, and the slush-pump was still going in his head. He felt weepy and, after putting off the light, he buried his head into one of his soft toys. He cried and prayed for sleep.

The next morning, Dr Conway arrived. Grandma had come to let him in. Ewan was asleep, and Grandma gently shook him to wake him up. He made his usual little squeaky noises when anyone woke him up. Then he looked up with bleary eyes while Grandma opened the curtains. The last time Dr Conway had seen Ewan was when he was a gawky sixteen-year-old who had got himself into a scrape in Rowallan Country Park after having a set-to with Mrs Learmont and an attempted stag-rut with Mr Farjeon.

"Good morning, Ewan," said Dr Conway. "How are you feeling now?"

"Not very good," Ewan replied. "I am still achy and feel very weak."

"I have come to see how you are, as part of the discharge procedure from the hospital... You are still running a bit of a temperature. We have done all the tests, and we think you have had a nasty attack of norovirus."

"Norovirus?"

"It's sometimes called 'winter vomiting virus'. It is very infective. Don't worry about giving it to the others. Ben and Dan were poorly in November, so they won't get it again. Your dad and mum told me that they had felt a bit green around the gills in early December, but it went quite quickly."

“Why have I had it so badly? I don’t get ill that often.”

“It’s the stress you have been under. You really have had a basinful. The shock of what happened to Jordan knocked you for six. The stress would have weakened your immune system. Have you been in close contact with anyone who had been ill?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Have you been to a doctor’s surgery or a hospital?”

“No... But I did go down to the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary in Edinburgh to pick up Jordan’s things. But that was over a week ago.”

“No, I don’t think it was there, although the place is notorious for its lax standards across the board.”

“The sanitiser gels were empty.”

“Not a surprise. Unfortunately, they don’t kill off norovirus. The DMI is the poor relation to the ERI. When they built the new ERI, they were going to close the DMI but found they still needed it. What’s more, the ERI helipad was damaged in a storm in early January, so they have had to use the helipad on the DMI.”

“Is that why Jordan ended up there?” Ewan asked.

“Yes. If they can transfer patients to the ERI they do. Poor Jordan had passed away in Theatre, which is why they left him there.”

“Stored him there,” said Ewan. “He was filed away in a stainless-steel drawer. They even wrote on a piece of scrap paper, ‘Gay, handle with care’.”

“Typical,” replied Dr Conway. “The ancillary staff are a law unto themselves. The place is an exercise in saving money, and its chief executive’s bonus is one of the biggest in the NHS.

Now I could talk for ages about the DMI, but I need to see how you are. You could have caught it anywhere, from anyone.”

Dr Conway felt Ewan’s tum. It was still a little bit swollen. His glands were still up. Dr Conway had doctored Ewan since he was a small boy and knew of his very slight build. All the younger Walkers were slightly built, something they had picked up off their father. But Ewan was decidedly bony. So, they went through to the bathroom and Ewan stood on the scales. Even though he had his old sportswear on, Ewan weighed sixty-four kilograms, decidedly underweight for a man of his size.

“You need building up, my lad,” said Dr Conway. “You are very thin, and if you carry on like this, you will float away.”

They went to the bedroom. Dr Conway then said, “I am going to sign you off for two weeks. You need to drink plenty of water and sweet tea. Take paracetamol up to four times a day. Above all you need to eat.”

“Ewan normally eats like a horse,” said Muriel, who was on her mobile about to ring Johnston MacLean and Partners. She was passed quickly through to Mr McCullough.

“Good morning,” Muriel started, “I am Muriel Walker, Ewan’s grandmother.”

“How is Ewan?”

“He’s not very good at the moment. First thing he wants to say is thank you for coming.”

“It was a very moving service.”

“Ewan is in bed. He was very sick on Saturday night. He collapsed in the bathroom and was taken to our local hospital. They even checked his heart.”

“Good grief!”

“They found that he has had a bad attack of norovirus. The doctor is with us at the moment. He is going to sign Ewan off for two weeks. Do you want to speak to Dr Conway?”

Muriel passed her mobile over. Dr Conway asked Ewan for his permission to discuss the case before he went through what he had found.

“Well, thank you for that,” said Mr McCullough. “May I speak to Ewan?”

“Hello, Mr McCullough,” said Ewan. He was always deferential to his boss.

“Now then, Ewan,” Mr McCullough replied, “Dr Conway has told you to stay off for ten working days. And you follow doctor’s orders. I don’t want everyone here rushing to the Ladies and the Gents. Catherine will pick up your current cases. I want you fighting fit when you come back.”

When Dr Conway left Brewster House, Ewan went downstairs with Grandma who made him some sweet tea. Grandma also made a little milky porridge. Ewan had always liked it as a small boy. He could not eat that much, but his stomach felt less that someone had punched it, rather that someone was sitting on it. He felt as if his legs had gone AWOL and were refusing to accept instructions from his brain. It was the same as it was eleven years before, in 2011. From about the age of five, Ewan had been the same height as Aidan. Between the ages of thirteen and fourteen, Ewan had put on a growth spurt which had made him the tallest in Secondary Three. His brain had not caught up with his growing body, making him rather gawky. He looked like a manga figure.

In the garden room next to the kitchen-diner was a bifold door into the garden. Next to the door was a large sofa. Like the one in the games room, it was battered but comfortable. Ewan

snuggled up onto it with his tea. Grandma sat next to him, and he snuggled up to her. She cuddled him, as she had done many times in the last four weeks. Ewan had always been close to his Grandma since he was a very small boy. Although he had turned twenty-four, he felt thirteen.

Muriel looked tenderly at her grandson. He looked so thin. He had the clothes that he wore in bed, a jumper over his T-shirt, a pair of swimming trunks, and yellow and black long sports socks. He had put on light trainers as the tiled floors downstairs could be cold. Young looking for his age, Ewan seemed so vulnerable. He still had a boyish innocence in his face. There was a lot that was quite effeminate in his looks and nature. It was no surprise to her that Ewan and Jordan had never exchanged a cross word. Theirs had been a romantic and deep love. Ewan was genuinely a gentle man who was a gentleman.

“Grandma,” said Ewan, “I dreamt about Jordan last night. I was sitting at the foot of a Celtic cross on an island like Iona. Jesus was there, and Jordan was there. Jordan did the talking. After I woke up, I wrote everything down. I’m sure that Dr Conway would tell me it was just a weird dream because I’m not very well and was running a temperature.”

Ewan handed the sheet of neatly written paper to Grandma. She read it carefully. She sipped her tea and thought carefully about what she had read. Finally, she said, “I really think that this is a message from God. Jordan is at home with the Lord. You must keep that paper and use it as life’s compass. You will never forget Jordan, but the Lord is encouraging you to move on. Jordan is safe, and in his care. God is going to give you a new soul-friend. Don’t be surprised if she’s a woman. She is going to have a truly lovely young man.”

“I am scared of women.”

“You’re not scared of me, are you?”

“No, Grandma. I have known you all my life.”

“There are lots of women like me. God will send you a woman you will love, just as you loved Jordan. Jordan told you not to be afraid, for God is with you. Do you love me?”

“Of course, I do, Grandma.”

“You can love a woman. You will be gentle and kind to her, as you are now and just as you were with Jordan. Now, laddie, your job is to get better.”

It was warm in the kitchen, and Ewan got himself a book and snuggled into the corner of the old settee. After a while he was asleep.

The next day, Ewan felt well enough to get up and get dressed as normal. He was still feeling weak and washed out, so he spent much of the day in the games room reading and listening to *Classic FM*. That afternoon he went down to the school to pick up Ben and Dan, who skipped back home with him. They were pleased that he was getting better. Ewan made up funny stories about an engine in a quarry that was the antidote to *Thomas the Tank Engine*. This engine was a guru in the art of annoying the Fat Controller and teaching others to do the same. He was also adept at enraging the quarry master. They stayed in the games room until Mum and Dad got home. Ewan was very close to his little brothers.

The following day, Ewan went out with his grandma for a short walk in Corr Wood. Muriel was seventy-seven and was not able to do all the things she had done fifty years before. Still, she enjoyed being with her grandson and, on these walks, he would open up to her. He mostly talked about his hopes, but sometimes it would be his fears. Jordan’s recent funeral had not brought closure; Ewan was still very raw. Muriel listened carefully and

sympathetically. It was the same when Mary had died. The two events had happened eight years apart, almost to the day.

On this occasion, Ewan had told Muriel about how Jordan and he were looking forward to buying their first flat together in Edinburgh. Ewan then said, “I seem to have lost my love for Edinburgh. It’s still a fantastic place, but since Jordie died, it has all gone flat.”

“I thought you were going to make your legal career in Edinburgh.”

“So did I,” Ewan replied. “Jordie and I were going to buy a flat in Marchmont, not far from Dad’s old flat. Since this all happened, I have felt homesick for Auld Caddie Toun. I feel safe here.”

“You are, and very loved.”

“When I went down to the Duchess of Midlothian, I really felt unsafe. There were people there who, if they knew I was gay, would have killed me. They were all high on drugs. They looked so scary; shaven headed, thick beards, and covered in tattoos.”

“I know what you mean, Eejay,” said Muriel, “But don’t judge a book by its cover. Some scary-looking people are actually real pussycats. We used to get some in the shop, and they were usually very polite and pleasant. The worst were often the dead posh people who used to come in their four-by-fours. We were mere dirt to them, mere shopkeepers. It used to send your Granddad up the wall.”

“I know that. Granddad did very well to be so polite and kind to them.”

“Underneath, he was hopping mad. You ought to have heard him when he got into the office. Some of the words he came out with he didn’t think he ever knew.

“Changing the subject, Eejay, when would you come back for good?”

“In October next year. I will have qualified by then with Johnston MacLean and Partners. Mr McCullough has had a word with Andrew Yeoman at Gordon Morton. He wants me to start with him to train as a solicitor advocate. It sounds really good. I want to make my life here.”

“Eejay, I know what you mean. At the moment you are hurting, and you have done the right thing, to come home to us. Time will heal your wounds eventually and you may change your mind. Even if you don’t, you will need to go to Edinburgh from time to time as part of your job.”

“Of course, Grandma. I may have to stay there overnight, but I will know that I will be coming home. I have asked Chris to do a painting of Jordie. I have promised Jordie that I will never forget him.”

“Of course, you won’t. Wherever you live, you can take Jordie with you.”

“At least here, I can wear my kilt when I want to. I wear it in my flat, but I don’t do so outside in Edinburgh, unless I’m going to the Festival. People wolf-whistle at me or think I am a prat. Here lots of young people wear it.”

“I know why you want to live here but keep your ears open to God and the way he leads you. That paper you showed me on Tuesday; it’s true today, tomorrow, next year, and for decades to come. If God brings you back here, we will be delighted. Come on, let’s go back home. Otherwise, you will catch a cold.”

So, they did.

Ewan's appetite and strength came back. By the second week, he was taking his little brothers down to school and picking them up in the afternoon. He would walk regularly with Grandma. By the middle of the week, he started to run again when Christian got back from work. They did short, slow runs. They were accompanied by Ben and Dan.

## Chapter 12

March 2022

Ewan Walker was getting back to his routine in Edinburgh. His work was going well, and the feedback was boosting his confidence. His colleagues had been very supportive. He wanted to thank them by getting down to work and pulling his weight. There was some catching up to do; he had forgotten what he had been up to, but it had come back to him quickly.

Like all trainee solicitors, he had to do criminal court work. Whether he won or lost cases, no one could ever say that it was through lack of preparation. If a client was guilty, Ewan would explain that it was easier to admit the guilt, and Ewan would stand up for the client in court. Therefore, a reduced sentence would be passed. For a client who had been falsely accused, Ewan would fight tooth and nail to ensure that the jury would believe the defence case. Like the vast majority of solicitors, Ewan was determined that justice should be served properly and only the guilty went down. In his work, Ewan started to meet scary looking people, but, as Grandma had said, most of them were decent people who had made bad decisions in life's journey. Some were rough diamonds. A small minority were truly evil; devious and manipulative, they lied and cheated as naturally as they breathed. They were in total denial that they had done anything wrong. They deserved their stretches in the slammer.

Ewan was now firmly on track. He was doing well at work. He still missed Jordan terribly, but he just had to get on with it. Instead of going to Brewster House every weekend, he went every fortnight. The other weekend, he spent with Aidan, Tamsin, and Gemma.

Back in Edinburgh, Ewan got stronger and his running improved. His appetite was almost back to normal. He made sure he ate properly in the evening, calling in on a good quality supermarket each evening on his way back from work. He kept to his routine of putting his suit away before “dressing for the evening” – a slightly pompous way of saying that he liked to wear his casual kilt or his sports kit. Jordan had had the same slight build as Ewan. Therefore, many of Jordan’s clothes fitted Ewan well. The main difference was that Ewan’s legs were longer. Jordan’s kilt was a bit short on him, but as Ewan only wore it about the flat, it didn’t matter. He would also do the washing, ironing, and hoovering depending on which day of the week it was. Once a week, he paid a cleaner to do the bathroom and kitchen. He would cook his evening meal, before doing his accounts and other computer work. After that he would relax with a good book for twenty or thirty minutes, before spending the rest of the evening listening to music or continuing to read the book. Or he would sit cross legged on the settee, just as he did on his rock on Corr Hill. Some people would have laughed at one so young having this kind of routine, describing it as “sad”. It was regular, just like it was when Jordan was alive, and it kept Ewan steady.

Ewan knew what was next. One Friday that month, Ewan had been invited by Baxter Ward Associates to name their conference room the *Melhuish Room*. Ewan had trawled through his many recent pictures of Jordan and found one that was particularly suitable. Jordan had just got back from work and was gazing out of the living room window over Inverleith Park. Ewan had had the picture professionally printed and framed.

It was lunchtime when he arrived. John Baxter and Shona Ward were there to meet him. After the usual small talk, at which Ewan was very adept, John said, “Thank you so much for

coming, Ewan. Jordan was our best employee, and we were confident that in a few years, he would be our lead partner. We are thrilled that you can come and name our conference room.”

“Thank you for inviting me,” Ewan replied. “I am delighted that Jordan has been honoured in this way. I have brought this picture to share with you the amazing man that Jordan was.”

They went through to the Conference Room. Everyone at Baxter Ward Associates was present. Shona Ward addressed the room, “A few short weeks ago, we were all truly shocked at the news that our friend and colleague, Jordan Melhuish, was involved in a car accident that cost him his life. We agreed immediately that we should have a permanent memorial to Jordan, and it was suggested that we should name this conference room after him. Jordan was an outstanding Technical and Industrial Linguist. He had just been elected to the Institute of Industrial and Technical Linguists, after taking some pretty challenging exams to be a Chartered Linguist. We are very honoured to have his partner, Ewan Walker to name the room. Over to you, Ewan.”

Ewan replied, “Thank you, Shona, thank you John. I was delighted to accept your kind invitation to open the *Melhuish Room*. I know that it will make sure that Jordan will be remembered even though he is no longer with us.

“I first met Jordan while I was in Secondary Three at Strathcadden Academy in Corscadden. I was a hormonal teenager, the gay one with the gob, which led me into a certain amount of trouble with the headmaster. Jordan had arrived at our school at the start of the spring term into Secondary Four. He struggled with Standard Grades, so they moved him to Secondary Three. He was over a year older than me. I was the youngest in my year. He was fifteen, and I turned fourteen that

year. We became close friends, a friendship that got closer and closer.

“I had a bad time when my mother died unexpectedly. Jordan was always there for me, and kept me level, even though I could be rather obnoxious at times. We shared many interests, including modern languages. We supported each other as we worked towards our Highers and Advanced Highers. We were at Uni together, although we did different courses. We shared a flat together, and at the end of last month, we were going to get engaged. Our intention was to marry as soon as I qualified as a solicitor.

“Shona has told me that Jordan used to mention me a lot at work. Well, this is me, Ewan. Jordan thoroughly enjoyed working here. He would tell me all sorts of things that happened here; it sounded a really fun place to be. During his last week, he would ring me every night to tell me how he was getting on at Grantsbury Hall especially as he was teaching and supporting people who were twice his age.

“It is a great privilege for me to honour Jordan in this way. He meant so much to me, and he still does. He will be looking down and sharing in the joy of this occasion.

“Therefore, I have the great honour of naming this room *The Melbuish Room*. I took this picture of Jordan a couple of months ago. I think it shows the deeply reflective and thoughtful nature of one who was truly a lovely young man. For me, as I get older, Jordan is forever twenty-five.”

Ewan handed the picture to John Baxter, who placed it on the mantel piece. Then Shona handed two plaques to Ewan, with a screwdriver. Both had *The Melbuish Room* engraved on them. Ewan’s task was to unscrew the plaques that read *Conference Room* and replace them with the new plaques.

After that, there was a buffet for everyone in The Melhuish Room. Ewan enjoyed chatting to his hosts who looked after him very well. All too soon, it was time for him to go back to his work at Johnston, MacLean, and Partners. He had not come across as mawkish. Although there was this Jordan sized hole in his life, events like this helped to fill it in.

Ewan was looking forward to Saturday. Aidan had bumped into Sam and Jess Proudlock. They had not met for some time, and both had been shocked to hear about Jordan's accident. Edward, Sam's younger brother had also heard about what had happened and sent Ewan a long letter from Canterbury University, where he was starting a PhD in Aeronautical Engineering. Edward was coming up that weekend and wanted to renew his acquaintance with his friends. Aidan was there with Tamsin and Gemma.

Ewan enjoyed meeting the Proudlock Family again. Sam was now thirty-eight, and Jess was forty. Olivia and Sophie were in Primary Seven, about to start in Secondary One at the James Gillespie High School in September. Kieran was now nearly nine. He was tall for a nine-year-old, which he had picked up from his father. All the children spoke in a Morningside accent, which had come from their mother. Edward, Samuel's brother was now twenty-two. He had a thick mop of black hair, just like his brother. Ewan and he chatted a lot, catching up on what each had been doing. Aidan got a lot of mileage from Dad being a dark horse. Tamsin reminded her boyfriend about the stable of dark horses that was in Brewster House. Gemma confirmed the story about her boyfriend's father being a naughty boy in a party in very dubious taste.

Gemma and Tamsin did not know about Jess being Mr McEwan's daughter.

Fortunately, the three Proudlock children thought of this as being grown-up bla-bla.

Angie, Jess's sister came over. She was still a single girl about town, now not far off her forty-second birthday. She had no regrets. She was unencumbered with children, had a nice flat in Edinburgh's New Town (not far from Ewan's office) and doing very well in her career.

That evening the whole troupe went to an Italian Restaurant on Marchmont Road. It was a most sociable occasion, which certainly kept Ewan's mind off things.

The following day, Edward, Aidan, Tamsin, and Gemma came over to Ewan's flat where he did lunch for them. Aidan suggested that Edward should try wearing a kilt. As Edward was game for a laugh, he removed his jeans and put on one of Ewan's kilts. It fitted well round the waist, although it was a bit short. He was a bit taller than Ewan. He really liked it and understood the way that Scottish men talk about the freedom of the kilt. He decided he would buy one. Ewan and Aidan went through how to get one. There were all sorts of tartans that anyone could wear, although there was not one for Derbyshire, which is where the Proudlock family came from.

Overall, Ewan tried hard to keep positive. He was quite a private person and didn't open up to many people. In the quiet of his flat, he would at times feel the loneliness of life without Jordan.

When the Duke of Cambridge, the future Prince of Wales and King William III, commented that the loss of his mother had caused him indescribable pain, Ewan agreed. Now Ewan had, almost eight years to the day, experienced a second shattering blow, and the pain was every bit as intense. He could have just given up, but that was not Ewan. Getting on with it was very hard, but it had to be done. Mr McCullough had expressed his

admiration for Ewan's potential of being an exceptional lawyer. If he yielded to the temptation to collapse into self-pity and give up, he would not only let down himself, but also everyone who had been so supportive.

Towards the end of the month, the Victim Information and Advice Officer visited Ewan at home. The Procurator Fiscal's office had concluded that there was sufficient evidence for Celia Barwick-Green to stand trial in solemn proceedings. While this would normally be held in a sheriff court, there were several aggravating factors, for example that Mrs Barwick-Green was clearly over the alcohol limit when she had started to drive and had been taking Class A drugs. Additionally, there were a good number of other serious driving offences. The whole case was to be heard not in Edinburgh Sheriff Court, but as solemn proceedings by the Edinburgh High Court of Justiciary. The case was due to start on Monday May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

A summons was served on Mrs Barwick Green at home in Cheshire. She was not best pleased as she had planned to fly out to Milan for a week's holiday with her husband, before Rebecca returned from boarding school at Shrewsbury for half term. She demanded that the trial should be postponed for a fortnight at least, but this was refused. She and Nigel lost their deposit.

There were times Ewan was angry with that woman who had driven like a lunatic in an oversized car, high on Class A drugs, and smashed into Jordan who was minding his own business. He shared the feelings of the husband who had been bereaved of his wife, and the children who had lost their mother. Nevertheless, she was innocent until proven guilty beyond all reasonable doubt. He was glad that it was not his job to defend

her. He would go back to those words that he had received in that dream. He had typed them into his computer. The last thing that Ewan wanted to do was to lose them.

Or were they so much wishful thinking – just some religious sounding bunkum that was the result of running a temperature having had a pretty nasty dose of norovirus? Ewan believed in miracles. They happened to other people. He tried hard to believe that the words were from God, but was his faith just a delusion? There were plenty of people who would say just that. Ewan preferred to base his life on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth than the incessant idol worship of football players, celebrities, and the Royal Family.

When he felt like that, Ewan could well have given up and walked away from his potentially outstanding career in law. He had to fight hard to resist the temptation. Instead, he sat cross-legged on the settee, waiting on God with prayers with no words. Unbidden, a voice would say, “I am here. I will sit next to you.”

## Chapter 13

April 2022

The next morning, Kathryn announced that she was going to the gym to meet up with the girls before they went out shopping in Tunbridge Wells. Rupert had to stay in because he had managed to get a tree surgeon to quote for felling the three ugly elms in the corner of the garden where he wanted to build the garage for his new Porsche. He had been allowed to resume driving after a three-year ban and an extended driving test. He was paying a penalty rate of insurance for minimum cover.

Unfortunately, a lorry delivering materials to the new estate had taken a wrong turn and had to back up to turn round. It used the drive in front of Windhover Barn. Unfortunately, the driver had not noticed the Porsche which was stored under a car cover. The offside rear wheel hit the front of the Porsche and rode up onto it, squashing the front flat. The Porsche was a write-off.

It would be an understatement to say that Rupert was incandescent, especially as the lorry driver had not noticed what he had done and driven off. The cost of a new Porsche was well within his means, but that was not the point.

Now he had engaged a company from Herefordshire to build an oak-framed garage at the back of his garden. Unfortunately, the three ugly elms stood in the way, so Laineshurst Tree Surgeons were coming to look at the job.

“Sorry, Mr Beldrake,” said Mr Collins, “we can’t do the job.”

“Why not?” Rupert did not like people saying no to him.

“You realise that these elms have a tree protection order on them?”

“Couldn’t you just cut them down anyway? Nobody would notice.”

“Your neighbours would and so would the council. I don’t want to be hit with a fifty grand fine, nor do you. So, we can’t do the job. Period.”

“Damned bureaucracy gets in the way of everything!” Rupert grumbled as he stomped back to Windhover Barn and thought what to do next.

Back at Windhover Barn a few days later, Rupert Bell-Dick, Head of Corporate Banking at Glynn’s Bank was feeling disgruntled. He was irritated that the council had sent a letter addressed to Mr Beldrake. Typical of a tradesman, he thought, to get wrong a name consisting of two simple four letter words separated by a hyphen. It was even more typical that Mr Collins of Laineshurst Tree Surgeons to snitch on him to North Sussex County Council. At Charterhouse, they had ways and means of dealing with sneaks. The letter informed him that a Tree Preservation Order had been placed at the request of Kew Gardens as the trees had special scientific properties, having survived the Dutch elm disease epidemic in the nineteen seventies. It also reminded him that to fell the three elms would be an offence resulting in at least a penalty of £20000 per tree.

“Bugger those bureaucrats,” Rupert grumbled to Kathryn as she got ready to go down yet again to the gym. “They stop people doing anything.”

Kathryn took no notice of her partner. Getting to the gym was more important as was her regular shopping trip to Royal Tunbridge Wells.

Rupert decided to deal with the trees himself. In Ettingden there was a tool hire place, one of the few businesses in North Sussex that did not sell expensive women's shoes or expensive women's clothing. It was annoying that he had to drive for twenty-five minutes each way. His driving had become somewhat less bad after his three-year ban and extended driving test. It was something to do with having been warned that any future offending could result in a ten-year ban. And he still had the Range Rover. If he managed to drive it within the speed limits, there was a more than even chance that it would get to Ettingden and back without breaking down.

At Ettingden Tool Hire, he hired a chainsaw. He was irritated that he had to hire some extra clobber. They called it personal protection equipment. He called it a load of clobber that was there to make more money for them. They told him they couldn't hire the saw to him unless he hired the personal protection equipment as well – Health and Safety at Work Act. He said he wasn't at work. He was a top banker, so did not cut down trees for a living. They said it was the law, so tough. He also had to buy two-stroke petrol. He had vaguely remembered that a mate of his had once had a two-stroke motorbike. He wasn't sure what was worse, the row that it made, or the stench that came from its exhaust. They told him that he couldn't use four-stroke as the machine would seize up and he would have to pay for a new one. They sold him a litre of two stroke oil. They couldn't possibly hire it to him, as it was a consumable; he would not be returning the container in the same condition as they gave it to him. They told him he needed a litre of saw-chain oil. They even managed to sell him a five-litre petrol can.

By the time he had paid the bill, he could have bought the machine outright, but he couldn't think of any further use for such a contraption, although he momentarily thought about what

he could do with one if the Board at Glynn's Bank were ever to "let him go".

By the time he got home he had forgotten what to do with the personal protection equipment. He put on the helmet and put down the visor, as a result of which he could see bugger-all. The earmuffs were built into the helmet. Since he couldn't wear the helmet without the damned thing slipping down, the earmuffs were useless. Anyway, he had spent many hours of his youth in disothèques and rock concerts. He might have been getting on a bit, but surely, he could put up with a chainsaw for a couple of hours. The thick trousers, which were marked XXL, would not fit over his evidence of too many corporate luncheons. The boots wouldn't fit around his fat and podgy little feet.

Surprisingly he managed to mix the two-stroke petrol correctly. He even put the petrol into the right hole and found the correct hole for the saw-chain oil. He managed to make the thing go; it made the expected appalling row, and the garden was covered with a blue mist that stank to high heaven. Buoyed by these achievements, Rupert Bell-Dick set to work.

The first two trees fell onto the lawn, more by luck than judgement. Any tree surgeon would have stood aghast, should he have seen Rupert's handling of the chainsaw. He barely had control of the saw and was completely ignorant of the most elementary ideas of forestry. The most likely thing to be felled would be Rupert himself, for he had not the most elementary idea of the rules of safe handling of such a tool. At one point the second of the trees had trapped the bar of the chainsaw firmly. Somehow Rupert contorted himself to push the trunk with his legs, while he revved the saw at full throttle. Suddenly the tree started to sway, and the saw cut through the remaining section. Rupert let go and the saw kicked back, giving Rupert a good wallop on the right ankle. The chain narrowly missed his left leg.

With the third tree, which leaned over at an angle towards the neighbour's garden, Rupert got into real trouble. He made the single cut towards his garden. The saw-bar got bound again. It was firmly trapped. Rupert swore loudly. Then he remembered that in the little-used tool shed on the other side of the garden, there was a rusty old bow saw. It had been left by the previous owner. Crossing the garden to the tool shed sounded simple enough, but with two large trees that had tangled together, it was like fighting his way through a jungle.

As well as the bowsaw, there was an axe. Although the axe was rusty, it was quite sharp. Rupert retraced his path across the lawn. The bowsaw would not have cut through butter; it made a few scratch marks in the bark. Rupert lost his temper and started to attack the tree with the axe, not that he was particularly handy with it. Small chips flew from the tree. Rupert was being driven not so much by his temper, but by the desperation to rescue the chain saw. Etteringden Tool Hire would not be best pleased to know that he could not return the saw because it was stuck in the trunk of a tree.

Without warning, there was a loud crack, and the trunk of the third elm parted company with the stump. The chainsaw dropped out of its prison. The tree teetered for a moment, before falling into next-door's garden. Time was in slow motion as it headed towards the greenhouse and sliced it in half lengthways. The tree then bounced and rolled into the conservatory.

Rupert was congratulating himself on a job well done. Then it occurred to him that he did not want the garden to be hidden by a tangle of firewood. He hoped that the neighbours, who had recently moved there and whose names he did not know, hadn't noticed. They would not be that pleased.

Much to his surprise, the chainsaw worked. Rupert decided he needed to get on with clearing the pile of firewood that was on the lawn. After a couple of cuts, he could hear some angry shouting.

“What’s your game?” shouted the first neighbour. She did not look that friendly.

“Do you realise you have flattened our greenhouse?” the other shouted, “And you have wrecked our conservatory.”

“You can claim on insurance,” Rupert retorted. “That’s what it’s for. I’ve got work to be getting on with.”

“That’s not the point you idiot! We have the national collection of *Vinca minima siciliensis*. They were in our bloody greenhouse.”

Rupert started the chainsaw and started to cut through the trunk of one of the elms. As he had almost cut through it, the nose of the saw dug into the ground, spraying wet soil onto his neighbours. A stone cracked Rupert on the shin. He swore loudly. There was a loud bang and shower of sparks as the chain engaged some flint. The chain then piled up against the trunk. There was only so much abuse the tool could take.

A rather stocky man was approaching. Rupert did not recognise him, but he introduced himself as the site manager for the Glebelands Farm Housing development.

“What are you doing in my garden?” Rupert asked petulantly.

“This is not your garden,” the site manager replied. “The previous owner paid rent on the land from Mr Marton. He paid up front for a twenty-year lease. When we bought the land from Mr Marton, we were obliged to honour the lease. We could have put at least three plots there.”

“What do you want?”

“It’s more than just want. The first thing we are demanding of you is that you are to stop using that chainsaw at once.”

“Why?”

“Health and Safety at Work.”

“This is my private land. I am not working. I am a banker, not a gardener. I can do what I like in my own garden.”

“That’s where you are wrong, Mr Beldrake...”

“MY NAME IS BELL-DICK! I am Head of Corporate Banking at Glynn’s Bank in the City. I don’t know where you got the idea of my name being Beldrake.”

“Before you so rudely interrupted me, I was going to tell you again that you are the tenant of this plot, Mr Dick, not the owner. We are the landlord. Not only have you made unauthorised alterations in breach of the terms of your lease, but you have illegally cut down three protected elm-trees. Kew Gardens are going to be livid. What’s more, we were using a drone for a routine survey of the estate. We watched you with the chainsaw. It made our hair stand on end. We will show you the footage. Matt! Bring your laptop!”

“Right oh, Max,” replied Matt. He got the laptop from the van, and within a couple of minutes the footage from the drone was clearly visible. Rupert had not seen or heard the tiny machine hovering above the garden. The neighbours, who had not bothered to introduce themselves to Rupert, looked on in keen interest. The footage would be of interest to not only their insurance company, but also to their solicitor. Other equally interested recipients would be the Head of Arboriculture at Kew Gardens, and the regional office of the Health and Safety

Executive. At the very least, it would make a suitable addition to *Idiots at Work* on YouTube.

“Scary stuff, Mr Dick,” said Max. “Where did you get that chainsaw?”

“None of your business.”

“It’s here, Max,” Matt called out. “Etteringden Tool Hire.”

“Now, Mr Dick, Etteringden Tool Hire will have given you personal protection equipment...”

“They didn’t give me anything,” Rupert snapped. “They charged me an arm and a leg.”

“Watching your performance with the saw, I would not have been at all surprised that it would have cost you an arm and a leg.”

“Very funny,” Rupert said grumpily, “you should be on the telly with stuff like that.”

“It’s not at all funny, Mr Dick.” Max replied. “In my position as Health and Safety manager for Sussex Fine and Country Developments, I am ordering you to hand over that chainsaw. Failure to comply will render you liable to action at law for which the maximum penalty is a ten thousand pound fine, or six months, or both such penalties.”

“You don’t know who I am. I am Rupert Bell-Dick, Head of Corporate Banking at Glynn’s Bank. I could have you put out of business.”

“Bully for you. Now please hand over the chainsaw,” Max replied. Rupert reluctantly complied. “Thank you, Mr Dick. I don’t think you will get your deposit back, looking at the state of the machine. Now I also need to know where your PPE is.”

It was just visible under the tangle of firewood that was, until this afternoon, two of the three protected elm-trees.

“You can’t leave it like that,” said Max.

“You’ve taken my saw you idiot!” Rupert snapped.

“You will have to use a hand saw, or, better still, get someone to do it for you. You have until this time next week. We are already seriously considering terminating your lease as a result of your unauthorised felling of protected trees. If you do not comply, action will start immediately to repossess the site.”

“I have paid the deposit on a new garage. The contractors are coming next week to lay the drive. My partner is taking time off her work to supervise the job.”

“If you do that, Mr Dick, you will lose the tenancy immediately. You are within a whisker of losing it anyway, so you had better call off the contractors at once. As for the garage, you will have to put that somewhere else. Like the patch you have your hot-tub and pizza oven? Or cancel the order and lose your deposit.”

“You don’t seem to know that I am a top banker. I am Rupert Bell-Dick, Head of Corporate Banking at Glynn’s Bank. I have access to some of the top legal professionals in the country. I will instruct them on Monday and take whatever action I need to bleed your company dry, and you at the same time. This is my land, and I own it, and I will not be removed from it.”

“Mr Dick, if you want to follow that course of action, Sussex Fine and Country Developments will not only defend the case with our expert legal team, but we will take immediate action to repossess the plot that you are renting from us. I wouldn’t bother. I would put your efforts into getting contractors in to clear the mess up.

“By the way, the people at Kew will be down tomorrow morning to assess the damage you have caused. They are not happy bunnies, either.”

Rupert stomped off into Windhover Barn in high dudgeon. The first thing he was going to do was to check the legal work on their purchase of Windhover Barn to see what the status of the garden was. However, before he got to the filing cabinet, the telephone rang.

“Hi, Rupe, it’s me,” said Kathryn. “I’m not coming home tonight. We’re staying over in Guildford, and we are having a girls’ night out on the town.”

“What about my dinner?” Rupert replied peevishly.

“You can go down to the George and Dragon.”

“It will be fully booked.”

“Well, that’s your problem.”

“You could have told me you were going out,” Rupert replied plaintively.

“We’re free spirits here. We decided to go to Guildford on a whim. You can sort yourself out.”

“Thank you very much.”

“Look, I am a free spirit, answerable only to myself. If it feels good, I do it. If you don’t like that, that’s tough.”

Kathryn put the phone down.

Rupert’s day was about to get worse. What the legal documents stated about the purchase of Windhover Barn did not please him one little bit. The garden was indeed on a long lease from Mr Marton. The rent of £300 a year had been paid upfront. Therefore, Sussex Fine and Country Developments had

every right to evict him from the plot. There was no way he could cut up two twenty-metre-high elms that were forming a large pile of tangled firewood with the blunt old bowsaw – certainly not within a week.

As Max and Matt got back into their van, Max said, “Good name for him, Dickhead of Corporate Banking. You can tell the corporate from the size of him.”

“What a banker!” Matt replied.

The idea that he should get a contractor to remove several tonnes of elm firewood seemed fanciful to Rupert. He changed his mind after several minutes with the blunt bowsaw. Getting a contractor was impossible. This was due to the dearth of tradesmen in this highly expensive region. Those few that answered their telephones had a full diary. The one that could come soonest still gave a waiting time well into June. Rupert felt resigned to losing the majority of his garden. Kathryn would not be that pleased.

Nor for that matter were the people whose greenhouse he had crushed. They would get it on insurance, so they could take a running jump.

Not pleased was the way that Andrew Kingston, Head of Arboriculture at Kew Gardens, felt when he got the call about the three elms. In fact, he was thunderously angry. He called in his team, very apologetic about getting them out on a Sunday, but did not mince his words about the clown who had felled three trees of national scientific importance. They needed to get the trees cut up quickly so that they might be in with a chance of growing new trees from cuttings.

Shortly before ten, the team from Kew arrived at Glebelands Barns. The mess that awaited Kew was enough to

make any tree-lover weep. Andrew Kingston could see that Rupert was at home and rang the doorbell. Rupert was reluctant to come to the door, so the team got down to work. They had been asked to by Sussex Fine and Country Developments.

When he saw twenty men and women in hard hats and personal protection equipment swarming over the garden, Rupert was very keen not only to come to the door, but also to go through it towards what he still considered to be his. He ran over Glebelands Barns Avenue, shouting, “Who’s in charge of you clowns? Stop at once and get off my land.”

“You are the clown,” Andrew replied. “I am in charge. My name is Andrew Kingston, and I am the Head Arboriculturist at Kew Gardens.”

“I am Rupert Bell-Dick, Head of Corporate Banking at Glynn’s Bank in the City. And what is an arbry-ist when it’s at home,” Rupert retorted. The whole word was beyond him.

“It is a specialist in the scientific study, maintenance and management of trees. I don’t do corporate banking. Instead, I am looking for an explanation from you right now as to why you cut those three elms down.”

“Well, you’re not getting one,” Rupert replied petulantly, just as he had forty-five years before when he was in trouble with the headmaster and about to receive six of the best. “The explanation I want from you is why you and your goons are tramping about on my land.”

“Unlike you, I am going to give you an explanation why my men and women are on this land. Those elm trees were important specimens. They were completely resistant to Dutch Elm Disease which ravaged the vast majority of elms in the country and all the elms in Sussex. They were of great interest and the central part of a long-term study that has taken the best

part of forty years, which you have now ruined. We have come to recover what we can rescue. We are going to remove all of this at your expense.”

“Who gave you permission to come onto my land?”

“Sussex Fine and Country Developments – they are owners of this plot, and you are its tenant. They are going to evict you for this. We have worked with the previous owner, Mr Marton, and now Sussex Fine and Country Developments who bought the land off him.”

“What a load of fuss over three ugly elms!”

“Mr Dick, you don’t understand the scientific value of these trees. We have worked on them for forty years. They were shoots from a tree that was about two hundred years old.”

“Where the hell am I going to put my garage?”

“You can put it at the end of your gravel drive in front of your house.”

“What’s that lorry doing on my drive? I didn’t give permission for it to be there.”

“It’s turning round. It is going to take all this material back to Kew, so that we have at least a chance of undoing a tiny fraction of the damage you have done.”

“And how long is this bloody racket going to go on for?”

“As long as it takes. And you are going to be billed for every minute that it does take.”

Kathryn’s Mercedes pulled up on Glebelands Barns Avenue. She stomped into the garden and saw Rupert continuing to argue with what looked like the foreman.

“What’s going on here?” Kathryn demanded.

“We are having a conversation with your husband, Mrs Dick,” Andrew replied.

“I am not Mrs Dick!” Kathryn shouted. “I am Mr Bell-Dick’s partner.”

She said the word *partner* as if it meant an awful lot to her. She confirmed this by adding. “I am Ms Chetwynd.”

Neil, Dr Kingston’s Chief Forester, got out a booklet and wrote “Miss Cheating”

“Why can no one spell my name?” she shouted. “It is spelt C-H-E-T-W-Y-N-D.”

“I thought you said ‘Cheating’,” said Neil. “Sorry, Miss Chet-wind.”

“No!”

“You said it was ‘Cheating’, then you spell it ‘Chet-wind’. Which is it? Make your mind up.” Neil enjoyed winding up pompous people like Kathryn. He was certainly succeeding.

“Listen you imbecile, my name is spelt C-H-E-T-W-Y-N-D, and it’s pronounced ‘Cheating’. Do I have to spell it out for you.”

“You have done that already, Miss Chet-wind-Cheating.”

“It’s not ‘Miss’, either, it’s Ms!” Kathryn was on the verge of apoplexy. There was a sinister buzz to the word ‘Mzzz’.

“I think I get it now Mzzz Chet-wind-Cheating.”

“Are you taking the piss?” Kathryn yelled. She was at the height of high dudgeon. “Who’s in charge?”

“I am,” said Andrew. “For your interest, I am Dr Andrew Kingston, Head of Arboriculture at Kew Gardens. This is Neil Davidson, the Chief Forester at Kew Gardens.”

“Typical of people like you, you make up stupid titles for yourselves. May I remind you of your social positions? You are mere gardeners. I am from one of the foremost aristocratic families of Southern England. And my partner is Head of Corporate Banking at Glynn’s Bank in the City. You should show more respect. You should be doffing your hats to us.”

“Oh, Hoity Toity!” Neil retorted. “I was taught that real aristocrats were gentlemen and ladies. Real ladies treat others with respect which you are not doing.”

Kathryn was digging herself into an ever-deepening hole with all the ferocity of a burrowing warthog. She countered, “I don’t care what you think, Mr King, little people should obey the instructions of their superiors. And my first order to you is to get the lorry off my drive so that I can park my car on it. My second order is to get your idiots off my garden.”

“No can do,” replied Neil cheekily. “We have an important job to do. Your husband, Mr Dick, cut down these three elm trees which are of particular interest to Kew Gardens...”

“PARTNER!” Kathryn screamed.

“Of course, I’m so sorry your ladyship,” Neil replied even more cheekily. He was enjoying this, especially as the team had all gathered around to watch the show. “I will write out a hundred times ‘I must respect my betters, and I will address them properly’. I must remember the correct address, Mzz Chet-wind-Cheating.”

Kathryn screamed in a paroxysm of rage. The team sniggered. They had not seen such a comic performance for ages. A sarcastic applause rippled across the garden.

“Now get up, Ms Chetwynd, and calm down,” said Andrew Kingston. “I will explain to you what is going on. After

that I will expect an apology to my whole team for this display of bad manners.

“Your partner took it on himself to fell these three elm trees that are of considerable interest to us at The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew. They survived the pandemic of Dutch Elm Disease which devastated almost every elm in the country. They have immunity to the disease, and this project to study them has been going on for forty years.

“A couple of weeks ago, Laineshurst Tree Surgeons pulled out of a job here because they knew of the Tree Protection Order placed on the trees by North Sussex County Council at our request.”

“It’s our land; we can do what we like. We are free spirits, and we are answerable to nobody except ourselves. If my partner feels it’s good, he will do it.”

“This is the problem, Ms Chetwynd. It is not your land at all. The previous owner of Glebelands Farm, Mr Marton, granted a tenancy to the previous owner of your property, Windhover Barn, to use a small patch of his land as a garden. This was paid for up-front, which is why you have not had to pay any rent. Mr Marton was very keen to work with us. When he sold out to Sussex Fine and Country Developments, they were keen to help us too. We work with them very closely. Now this land is not yours; it belongs to Sussex Fine and Country Developments. They are going to take action to repossess the plot.

“Now our job is to recover as much viable material from the three trees as we can. We are clearing up the mess as well, which we are going to charge you for. It will cost you about £2000 + VAT per tree.”

“You said three, but there are only two.”

“The third tree has gone into that other garden and flattened the greenhouse and conservatory. Your neighbours are not very pleased, especially as they hold the national collection of *Vinca minima siciliensis*. The Royal Horticultural Society are none too pleased either.

“Your partner is not exactly flavour of the month.”

Kathryn did not apologise for her performance. She stomped back to the barn, calling Rupert in as well. She noticed a large tractor pulling into the lay-by which had been built almost up to the end wall of the barn. It was towing a large shredding machine for heavy duty forestry use. A second tractor was towing a trailer to receive the chippings from the brash.

“Rupert!” Kathryn shouted when they got in, “What the devil’s going on? Thank you very much. You have now lost us the garden.”

“I’ll get Barfords to sort it out. They’ll stop Sussex Fine and Country in their tracks. It’s our land.”

“Get the legal documentation for the house,” she snapped. What she found was not in the least bit pleasing. It was true, just as Rupert knew from last night. The relevant clauses had not miraculously changed. The previous owner had taken a tenancy on the relevant plot from Mr Marton and paid him up front for the duration of the lease. Rupert had uncharacteristically overlooked this detail in the rush to get the legal work done during the contracts race.

At that point, a loud grumbling came from the back wall, followed by what sounded like a large propeller-driven aeroplane being taxied towards the runway. The sound of brash being shredded was indescribable. It was impossible to hold a conversation in the barn.

“I bet Kingston did it deliberately,” Rupert grumbled. Kathryn ignored him.

Later, as Andrew and Neil got back into their van, Neil said, “Good name for him, Dickhead of Corporate Banking. You can tell the corporate from the size of him.”

“What a banker!” Andrew replied.

Back inside Windhover Barn, there was a furious row and Rupert spent the night on the sofa bed.

Kathryn had started to loathe the place. It had been sold on all its high-tech gadgets, but none of them worked. The place was looking tired, even though they had only been in there for seven years. The thatch was tatty. There were people in the new houses at the front of the barn. They could stare in at Kathryn and Rupert when he was there. They had children who were infernally noisy and often kicked footballs into her garden.

Rupert used to keep a pile of letters next to the computer, which he had opened over the weekend, and left there to deal with the following weekend, or a month later, or not at all. One evening, Kathryn noticed that the tray in which the letters were kept had fallen down the side of the desk; the cleaner must have knocked it off. She picked it up with the letters. Having a nosy streak to her, she had a look at them. What she found was not very pleasing. From a woman called Caroline, there was a demand for the next year’s school fees for their nine-year-old daughter, Francesca, who was at a very expensive girls’ school. It took a while for this to sink in. Kathryn had never had a daughter, and her ex-son was now dead. Rupert had been paying maintenance for Francesca without her knowledge. Another letter from Caroline was demanding two thousand pounds to enable Francesca to go on a school trip to Italy.

A second letter was from another woman, Bethany, who had just given birth to a baby girl, Adriana. Since Rupert was the father, Bethany was calling on him to pay her maintenance of five thousand pounds a month, to enable her to pay nursery fees so she could go back to work after her maternity leave. If there were no response, she would consult her solicitors.

Kathryn had caught him at last. She had suspicions that Rupert was being a naughty boy. She wondered how many times in the last ten years Rupert had been in bed with another woman. She could confront him, but he would go all coy and deny it completely. He would go mad if he knew that she had gone through his letters, even though they had been kept in the open.

No, Kathryn would get hold of Sebastian's estate and buy herself a little place near her family in West Sussex and tell Rupert to fuck off. She would get a little something from Windhover Barn that would boost her pension. At least Sebastian had been some use to her.

## Chapter 14

Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> April 2022

A fat envelope from the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary was awaiting Ewan. It was addressed to Jordan. Ewan opened it. A patient satisfaction questionnaire fell out along with the usual bland letter that started, “Dear Patient...”

The covering letter was badly word-processed, being littered with errors in basic spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Ewan initially thought it was a mistake, a typical administrative error for which the DMI were notorious. The name and address fields had been already filled in with that kind of irritating wide rounded girly handwriting that suggested that the owner of the hand was young, bored, and disinterested in her work. It was clear that Jordan was its intended recipient.

Ewan’s initial reaction was to shred the thing; he had a good quality shredder, which was under-used. He kept all sorts of important documentation, just in case he “got clobbered by the taxman”<sup>13</sup>. Something made him change his mind. Benedict Lister, a friend of Jordan’s from university, had come over to Ewan’s flat to do a run. They did a lot of running together, both as Haries and on their own. Ewan and Ben had become quite close since Jordan had passed away. Ben had been made redundant from his job and had taken up a temporary job as a porter at the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary. He had been there for about six months. Fortunately, he had not done that shift on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, when Jordan had been brought in. None the less, he had heard a lot of rather unpleasant banter about a gay man who had been brought to the mortuary after a fatal road

---

<sup>13</sup> (*Author’s note*: Dad started to keep detailed records of everything when he was seventeen. He continued this habit to the end of his days, and there were many boxes of his papers stored in the attic of Brewster House. They were also kept in digital form.)

accident. It was only when Ewan had told him that he realised the young man was Ewan's boyfriend and soon to be fiancé, Jordan.

A rather unpleasant feature of being a hospital porter at the DMI was the gallows humour that went with it. The trolleys to carry the departed patients were often referred to as "meat wagons" and the patients carried on their final solemn journey from the ward were called either "meat", or "carcasses". Sometimes the bodies were desecrated by placing items on them that were insulting to them or their religion. He found out that Jordan's body had been desecrated in this way by having a note, "Gay. Handle with care", placed on it. Homophobic terms were frequently used by the mortuary staff and the porters. They had made considerable fun about Ewan having come to the hospital in his running gear.

Benedict did not fit easily into the team. He tried to bring his concerns to his supervisor but was given very short shrift. He was subjected to a campaign of bullying and intimidation. An attempt at whistleblowing to the Chief Executive was met with his dismissal, "We'll move you to where they can't get at you. Pick up your P45 from Human Resources as soon as this meeting is finished and leave the premises."

Benedict had a deep debt of ingratitude to the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary. What had arrived at Ewan's flat would give him a chance to repay a very small part of it.

After their run, Aidan was coming for lunch. Afterwards the three young men had a wonderful time deciding the responses to the questionnaire:

Question 1: The length of time that I had to wait to be seen was reasonable.

*Disagree: I was never seen. I was put into a filing cabinet drawer. I was left there for two weeks.*

**Question 2:** I was involved and informed in decisions about my care.

*Disagree: Nobody told me a thing. I was put in this cold drawer and opened up without my permission. As for care, what care?*

**Question 3:** I was involved in the planning of my care (or my child's care if applicable).

*Disagree: I don't think my care was planned at all. They made it up as they went along. As for having a child, I was a bit young for that. Additionally, I had mumps when I was in my teens and was made sterile as a result.*

**Question 4:** The health care person listened to me.

*Disagree: No one listened to me. I had a communication problem, something to do with being dead.*

**Question 5:** The health care person explained the treatment / health advice in a way that I could understand

*Disagree: Dead people (in your terms – stiffs) find it quite difficult to follow explanations. Your health care persons have, I think, realised this and have given up bothering.*

**Question 6:** I was given enough privacy when treated or advised.

*Disagree: I was taken out of the filing cabinet drawer and placed none-too-gently on a ceramic table in a large room with several people around me. No advice was offered. But there was plenty of vulgar banter.*

**Question 7:** I was seen in a clean and safe environment.

*Disagree: I can't say that the mortuary was particularly clean. Somebody came down occasionally and redistributed the dirt with a grubby looking mop. Sometimes the place stank to high heaven. As for safe, there must be lots of bugs down there. It's also rather cold in those filing cabinet drawers.*

**Question 8:** I had confidence and trust in the health care person who was treating / advising me.

*Disagree: Dead people tend to have rather limited confidence and trust with health care persons. Death is, of course, the ultimate expression of poor health.*

**Question 9:** I was treated with dignity at all times.

*Disagree: I was referred to as “the meat”. A note was placed on me saying “Gay. Handle with care.” I was also referred to as [Ewan reproduced a number of extremely foul terms] among other vulgar homophobic comments.*

*A letter was sent to my fiancé which said that I was blocking up space in the mortuary and that if I were not removed, I would be disposed of by the City Council. My fiancé was also told that my possessions would be disposed of as well.*

*He was referred to as a “Jessie”.*

**Question 10:** The information I received about my health care helped me to understand my condition / my family’s health.

*Disagree: Nobody gave me any information, but dead people tend not to understand their condition that well. As for family, my partner (soon to be fiancé) picked up an infection which knocked him flat for several days.*

**Question 11:** My family/carer were involved by staff in planning my care (with my consent).

*Disagree: My fiancé was kept in the dark for at least two weeks about what was happening to me. While tests were done quickly, the autopsy took a long time to be performed. This was due to the pathologist going to meetings, playing golf, a conference, and then on holiday. During this time, diddly-squat happened to me. Many days overdue, the report went to the Procurator Fiscal’s office, and to my fiancé accompanied by a rather unpleasant letter.*

**Question 12:** My personal information was treated confidentially.

*Disagree: My case was treated as a standing joke shared between the porters and mortuary. My fiancé too was treated as a joke; they made a mockery of his accent. They refused to believe he was twenty-three, even though he carried proof of age identity and his driving licence. On showing the latter, my fiancé was asked if this was his moped licence.*

**Question 13:** The treatment (or advice/ support) that I received was effective.

*Disagree: I was dead, so that speaks volumes for the effectiveness of the treatment I was not offered.*

**Question 14:** I would recommend the service to my family and friends.

*Disagree: I would not recommend them to come here unless they had a death-wish.*

**Please add any other comments or suggestions that you would like to make below:**

*As Jordan is dead, he cannot make this statement for himself. As I am Jordan's fiancé, I will give my experiences.*

*I found every aspect of visiting the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary thoroughly unpleasant. The receptionist was surly and frequently overstepped the mark of what was rude and discourteous. The hospital was dirty, and the décor was shabby. There was no alcohol gel available for visitors. I was treated with a certain amount of disrespect within the mortuary department. They seemed to me to have no respect for the feelings of patients' loved ones.*

*It is hard enough to see the love of my life laid out lifeless on the slab. For staff to make a mockery of him is intolerable. I am informed that this is very much the ethos of the place. I know that a whistle-blower was dismissed for bringing up his concerns. The sooner the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary is visited by Healthcare Improvement Scotland, the better.*

*I have kept the correspondence and the notes I have made about my dealings with the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary. Unless I have a satisfactory response, I will start a formal complaint procedure to Healthcare Improvement Scotland.*

Ewan, Aidan, and Benedict found it funny at first, but within seconds Ewan saw Jordan's broken body laid out on the slab. He saw the note "Gay – Handle with care" with the smiley face emoticon. He had heard a couple of porters sniggering in the background. He remembered talking to the police officers, after which they had left him in that terrifying place. The whole

scene replayed in his head, second by second. Ewan went quiet and withdrawn.

The porters thought it funny that Ewan had come into the hospital in running clothes. Ben had told him how they found what he had said very droll and made fun of his accent. They had accompanied it with limp wrists and other homophobic gestures. Ewan's rather effeminate manner had become a standing joke in the porters' room. Since Ben knew Ewan, it had been challenging, to say the least. Somehow Ben had let slip that Ewan was a mate of his, and that set up an atmosphere of homophobic banter that was targeted at him.

As the scene replayed, tears poured down Ewan's face. He quietly said, "I have had a flashback. Let me get a grip on myself."

Aidan hugged Ewan, who buried his face into his brother's chest. Although Ewan was taller than Aidan, he was still his little brother and felt it.

It had only been three months since Ewan had seen the mortuary for real, with Jordan's smashed up body on the mortuary table, about the length of the school Spring Term. He had got into the phase where he had reluctantly accepted what had happened. It still had the power to hurt, and to hurt like hell.

Jordan was the love of his life, an exceptionally beautiful young man with a temperament to match. Their love was deeper than the shallow liaisons that passed for commitment in the eyes of many people of his age – a snog, followed by a bonk. Ewan and Jordan were homoromantic and asexual. They were both touchy-feely and had deeply enjoyed their intimacy. However, the idea of any sexual act thoroughly repelled them both. They had agreed on that when they were teens. Their intimacy was very private and very special. They had committed themselves to each other for the rest of their lives shortly after leaving school.

That lifelong commitment had been shattered by a Cheshire county-set airhead and that intimacy had been snatched away. He missed that feeling of contentment when he lay with his head on Jordan's chest and Jordan stroked his hair and face. He could hear Jordan's heart beating gently. The Jordan-sized hole would take a long time to fill. It had barely started. The receipt of the questionnaire had caused some of the repair to crumble away.

This would be the way of things for months.

Two weeks later, a letter from the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary arrived at Ewan's flat. As usual, Ewan opened it with a knife. Its contents were not at all pleasing.

*Dear Mr Walker,*

*We are in receipt of your completed questionnaire intended for the late Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melbuish.*

*Our first observation is that the questionnaire was intended for Mr Melbuish, not you. You had no right whatsoever to answer for him.*

*The second observation is to say that the contents were generally flippant and derisory. At some points, some phrases transgressed into obscenity. Your answers show that you are clearly rather immature.*

*You have picked up a lot of material from an ex-employee who was dismissed because he did not fit in. We considered that his continued employment would disrupt the working environment for his colleagues, many of whom have worked at the hospital for many years. A good number were here before you were born.*

*We therefore repudiate the content of the questionnaire with the contempt which it deserves. We would also warn you against approaching Healthcare Improvement Scotland. They would take our submissions more seriously than those of an irresponsible young man.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Norma Sbrille (Ms)*

*Chief Executive*

Ewan was angry. It was hard enough to bear Jordan's loss without his being subjected to abuse from an institution that should have been about caring for patients and their loved ones. This one seemed to care about outcomes and targets; a dead patient was a negative outcome that would affect the performance target. Patients were people. Jordan was not just a young person in a mortuary who was something that used up resources. He was deeply loved and cherished not just by Ewan, but also by his father and grandparents. He hadn't chosen for his car to be run into by an airhead who had taken alcohol and Class A drugs. Allegedly. She was not guilty until proven so, and she had the right to a fair trial.

In England, the hospital would have fallen in the league tables. Thank God, they didn't have them in Scotland. From everything that Ewan had picked up at work, and his own experience, the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary was failing to do its fundamental duty, which was to care for patients and their loved ones. Instead, it seemed to regard them as an inconvenience.

Ewan collected all the evidence he had and typed a four-page letter to Healthcare Improvement Scotland. He then wrote a letter to the Chief Executive of the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary:

*Dear Ms Sbrille*

*I have taken note of your letter of Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> April.*

*Firstly, your use of the term “late Jordan Melbuish” suggests that you knew that Jordan was dead. Why are you sending in a questionnaire addressed to a living patient, who has in reality passed away before questioning the right of a loved one to fill it in? The answer is that a dead patient cannot fill in a questionnaire, especially one that is going to be critical of your hospital.*

*Secondly, I agree with your comments about flippant, derisory, and obscene.*

***Flippant*** as it revealed the absurdity of your institution’s sending out a satisfaction questionnaire to a dead person. I am sure that it was an administrative error. I must tell you that it was upsetting to me as a bereaved loved one.

***Derisory*** as I, as a bereaved loved one, received a letter (copy enclosed) telling me to pick up Jordan’s body, otherwise it would be disposed of. When picking up Jordan’s property, I was subjected to rudeness by your receptionist. After that, when asked to show identity at the mortuary, I was asked whether I was eighteen (I was twenty-three at the time) and when I offered my driving licence, I was asked “Is that your moped licence, sonny?” I was also referred to as a Jessie.

*I do look young for my age; it’s a family trait. I therefore carry a proof of age card at all times. I also admit that, since I am tall and rather skinny, it gives me a slightly effeminate demeanour.*

***Obscene***, as phrases used by your staff included obscene homophobic phrases such as those shown on the response to the questionnaire.

*Your handling of this is high-handed, showing insensitivity at a particularly difficult time. You clearly hold me in a certain amount of contempt, not only because I am young, but also because of my and Jordan’s same sex attraction.*

*I am informing you now that I have made a formal submission to Healthcare Improvement Scotland including all my records of dealings with your staff and you as Chief Executive. You will no doubt be hearing from them in the near future.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Ewan Walker BA LLB (Edin)*

On the following Monday, Ewan was asked by Mr McCullough to take on several cases where clients had had bad experiences with the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary. It was going to be a high-profile case to be heard in Edinburgh Sherriff Court. Mr McCullough assured him that there was no conflict of interest, and that he had done the right thing to refer their behaviour towards him to Healthcare Improvement Scotland. Of course, it would not affect his case preparation that they had referred to him as an irresponsible and immature young man. He would not mention it at all when he carried out his cross-examination of Ms Shrille, the Chief Executive.

It was not just Ewan Walker who received displeasing correspondence. Kathryn Chetwynd was alone at Windhover Barn doing work from home. Among the usual junk mail, and bills, two other letters arrived. One was in a cheap brown local authority envelope, while the second was in an envelope that exuded quality. The same applied to the paper the letters were written on. The first, addressed to Mr Beldrake, was a summons to attend court for the unauthorised removal of three elm trees.

The second came from a familiar source, Barford and Partners in the City of London. Normally letters from Barford indicated that they had managed to squeeze a litre of water from a dry cloth on Rupert's or Kathryn's behalf. Kathryn at first thought that they had managed to twist Stephen's arm sufficiently so that he had signed over Jordan's entire will to her. She opened it eagerly.

*Dear Mr Bell-Dick and Ms Chetwynd*

*We have been instructed by Sussex Fine and Country Developments to terminate the lease on the plot of land registration NS26---. The lease will determine one calendar month from the date of this letter.*

*You are aware that the lease of this plot was granted by the previous owner of Glebelands Farm, Mr A Marton, to the previous owner of your property, Mr and Mrs K Burton. Mr and Mrs Burton paid the rent for the whole term of the lease; therefore, there was no rent payable by you.*

*However, the current landlords found that you had carried out unauthorised works to the plot, including the felling of three elm trees. You also had engaged contractors to lay a drive and build a garage against the conditions of the lease. Although these latter works were not carried out, the landlords still hold you in breach of the lease, since you did not intend to approach them in order to gain approval.*

*Additionally, the behaviour by both of you towards the landlords and their agent was deemed to be unacceptable.*

*The cost of this letter is payable by you. Please forward the amount on the invoice at your earliest convenience.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Kelly Donaldson*

*(Head of Property Department)*

There was an invoice accompanying the letter for £500 plus VAT.

Kathryn picked up the telephone. She did not like using the landline, but Wapplesfield was still a mobile phone not-spot. The nearest mobile mast was on the Speak-Easy network. It had failed some months before and still had not been repaired. She rang Rupert's mobile. It rang twice before being cut off. She swore and returned to her work on the computer.

It took two more attempts for her to get through. She was not at all pleased. “Rupert,” she snapped, “what the bloody hell’s going on?”

“What the bloody hell is going on, Kathryn?” Rupert snapped. “You rang me while I was interviewing a candidate. It was so embarrassing. If a candidate’s mobile goes off when I’m interviewing, I show them the door. They are warned to turn mobiles off before coming in to see me.”

“That’s your fault for leaving on your mobile. Do you realise that Fine and Country have given us a month’s notice to quit my garden?”

“It’s my garden as well,” Rupert replied petulantly.

“You do bugger all in it, except cut down trees. You go to your solicitors and tell them that we’re not moving off it. It belongs to us. That’s what you told me. You did all the paperwork. Go and sort it out.”

Later that day, Rupert obeyed his orders, having made an appointment at Barford and Partners. Normally they were pleased to act on his behalf; it meant that it was a commission to squeeze someone dry, regardless of whether justice was served. This time they were a bit coy, but Mrs Donaldson was there to meet him.

“Very sorry, Mr Bell-Dick,” she said, “but we cannot handle this case for you. You see, we are acting for Sussex Fine and Country Developments. I can’t act for them and you at the same time. It would look rather odd in court, to say the least.

“Additionally, you will remember that you signed the lease for that garden from Mr Marton when we did the conveyancing for you.”

“I never did any such thing,” Rupert replied.

“I think you did, actually,” said Mrs Donaldson. She got out a pile of legal documents marked Transfer from Burton to Bell-Dick. The lease on the garden was there, as was Rupert’s signature. “I have to advise you against fighting this case.”

“It’s not fair!” Rupert sounded like a small child.

“You can fight the case on the basis that you have complied with all the conditions of the lease. However, I am informed that you felled three elm trees that were of considerable scientific interest. I am also told you are facing legal action from North Sussex County Council as a result of your actions. The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew are none-too-pleased either. I would save your money if I were you and accept it.”

“My partner is not going to be very pleased.”

“No, I don’t suppose she will be. Would you like me to ring her and explain the situation, or would you prefer to talk to her?”

“Ring her.”

Kelly Donaldson was accustomed to making difficult calls. This one was hellish. Rupert could hear the screeching that was the stock-in-trade of his partner while she was having a tantrum. He was glad he was not going back to Windhover Barn that evening. He was bound to get an earful before the day was out.

He was wrong. It came almost immediately. Kathryn demanded to speak to him at once, and Kelly Donaldson was glad to pass the receiver over.

A few weeks later, Rupert was going to take a couple of days off, not for the pleasure of seeing Kathryn, but he had an appointment at Ettingden Magistrates’ Court for the wilful destruction of three elm trees of special scientific value. Kathryn

ignored Rupert, speaking to him only sufficiently to get by. Rupert was used to this. He said nothing but was quite looking forward to blowing Kathryn's argument about Jordan's (as he now thought of him, if he did at all) will during the forthcoming case at Buchanan Sheriff Court.

Rupert's case at Etteringden Magistrate's Court did not take long. Although he pleaded not guilty, evidence from witnesses and drones demonstrated to the magistrates' satisfaction that the trees of considerable scientific interest had been felled in breach of the tree preservation order. Rupert Bell-Dick was fined sixty thousand pounds and ordered to pay costs. The whole escapade had cost him the best part of eighty grand. For him it was an inconvenience, but he would recover it all in a few insider deals with a couple of hedge funds. He had made millions on short selling, so picking up eighty grand would be a piece of cake.

Three weeks later at Windhover Barn, a two-metre-high fence went up one morning around what had been the garden. At one end two gates were installed. Within a day the topsoil had been taken away and what had been a (badly damaged) lawn was now a patch of mud. The following day, excavators were digging trenches for gas, water, and electricity for six small semi-detached houses. They were small in every way except for the prices (starting at £599995). Kathryn longed to get rid of Windhover Barn, but Rupert would not agree. They had paid two and a half million for the place. It was now worth eight hundred thousand. The barn would have been worth more if it was building land, but it had Grade Two listing.

## Chapter 15

### Monday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2022

The trial diet of this serious case started on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2022 at Edinburgh High Court of Justiciary. As Ewan had made so much progress with the Duchess of Midlothian cases, Mr McCullough instructed him to attend the court case against Celia Barwick Green. He knew it would be hard. He was instructed to attend the court, not just as a victim, but also a valuable learning experience in the jurisprudence of solemn proceedings. Ewan would feed back the progress of the trial to Stephen.

Since the indictments could result in a prison sentence of more than five years, the process was to be supervised by a High Court judge. The judge was Lord Commissioner of Justiciary, The Hon Lady Samantha Whifflet.

Celia Barwick-Green sat in the dock looking rather haughty. It could have been that she was in denial of the serious accusations made against her in the indictment. It could have been that she was annoyed at having to cancel her holiday in Italy. Her body language was noticed by the Sheriff Clerk who reminded Mrs Barwick-Green that this was a solemn proceeding before a panel that, should she be found guilty of the charges on the indictment, would result in a custodial sentence.

The panel of fifteen jurors was sworn in. The list of indictments against Celia Louise Barwick-Green was long:

- Causing the death by dangerous driving of Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish.
- Causing the death by dangerous driving of Lucinda Helen Abbott.

- Causing injury by dangerous driving to Christopher Paul Abbott, Helen Peel Abbott, and Michael David Abbott.
- Driving under the influence of alcohol.
- Driving under the influence of Class A drugs.
- Furious and reckless driving without regard to the safety of other road users.
- Driving while using a mobile telephone.
- Driving without due care and attention.
- Multiple instances of serious speeding.
- Attempting to leave the scene of an accident.
- Supplying Class A drugs.

“How do you plead?” said the Clerk of Court.

“Not guilty to all charges.”

It was going to be a trial that would last several days. There were no fewer than thirty witnesses for the case brought about by the Procurator Fiscal. The first part of the trial involved the establishment of the facts for the panel of jurors.

On Sunday 23rd January 2022, the accused drove a Range Rover SV Autobiography south from Queensbury Hotel in the north-west Edinburgh suburb of Barnton. The accused had been at a party on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> January in which she allegedly consumed a considerable amount of alcohol. She had also allegedly consumed several doses of cocaine, by snorting lines.

She had intended to leave the Queensbury Hotel early on Sunday morning as her daughter was competing in horse trials in Cheshire. However, she had overslept and left late. The vehicle tracker within the car had been turned on accidentally when the sat-nav had been programmed. It indicated a considerable amount of driving well above the speed limits. The car had been

driven at speeds of up to 180 km/h<sup>14</sup> on the A720 road, the Edinburgh City Bypass. These speeds were confirmed by several speed cameras.

The car then was driven furiously down the A729 road, where its speed was measured at up to 150 km/h. As one police officer said, “the tracker and dash-cam sang like canaries”. The car was driven very aggressively, with frequent tailgating. Confirmation of the aggressive driving came from several speed cameras and dash-cam footage from several motorists, as well as the car’s own.

Near the village of Tubberbutts in the Borders, the A729 had a straight stretch of about 800 metres, along which the car was driven at speeds of up to 130 km/h, passing a long queue of slow-moving traffic held up by a set of temporary traffic lights that was in position at the edge of Tubberbutts village. The car barged several times into the queue to allow oncoming traffic to pass. The dash-cam picked up the blaring of horns as tempers were frayed by this piece of rank bad driving. It also picked up the mobile-phone conversation Celia Barwick Green had with her friend Sophie Kitchener. The speed of the car was close on 100 km/h as she hurled it into Lennerton Lane, striking a Mazda 3 car a glancing blow tearing off the front part of the car. This made the Range Rover tilt to the left. It impacted with a silver Volkswagen Polo travelling in the opposite direction at a speed of 78 km/h. The two lines of the carriageway were separated on the junction to allow traffic to turn right safely. There was no way that a driver could pull into the middle of the road to avoid a car coming out-of-control in the opposite direction. The wreckage of the Polo was hurled backwards into a black Ford S-max which suffered extensive damage. The Range Rover finally demolished a garden wall belonging to a property called Corner Cottage.

---

<sup>14</sup> The parliament of the soon to be independent Scotland legislated for full metrication early in 2021 with a change-over period of three years.

As a result, Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish, 25, sustained injuries from which he died in the operating theatre of the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary. Lucinda Helen Abbott, 38, died of her injuries ten days later in the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

The police described the tests they had done. The alcohol level was on the legal limit; it must have been over the limit when the accused left the hotel. The level of Class A drugs was well above the legal limit.

The interview was played in which the accused attempted to put the blame on the driver of the silver car who was an irresponsible young man who was driving too damned fast. Throughout the interview there had been a consistent denial of responsibility for what had happened. The accused was much more anxious to get back to Cheshire to attend her daughter's equestrian event.

Recordings of the emergency calls were replayed to the court, including the police conversations with the control room.

There followed an account of the road traffic accident investigation, including a detailed description of the damage sustained by all vehicles. A video clip was played that showed the scene of the accident immediately after the police had arrived, along with the rescue and salvage operation. All the damaged vehicles were shown later in the garage to which they had been recovered. The most severely damaged was the silver Polo. It was barely recognisable as a car.

In the public gallery, Ewan Walker wondered how much more he could take. He was glad Stephen was not there; he would have found it unbearable.

Dash-cam footage was played, including the dash-cam in Jordan's silver Polo. It showed the Range Rover turning over in front, skidding a few metres on its side before smashing into the Polo with a very loud metallic bang. Surprisingly the dash-cam continued to record after the impact. It picked up Jordan groaning with pain. Then a female voice was heard berating him.

"Thank you very much. Look what you have done to my car. You were driving far too fast. I've got to get down to Cheshire you fucking idiot!"

The tirade was then drowned out by other shouting. Then there were more groans, cries and the occasional expletives. It was little wonder. The dash-cam then failed, sparing any more distress. At this point the body cameras were played, showing the rescue of the Abbott family. After that Jordan's rescue was shown using body worn cameras, including the paramedics encouraging him to keep going, the insertion of the saline drip, the blood transfusion, the oxygen mask, his careful removal from the smashed-up car, and his transfer to the air-ambulance that had just arrived. That he was still conscious and in great pain was particularly distressing for Ewan.

For a moment he glared at the author of Jordan's misfortune. She had a haughty look of contempt on the proceedings. She was in denial of what she had done. Momentarily a feeling of utter loathing passed across Ewan. He wanted her to do the rest of her natural in the slammer. He would have liked to punch her hard in the face. Firstly, it would have ended his career as a lawyer, and the little bitch was not worth it. Secondly his thoughts, though entirely natural, were simply unchristian. Thirdly, she was entitled to a fair hearing and was innocent until proven guilty beyond all reasonable doubt. Distressing too were the recordings made inside the air ambulance as Jordan was not far from slipping away.

It was just as bad for Stephen Melhuish. At least Ewan had a large and supportive family. Stephen had his parents, but his ex-wife was a vixen who was only interested in Jordan, or Sebastian, as she called him, if she deigned to mention him at all, her son, because she wanted to get her grubby little mitts on the compensation that would be paid into Jordan's estate.

Ewan would have happily fled the court back to the safety of the offices of Johnston MacLean and Partners. It was essential that he should sit it out. If he were to advise potential clients for whom life had doled out a rotten hand, at least he would know the intense pain that they were going through. Ewan wanted to know that Jordan got justice.

Ewan invited Stephen back to the flat, but Stephen wanted to get back to the hotel. It was getting too much for him, but he too was determined to ensure that his son got the justice he deserved.

When Ewan got back to the flat, there was a letter awaiting him. He opened it with his usual care. It was handwritten.

*Dear Mr Walker*

*I have taken the liberty of contacting you, having been allowed to trace you as the partner of the late Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish. My son, James, is thirty, and on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> January this year was given a new kidney that is a perfect match. This kidney was donated by Sebastian, who was carrying a donor card. James is now considerably better after his treatment.*

*My wife and I wish to thank Sebastian most sincerely for donating his organs. The circumstances of his passing are most tragic, especially given the fact that it was his twenty-fifth birthday. However, he has given the blessing of further life to several other young people.*

*I know that you will still be feeling the pain and grief of your loss. My wife and I hope very much that you will find comfort in the gifts that Sebastian has so generously given.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Jonathan and Helen Pascoe.*

There were tears in Ewan's eyes as he read the letter. He immediately replied:

*Dear Mr and Mrs Pascoe*

*Thank you very much for your kind letter. I am really pleased to hear of Sebastian's final gift. I knew that he carried a donor card, and I knew that he intended to donate his organs. I am delighted to hear of James' continued recovery and wish him many years of good health for the future.*

*I knew Sebastian (whom I knew as Jordan) from school. He was my closest friend, and our friendship grew into love. We committed ourselves to each other for the rest of our lives just after we left school. We were due to get engaged on Saturday, 26<sup>th</sup> February, which was the day before my twenty-fourth birthday.*

*I am slowly getting used to life without Jordan, but it is difficult at times, for Jordan was a very special young man. I am greatly comforted that his donation ensures he lives on in James.*

*I have taken the liberty of showing your kind letter to Mr Stephen Melhuish, Jordan's father.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Ewan Walker*

The next morning Ewan showed the letter to Stephen, who was as touched as Ewan was.

The trial was now into its third day. This involved more police evidence, witness statements, and more dash-cam footage. To Ewan, it was clear that Mrs Barwick-Green was as guilty as f... No! She was innocent until proven guilty beyond all reasonable doubt. Ewan reminded himself that she was entitled to a fair trial.

The Macer<sup>15</sup> summoned each witness in turn. There were many of them. Without exception, each told the same story of a large teal Range-Rover sports utility vehicle being driven aggressively and at an excessive speed, frequently tail-gating other motorists, and overtaking on dangerous corners. On a couple of occasions, on-coming motorists had to pull over to avoid being involved in a head-on collision. (This was not an option for Jordan due to the layout of the road at the Lennerton Lane junction.) The blaring of horns was clear.

The most harrowing part for Ewan was to hear of the litany of injuries that Jordan had suffered. He knew about them, but it still was painful to take in. It was just as painful for Stephen, and Mr Christopher Abbott who was attending court.

The foreman of the jury was writing notes in shorthand as fast as she could. Ewan had an amazingly retentive memory that enabled him to retain all sorts of detail. Nevertheless, he always wrote things up when he got home.

When Ewan got home that evening, there were two more letters awaiting him from grateful families, to which he immediately replied. Although many Generation Z would have considered writing hand-written letters as rather quaint and old fashioned, Ewan felt that a hand-written letter showed that he cared. He also allowed himself to take some pride in his very neat and beautiful handwriting.

---

<sup>15</sup> The macer in a Scottish court is the court officer who ensures that all witnesses are summoned at the appropriate time. S/he also carries the mace that is placed before the judge to show that the court is in session.

The fourth day of the process was given over to the defence case. Celia Barwick-Green had appointed a lawyer from Cheshire who had little idea that Scottish Law was rather different to English. Ewan considered that his jurisprudence left something to be desired. He did make a brave attempt at the defence of his client, but the overwhelming weight of evidence pointed towards his client's guilt.

Mrs Barwick-Green's evidence maintained that the driver of the silver car (a Golf GTI) ran into her because he was driving well above the speed limit. The impact was at least twenty-five metres north of the Lennerton Lane junction, which explained why the Range Rover, locked together with the Polo, had careered out of control into the Mazda, then into the wall of Corner Cottage.

She could not explain why there was no wreckage at her supposed point of impact. Nor could she explain why the shattered bumpers, headlights, and other detritus belonging to a silver Volkswagen Polo were twenty metres on the Tubberbutts side of the junction, mixed in with rubble from the wall. She argued that the detritus must have come from her car. This was countered by the fact that her car's colour was teal (a dark blue green). She tried to argue that all the detritus from the Polo stuck to her car and was dumped at the point at which it had been found.

Her solicitor and barrister had advised her to plead guilty; she would have had a discount on her sentence for pleading thus. She would have none of it, so her barrister tried his best to cross examine the witnesses. It was a lame attempt. He could find no inconsistency with the accounts. However, Mrs Barwick-Green stood by her account, stubbornly defending the indefensible. She maintained that if Jordan (she could not bring herself to give his

name) had been driving more slowly, none of this would have happened. She would have turned safely into Lennerton Lane and would now be on holiday in Italy before her daughter got back from boarding school in Shrewsbury. Instead, she was wasting her time here.

When asked why she considered Sebastian Melhuish to have caused the accident, she replied that any young man called Sebastian Jordan was likely to drive like an idiot, particularly as he had a VW Golf GTI. This led to a collective muttering in court and Lady Whifflet banged her gavel for silence.

She then accused the young man of being drunk and having taken drugs. This was countered by the Procurator Fiscal's advocate who stated firmly that there was no evidence whatever of alcohol or drugs in Jordan's blood. He also pointed out that Jordan had never taken drugs.

There was more half-hearted defence cross-examination, before the accused was cross-examined in more detail by the advocate for the Procurator Fiscal. It was not difficult to demolish the accused's case; it crumbled into dust.

The final summing up was carried out on Friday morning. The advocate for the Procurator Fiscal had little to do other than to state that the driving of the accused was appalling, conducted at grossly excessive speeds, and aggressive to other road users. There was strong evidence of excessive alcohol and Class A drugs. The accused had been recorded using a mobile telephone, as well as being distracted by fiddling with a sat nav. The mobile phone records indicated that Celia Barwick-Green had been talking on the phone at the time. There was no reason to have driven in this way other than to get back to an equestrian event at which her daughter was competing.

As a result of this selfish behaviour, there had been a very destructive road traffic accident in which a promising young man and a devoted mother had lost their lives. To add insult to the injury endured by Jordan Melhuish's loved ones, the accused had consistently attempted to put the blame on him.

The defence case took little summing up; the accident was caused by Mr Melhuish who was driving at excessive speed, possibly under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs. Mrs Barwick-Green was a well-respected member of Cheshire society and very prominent in equestrian circles.

At lunchtime, the panel of fifteen jurors was sent out to consider their verdict and the court was adjourned. It took no more than three hours for the panel to return the verdicts. Celia Barwick-Green had been found guilty on all counts but one. The charge concerning the alleged supply of Class A drugs had not been proven.

Celia Barwick-Green looked genuinely surprised. Lady Whifflet adjourned the case until Monday morning, 24<sup>th</sup> May for Victim Impact Statements. Celia Barwick-Green was released on bail of £50000, paid for by her husband, having been warned that she was likely to face a custodial sentence and should bring a bag of clothes and possessions on Monday.

Christopher Paul Abbott was first to deliver his statement. In it he explained how he had been married for fifteen years. The family were travelling back from a wedding south of the border. He remembered the horror of seeing the accused's teal Range Rover attempting to turn onto Lennerton Lane at very high speed and smashing into Jordan Melhuish's silver Polo. The Polo crumpled before him, before being driven into his car. His wife caught the full impact. He had flashbacks to the accident, including when he had given evidence in court. Although he and

his two children had sustained injury, they were recovering, but the children had been traumatised by the death of their mother. He had to be both daddy and mummy to them, which was difficult. He had been shocked by the accused's denial of her responsibility.

The victim impact statement from Stephen Richard Melhuish centred on the loss of a son to whom he was devoted, who had given him a great deal of support during a messy and acrimonious divorce. Jordan was very much a daddy's boy who had given him a great deal of joy. That Jordan had ended up as a Technical and Industrial Linguist was a source of great pride. There was some comfort that Jordan had donated organs that enabled at least three other people to live.

Ewan James Samuel Walker described his relationship with Jordan as one of deep romantic love. They had committed to each other as teenagers. They were getting engaged on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> February, on the day before Ewan's birthday. That Jordan's accident had occurred on his birthday was very hard to bear. Ewan had had many flashbacks to seeing Jordan in the mortuary that Sunday evening when he had been asked to identify him. He had lost his life's companion, and Jordan was irreplaceable.

Lady Whifflet had received a letter forwarded to her by the Procurator Fiscal's office. It was from Baxter Ward Associates describing their loss of a most talented employee, a young man who had the potential to be a future senior partner.

Celia Barwick-Green stared ahead impassively. The whole thing was to her a complete miscarriage of justice, which she pointed out when asked whether she had anything to say. It was still the fault of that young man in the silver Golf who was driving it recklessly. Furthermore, the guilty verdicts would

damage her standing in Cheshire high society, and the future of her equestrian business could be put in jeopardy.

“Celia Louise Barwick-Green,” Lady Whifflet started. “You have been found guilty of a range of very serious charges including causing the death by dangerous driving of Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish and Lucinda Helen Abbott.

“This is one of the most serious cases that has come before me as a judge. It is a highly tragic case, involving the futile deaths of two people, both of whom had promising futures. It is also tragic to you and your family.

“It gives me no pleasure whatever to pronounce sentence, but it must be done so that justice is done and seen to be done.

“I have sat in judgement on many people. Most of them are contrite before the court. Many have made bad choices or have behaved in a reckless way. They express their remorse. I have watched you throughout this solemn proceeding. You do not appear to have any remorse at all. You have regarded this trial as something of an inconvenience. It has stopped you from going on holiday to Italy. You have brought before the court your concerns about your social standing in Cheshire. You have submitted a plea about your equestrian business. Perhaps you should have considered those before you took it on yourself to get drunk and take Class A drugs on the evening before the accident.

“You took it on yourself to drive a very large and powerful car at excessive speed with no heed to the rules of the road. You bullied other motorists to get out of the way. Your only motivation was a desire to get back to Cheshire to see your daughter compete at an equestrian event. As a result of your selfish and reckless actions there occurred a destructive road traffic collision that killed two promising people.

“Despite all the evidence that has been laid before this court, you continue to maintain that the accident was caused by Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish, and you gave evidence that was clearly untrue. I want it to go on record that Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish was entirely innocent of any wrongdoing. His driving was steady and thoughtful, with all due consideration to other road-users. Yours was not. You have been consistent in your denial of the responsibility for this accident, which you must bear alone, and must be prepared to take the consequences.

“It is now my solemn duty to pass sentence on you. For the death by dangerous driving of Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish and Lucinda Helen Abbott, the sentences are the maximum for these offences. You will go to prison for fourteen years for each offence, to be served concurrently. For driving while under the influence of alcohol and Class A drugs, you will go to prison for five years to be served concurrently. For dangerous driving, you will be fined the sum of £2000. For each of twenty speeding offences recorded on speed cameras, you will be fined £200 for each offence. For using a mobile telephone while driving, you will be fined £200. For adjusting a satellite navigation device while driving, you will be fined £200.

“The prison sentences will be served concurrently. The fines will be paid within twenty-eight days of the conclusion of this session. You will also be banned from driving for ten years from the date of your release from prison, and you will be required to sit an extended driving test.

“These sentences are without prejudice to the proposed actions being brought in the Sheriff Court for compensation to the family of Lucinda Helen Abbott and to the partner and father of Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish. They are also without prejudice to the actions being brought by the drivers of several

seriously damaged motor vehicles, and the owner of the wall that was demolished. You may go down.”

Celia Barwick-Green screamed with rage. “I haven’t got any clothes,” she shouted.

“You were warned to bring a bag full of clothing with you,” Lady Whifflet replied.

“I thought I would be just fined,” shouted Celia Barwick-Green who had lost her airs and graces of the Cheshire county set. The performance was worthy of a Manchester fishwife. “Nobody said anything about prison.”

“You were warned that you were very likely to receive a custodial sentence. Please take her down.”

The court rose. Lady Whifflet stood up and bowed to the court, before leaving.

The diet of the solemn proceedings had given everyone indigestion, especially Celia Barwick-Green as she faced her first afternoon in HMP Edinburgh. Later she was transferred to Cornton Vale Prison near Stirling. Her new housemates were rather low types. In fact, they were a bunch of criminals. Could they not have chosen a higher class of nick?

For Ewan Walker, the proceedings were very painful. Even though justice had to be done, it was a tragedy for another family, however obnoxious the accused had been. Seeing Mrs Barwick-Green sent to the slammer for the next seven years at least gave him no satisfaction whatever. Instead, he wanted to have Jordan with him; he would never again have to set eyes on that airhead from Cheshire.

That day, in Little Holland, a team of highly paid managers got indigestion as well. It was said that Monday 23<sup>rd</sup>

May 2022 was not one of Ms Norma Shrille's better days. Healthcare Improvement Scotland had made an unannounced Visit of Inspection to the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary and found that there were very many bad practices and failings that were cause for serious concern. If the hospital had been in England, it would have been rated as inadequate and put in special measures.

Two weeks later, the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary got a full front-page blasting in the *Edinburgh Evening News*.

## Chapter 16

June 2022

Ewan got his results from the Law Society for his first set of professional examinations. He was awarded Grade A for all his papers. His highest score was 98 %. He was awarded the Law Society prize for the highest performing trainee solicitor. He had done it for Jordan.

Gemma Hammond had now completed her Doctorate of Philosophy. The oral examination that concluded it was certainly challenging, but she had impressed the examination board. She was now Doctor Hammond, although it did not make her any different when she was lying in the bath. Graduation Day was one of the highlights, with Mum, Dad, and Eleanor. She looked resplendent in her hired gown, hood, and mortar board. Christian, who was there as well, took lots of pictures. The best he had framed and took up to Merton o' Kenniebrig.

Gemma and Christian planned to take a couple of weeks' break to hike in the Ardennes region of North East France. There they would resume their pair-bonding, which they had somewhat missed while she was in Edinburgh and Christian was in Corscadden. After that Gemma was at work at Dunalastair Engineering. For Christian, it was ideal. He had the most important people in his life in Brewster House, Mum, Dad, and Gemma – and his little twin brothers whom he adored. Gemma stayed at Brewster House during the week and would go to her parents at Merton o' Kenniebrig every other weekend. Christian would go when he was not working on a Saturday.

Aidan and Tamsin were still in Dad's flat in Marchmont. Now they were on their own, they too felt quite grown up. Despite the hiatus from the pandemic, Tamsin was almost two years into her Doctorate of Philosophy; this time next year, she

too would be about to graduate with her PhD. They loved Edinburgh with all its vibrancy, culture, and excitement. At least once a month, they would find a classical concert to go to and make an evening out of it. Now that Gemma had gone home to Corscadden, the second bedroom was empty. Ewan would come over and stay the night from time to time. They would go over to Ewan's flat. Aidan and Tamsin would sleep in Ewan's bed, while he would sleep on the sofa-bed in the living room.

Ewan appreciated the company a great deal. It helped to fill the Jordan-sized hole in his life. Justice had been done, and he learned a great deal by observing the solemn proceedings. He had observed many other solemn proceedings before, but he had been detached from them. This one had required him to hear how the love of his life had been snatched from him. It had been traumatic for both Ewan and Stephen; especially as it was clear that Jordan had died in pain. The evidence that Christopher Abbott had given about his wife was just as harrowing.

That justice had been done gave Ewan no satisfaction. He wanted Jordan in the flat with him. Jordan would be his fiancé now. And Mrs Barwick-Green would be with her husband and daughter. He did not envy the way that Rebecca would have to explain to her schoolmates at Shrewsbury that her mother would be in the slammer near Stirling for at least the next seven years. It was a tragedy for everyone.

The experience would make Ewan even more aware that the evidence in solemn proceedings involved very hurt people. It was important that justice should be done and seen to be done. To ensure that justice was done, evidence had to be watertight. Villains got off because the prosecution case had been badly prepared. Justice was denied to the victims. On the other hand, an innocent person wrongly convicted was beyond unacceptable. Oh, how pompous! Any legal professional would have those ideals. As in all professions, there were rotten apples that had

fallen into temptations of all sorts. Ewan, like all others, would have to be careful himself.

That Ewan had won a Law Society Prize did not make him arrogant and boastful. His ambition was to be an outstanding legal professional who would give his very best to his clients and fellow professionals. It would be his way of being the servant of others. It was one of the key tenets of his private Celtic Christianity. Others would say that he was simply being a pretentious prick.

There were times that he could feel very angry towards Mrs Barwick-Green. She had, after all, selfishly blown a Jordan sized hole in Ewan's life. Stephen had suffered the same. The same woman had blown a Lucinda sized hole in Christopher Abbott's life, and it hurt like hell. At these times, Ewan wanted her to have a bad time in the nick. It could have gnawed away at him to leave him bitter and cynical. Forgiveness was important, but not at all easy. He had to do it repeatedly as an act of the will, especially as the bereavement was still quite raw. It had happened only five months before.

Every day, Ewan wanted Jordan to be there. They had enjoyed their homo-romantic asexual love for each other for ten years. Ewan missed the physical and emotional attraction and intimacy. He had gone past the gay bars in Rose Street. Some of the clientele looked positively scary and he didn't want that kind of promiscuous lifestyle. Ewan and Jordan had been faithful to each other. He had thought of gay dating agencies, but no-one would ever be like Jordan.

Dr Cuthbert's voice from eight years before rang through Ewan's head, "I suggest that you go away, do a bit of thinking, do a bit of growing up and get on with some work before May." That was the day that he had had a big bust up with Mrs Learmont, followed by Mr Farjeon. A teenage petulant prick, he

had flounced off the school premises and got himself into deep shit in Rowallan Country Park and the mountain rescue had been called out. In the intervening eight and a half years he had done a lot of thinking, a huge amount of work, and some growing up. He had certainly heeded Dr Cuthbert's directive. Jordan had helped him no end. At twenty-four, Ewan still had some growing up to do. He wanted a soulmate.

Grandma had suggested his new soulmate would be a woman. He was scared of women. He remembered his innocent chat-up line with Chloe Grey in Secondary Three, and how she had responded with a hard slap across the chops. He remembered how he went ape and had to be restrained. After that he had a set-to with Miss Bryant. He had been suspended, and his mother went mad at him. When he returned to school, Miss Bryant kept on about "sexist degradation of women", until Ewan had had enough and shouted that Miss Bryant was the biggest sexist degradation of women that he had ever met. He remembered the screech shaking Fenton House to its foundations and getting a bollocking off the Headmaster. But there had been a twinkle in Mr Mitchell's eye. With some of the amazons that were at Strathcadden Academy, it was little wonder he was scared of women, and that he was gay.

Ewan felt so lonely up in his flat. He cuddled a soft toy, before bunching up on the sofa. Tears again were falling down his face. Unbidden, a voice seemed to say to him, "Ewan, I am here. I will sit with you." He tried to pray but found it impossible. Instead, he fell asleep. Now that was not very spiritual, and the way his short kilt had ridden up was most irreverent.

At work, there were more complaints coming in about the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary. This case was becoming a

major project, and Ewan spent most of his time on it. He regularly reported to Mr McCullough who was to be the lead advocate when the case came to court in September. It was going to be a bigger case than previously thought.

Kathryn Chetwynd was staying at the Compton Parfitt Manor Country House Hotel. The last time she was here, she had emphatically ordered Stephen and Sebastian out of her life. Sebastian had obliged by getting himself killed in a car accident. However, Stephen had occasionally come back to haunt her like the bad smell from the drains at Windhover Barn. It irritated her intensely. She was a free spirit. It felt good at the time to ditch them, so she did it. She didn't give a shit what Sebastian had felt. He had failed to get into Charterhouse and ended up at Barrowcliffe High School. They described him as very average, if not below average ability. She had had to pay a contribution towards the fees for that funny school up in the West Highlands of Scotland. It was typical of Sebastian that he had got into a long-term relationship with another boy who was a year younger. She had heard that the two drips were getting engaged. Rupert would have beaten the living daylights out of the two of them if he could have got his hands on them. That Sebastian's boyfriend referred to him as Jordan, or even worse, Jordie, rankled with her – oh, how common!

It had surprised her when she had heard that Sebastian had got into a prestigious university, not that she cared. Nor did she care one iota about his job as a technical and industrial linguist. What she did care about was that Sebastian's estate would get a considerable pay-out from the woman who had killed him, as well as a couple of hundred grand from his life assurance.

At least her ex-son had done something useful in leaving a very handsome sum of money.

That was the problem. Unfortunately, Stephen and that boyfriend of Sebastian's wanted their paws on it. It belonged to her, and she was bloody-well going to get it by hook or crook. Six or seven hundred grand - she could put it with her savings to buy a nice small house in West Sussex. Once she had the keys, she would pack her stuff in the car, leave a note to Rupert telling him to fuck off, and start her new life. Stephen wouldn't find out where she lived. She would be rid of him. Perhaps he too should drive his car into a lorry coming the other way. She hoped that they would screw every penny out of him and Sebastian's boyfriend. Laineshurst Solicitors had passed her on to Mr Piper-Goodall, their tame barrister. Kathryn had rather lost faith in Barford and Partners since they had acted for Sussex Fine and Country Developments to evict her and Rupert from their garden. Mr Piper-Goodall felt she had a case and would write his submission based on what she had told him. She knew full well it was not true, but it felt good, so she would do it.

Ideally Stephen and Sebastian's boyfriend wouldn't turn up, so all they needed to do was to state their case and the money was hers. And Stephen would be landed with a hefty legal bill. There was only one possible snag. Mr Piper-Goodall had told her that Sebastian's boyfriend, although very young, was one of the best trainee legal practitioners in Scotland. (He had told her his name, but she promptly forgot it.) The trainee had engaged an advocate, as he did not want there to be a conflict of interests. Oh, how twee and upright!

Kathryn was determined to enjoy the day and night in this superb country house hotel. She had a session in the gym, dressed in her most fashionable Lycra. She listened to loud music as she jerked feebly on the apparatus. Rupert, had he been there, would be attempting to pump iron as far as his fat carcass would

let him. She thought she was being a power-woman. To other users of the gym, she was pumping feathers or needed a doctor. After that, she went into the sauna, before having a Jacuzzi.

That evening, Kathryn sat at a single table, picking delicately at her food. She had been brought up properly. Rupert would have stuffed himself like a pig. Her late ex-son thought that a meal in a pub was a posh do.

The next morning the journey north carried on. For someone who liked to drive her sports car fast, Kathryn found the A825 road remarkably frustrating. She arrived at the Glenclawe Hotel in the late afternoon, having intended to go down to Buchanan to do some retail therapy. The hotel was even more luxurious than Compton Parfitt Manor.

The next day, Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2022, was going to be hers. The court-case would be over quickly, and she could spend some time investigating the shops in Buchanan.

Since this was a civil case of current value ten thousand pounds, it was going to be heard in the Sheriff Court without a jury. It was to be heard under Sheriff Jonathan Kimmerghame sitting as a Lord Ordinary in the Court of Session. Kathryn was in plenty of time. There was time for her to meet up with Mr Piper-Goodall before the case was due to start at ten o'clock.

The case started promptly with Judge Kimmerghame introducing it as *Chetnynd vs Melhuish & Walker*, concerning the will of the late Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish. There seemed to be very few people in the court, just Kathryn (Pursuer), Mr Piper-Goodall, and Mr Andrew Yeoman, advocate for the Defenders.

Mr Piper-Goodall set out the reasons why the Pursuer should be the sole beneficiary of the will of the late Sebastian Melhuish. There had been a messy and traumatic divorce case, in

which Kathryn Melhuish had walked out on her husband as a result of his innumerable affairs with other women. She had ended the marriage to protect her son, Sebastian, whom she adored. He was the apple of her eye. She had arranged for Sebastian to attend the Strathcadden Academy in Corscadden as a boarding pupil. Her contention was that Stephen Melhuish, her ex-husband, had prevailed upon Sebastian to alter his will in favour of Stephen and his boyfriend. Therefore, she was petitioning the court to make the will invalid, so that she, Kathryn Chetwynd would be the sole beneficiary.

The case seemed to be won, except Mr Yeoman was going to be awkward and ask questions. His first was to ask about the collapse of the marriage. “Ms Chetwynd, could you tell me of the affairs that you allege your husband to have had?”

“He had at least ten between the years 2002 and 2011.” Kathryn replied. “What are they to you? They are not relevant to this case.”

“They are. They are forming part of your petition to have your son’s will annulled. Therefore, I am obliged to follow this line of questioning. With whom did your husband have these affairs? Where did he have them, and when?”

“How should I know?”

“You are making a serious allegation in court that may have a bearing on the outcome of the case. Can you give details of at least one?”

Kathryn Chetwynd looked uncomfortable. She gave a list of names of random women, which did not tally with the Pursuer’s papers that had been submitted to the Defenders. One had happened in the George and Dragon Hotel in Barrowcliffe.

“There is no George and Dragon Hotel in Barrowcliffe,” said Mr Yeoman. “The main hotel in Barrowcliffe is The Hind.”

“It was called the George and Dragon then. It has changed its name,” replied Kathryn.

“I don’t think so; I checked with the proprietors. It has been The Hind for three hundred years.”

“Well, I made a mistake,” Kathryn snapped. “I can’t remember everything.”

“Like the ten women that you allege your husband to have had affairs with. We will come back to this later. Now you allege that he could be violent to you.”

“Yes. I reported him to the police on two occasions.” Kathryn gave two dates which Mr Yeoman noted. These did tally with the dates given on the papers. However, the local county police had no records of such complaints being made. The Chief Constable had a zero tolerance to domestic violence and investigated every allegation.

“Now,” Mr Yeoman said, “you say that Jordan had made a will in your favour. When and where did he do this?”

“Sebastian, not Jordan, please. I have it here,” said Kathryn. She got a piece of A4 from her briefcase. She handed it over to Mr Yeoman. Mr Piper-Goodall had an expression of shock on his face. It was a DIY will which handed over all of Sebastian’s possessions to be considered on permanent loan from his mother to him. If anything happened to him, all his assets were to pass to her. Mr Piper-Goodall had told his client a few years before that it was not worth the paper it was written on. Firstly, it had not been witnessed by others. Secondly, Sebastian was a minor. Thirdly, the signing over a child’s property to be an asset of a parent was most irregular, and many courts would look askance at it. Under no circumstances was it to form part of the present case. As far as Ms Chetwynd’s case was concerned, it was dead in the water.

“I have been told about this,” said Mr Yeoman. “When I first heard of this, I thought it was an exaggeration. My Lord, may I pass this for your attention?”

Sheriff Kimmerghame looked at the DIY legal document. He looked inscrutable as he passed it back to Mr Yeoman, who continued, “I would like to ask my learned friend why this was not passed with other papers to me.”

“I will answer my learned friend’s question when I have had time to consider my response.”

“When did your son sign this?” Mr Yeoman asked Ms Chetwynd.

“In August 2011.”

“Where did he sign it?”

“At home at my house in Barrowcliffe, not long before my ex-husband and I split up. Sebastian often came to visit me in Surrey. After we moved to North Sussex, he would visit me frequently there as well.”

“I will return to this later,” said Mr Yeoman.

“Mr Piper-Goodall, do you have any witnesses to call for the Pursuer’s case?” Sheriff Kimmerghame asked.

There being no further witnesses for the Pursuer, Mr Yeoman started the defence case. He had a number of witnesses to call. He set out the case that a will was written at the premises of Gordon Morton Solicitors, signed, and witnessed in October 2019. It was written by Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish and Ewan James Samuel Walker, both of whom, while still young, had committed to each other for the rest of their lives. It was a fully valid legal document. It was well-known that Ms Chetwynd had disowned her son in a particularly cruel way. The visits to the South were entirely fictitious. The case brought by Ms Chetwynd

was entirely vexatious, based as it was on several mendacities. That Mr Melhuish had been violent and had had repeated affairs was a figment of her imagination, which could be interpreted as slander.

Ewan Walker was the first witness. He told the court of the circumstances in which he had met Jordan and had befriended him. He mentioned how Jordan had been his rock when his mother had died. Ewan had been Jordan's rock when Ms Chetwynd had disowned him. He described how their friendship had blossomed into a deep love and commitment to each other for life. They were to get engaged on Ewan's twenty-fourth birthday. The two young men kept nothing secret from each other, and Jordan had never gone to Surrey or North Sussex.

Mr Piper-Goodall made a rather unsubtle line of questioning to suggest that Ewan was unreliable as a witness.

"You are a trainee solicitor," he started, "with a first-class honours degree in Law. Why is it that you are not conducting this case yourself?"

"I considered it to be a conflict of interest," Ewan replied firmly.

"Or is it because you are too young and inexperienced?"

"No, My Lord, it was to prevent a conflict of interest. I would have been questioned about it, should I have decided to represent myself."

"More likely because it was too much like hard work for a Gen-Z snowflake. I would have wiped the floor with you."

"My Lord," Mr Yeoman interjected, "Mr Walker did exactly the right thing. I would also say that he is a highly talented legal professional. He was doing work for me when he

was sixteen. I would most respectfully ask my learned friend to withdraw the personal elements to his submission.”

Mr Piper-Goodall then went on to suggest that Ewan Walker had put Jordan Melhuish up to rewrite the will in order to exclude his client.

“No, My Lord,” Ewan replied. “Jordan had none of his parents’ assets in any of our accounts. We had put in about five thousand pounds each to put down a deposit for a mortgage on a flat in Edinburgh. The will was to cover disposal of our assets in the case of one of us dying. Half of it was to go to my family and half to Jordan if I was the first to die. Jordan, of his own free will, asked for it to go to his father, since he had been disowned by his mother in a particularly cruel way. Everything was done in full compliance with Scottish Law.”

“Are you sure that he was of sound mind? If he were of sound mind, he would have been dating a girl, not a boy.”

“That answer to that is yes. I will not respond to the rest of that statement.”

“I agree with that,” said Sheriff Kimmerghame. “Mr Melhuish’s orientation is not relevant to this case, and homophobic comments will not be allowed in my court.”

Mr Yeoman carried on, “Mr Walker, was there any evidence of domestic violence towards Jordan or Ms Chetwynd?”

“None whatsoever. Jordan was devoted to his father. Jordan told me his mother was very strict and overbearing. He also told me that she had never forgiven him for failing to get into Charterhouse.”

In the late morning, Stephen Melhuish came in to give evidence. He gave evidence to the court about his messy and acrimonious divorce. Kathryn had run off with Rupert Bell-Dick

while he was away on business. She had been dating him for about three years beforehand. It had all been very carefully planned. Jordan had come home to an empty house and rang the police, reporting his mother as missing. He had come home as quickly as he could. Jordan, although very hurt, was remarkably level-headed. Kathryn was not going to come back.

Indeed, she had told both him and Jordan that she never wanted to see either of them again or hear from them. She had heard from the police that Jordan had died. She rang him and berated him for telling the police to contact her. In fact, it was Jordan's employer.

He told the court about how Kathryn had made it clear to Jordan that all his property was actually hers on loan, and she had taken away almost all his valuable items, including items that he had worked for and paid for. He thought it was very cruel.

As far as domestic violence was concerned, on both dates mentioned, he was not in a position to be violent to his wife. He was in Japan, and his colleagues had submitted affidavits to that effect. As for affairs, she had made all these up.

Kathryn glared at Stephen throughout his evidence. She wanted to find a way of nailing him that did not put her in the slammer for the rest of her natural.

Stephen went on to describe how his ex-wife had become obsessed with and very acquisitive of money. He told the court how she had often told him that she was a free spirit and if it felt good, she did it.

Stephen's opinion was that she was not a free spirit, but a mercenary and vicious little vixen. He was careful not to use those terms in court and referred to Kathryn as his ex-wife.

It was now lunchtime, and Sheriff Jonathan Kimmerghame adjourned the court.

What Kathryn and her barrister had said to each other over lunch was not recorded, but when they came back into the court after the adjournment, they were not looking at each other. Kathryn looked like she was about to explode. It was an expression that many of her underlings had seen on many occasions before receiving the rough end of her whiplash tongue. Mr Piper-Goodall looked like his case had been truly blown out of the water. He wanted to abandon ship, but he felt obliged to sit it out to justify his fee.

Mr Yeoman still had a trick up his sleeve. “My Lord,” he said, “I would like to call my last witness, Mr David Rupert Roderick Bell-Dick.”

Kathryn Chetwynd looked thunderstruck. She hoped that it must have been someone who by some chance had the same name. Then a familiar looking man with a shaven head and a trimmed beard appeared. He had the familiar well-tailored suit that concealed his fat carcass that was the result of excessive consumption at far too many corporate luncheons.

After the usual formalities, Mr Bell-Dick gave his testimony. He had been dating Kathryn for about three years before she split up from Stephen. At no time had she ever told him that Stephen had been dating other women. Never was there any evidence that Stephen had been violent to her. She certainly would have told him. She had encouraged Jordan (he used the name Jordan rather than Sebastian to get even further up Kathryn’s nose) to see his grandparents at weekends when Stephen was away on business. She would play away with Rupert. He knew that she had claimed for travel south on her employer’s credit card. She also used to come down south on business and claim for a hotel but stay with him. He had planned with her when and how to ditch Stephen and Jordan.

He had first seen Jordan at the Compton Parfitt Manor Hotel. Kathryn had called Stephen and Jordan to tell them that she wanted nothing more to do with them. There had been a bit of an argy-bargy, which was hardly surprising. It seemed odd that Kathryn had taken all Jordan's possessions, saying that they were hers on loan to her son. She had shown him the DIY document, and he thought it not worth the paper it was written on. This was borne out when the divorce courts told her that to take her son's possessions in this manner was actually against the Theft Act. She paid Jordan, but with great reluctance.

Jordan had been sent as a private student to a state-run school in Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil. Rupert had not heard of Strathcadden Academy before, but it clearly did Jordan a lot of good, for he got excellent Highers and Advanced Highers, before progressing to gain a good degree at a good university. He said that Kathryn had scoffed at her son's achievements. He thought it was strange that she would refer to him, if she referred to him at all, as "my ex-son".

When Jordan was killed in the accident, Kathryn had been very angry that she had been disturbed as a result of something that had happened to her ex-son. She had rung Stephen and berated him. Rupert had later contacted the two officers who had been quite taken aback by her reaction, which they described as one of cold hostility. They had written affidavits.

Rupert had been disturbed by Kathryn's attitude to Jordan when she said it was the only useful thing he had ever done. He was even more disturbed that her subsequent actions were designed to get her hands on Jordan's estate. It would be worth something to her, not just for the life assurance, but also for the compensation that would be received from the insurance company of the woman who had killed him.

Rupert had been appalled by all these actions, so he maintained. What he had said was completely truthful, even though his submission was one of total hypocrisy. That fact was not to be known by the court. His pea-sized conscience had been fully salved.

Mr Piper-Goodall made a token effort at defending his client. He asked about Rupert's past misdemeanours behind the wheel that had led to a three-year driving ban. He also brought up the small matter of three elm trees of invaluable scientific interest that had been felled illegally, leading to a swingeing fine. The question was ruled as inadmissible.

Mr Piper-Goodall summoned no further witnesses and made no closing statement. Mr Yeoman had quite a lot to say in his closing statement.

Sheriff Jonathan Kimmerghame adjourned the court to make his judgement. Kathryn Chetwynd had not intended to stay this long. She had wanted to get down to Compton Parfitt Manor. She thought she would have left hours ago, having bled Stephen and Sebastian's boyfriend dry.

It was late afternoon when Sheriff Kimmerghame reconvened the court. It had taken him little time to decide on his judgement. He thought it would be rather improper to make it there and then; it would look like he was making it up as he went along and that would not do. He spent an hour typing it up. Jonathan Kimmerghame knew exactly what he was going to say.

He bowed to the court, which had risen at his entrance. He bade the court to be seated and pronounced his judgement, "I have now listened and noted carefully the submissions made by both sides of the case *Chetwynd vs Melbush and Walker*. I reject the case made by the Pursuer and find in favour of the Defenders."

Kathryn Chetwynd looked like she was ready to faint.

“I will outline the reasons for my judgement. It became clear to me that Ms Chetwynd’s claim was entirely vexatious, designed to force money out of her ex-husband, Mr Melhuish. The evidence that was submitted before me made this clear. Ms Chetwynd made many false claims. There were no extra-marital affairs, nor were there any instances of domestic violence. On the dates cited, Mr Melhuish was not in the United Kingdom; he was as far away as it is possible to be from these islands.

“It is also clear to me that the then Mrs Melhuish was utterly bored with her husband and son and planned carefully with Mr Bell-Dick as to how to abandon her marriage. In doing so, she dropped her husband with no thought whatever. She completely rejected her son. Additionally, she made him sign a document that can only be described as most extraordinary. It had no validity in law. As her son was so young and vulnerable, I would rate this as nothing less than child abuse.

“Ms Chetwynd had ordered both her husband and son to get out of her life and never to contact her again. Therefore, her submission before this court claiming her son was close to her and visited her regularly in Surrey and North Sussex was entirely mendacious.

“Ms Chetwynd only became interested in her son’s estate after he had been so tragically killed in a car accident. The significance of her son’s death did not impact on her immediately. On receipt of the news, she berated her ex-husband for letting the police know her address to contact her, while in fact it was her son’s employer who had arranged the contact. The police officers whose duty it was to inform her were taken aback, shocked even, by her callous reaction. It was clear that she had permanently rejected her son and had no feeling for him whatsoever.

“It was only later that Ms Chetwynd came to realise that, as the accident was not her son’s fault, compensation would be payable. The statement that ‘it was the first time that Sebastian had done something useful’ was, to say the very least, cynical beyond belief. Although the estate in question currently represents some five thousand pounds of a young man in a deposit account, she wanted to get her money on the entire estate after the compensation was paid, in order to ‘shaft her ex’. She wanted the entire estate, including the money that is the property of her son’s partner. In other circumstances, such an action could be described as an attempt to defraud.

“Additionally, the claim by Ms Chetwynd has no validity in law since a will was drawn up under due legal process. Since the potential beneficiaries had drawn it up by mutual consent, it cannot be contested until a further will is produced to supersede it. No action of this kind has been made, and it is entirely proper that the instructions of the late Sebastian Jordan Stephen Melhuish should be implemented fully.

“Ms Chetwynd, will you please stand.”

Kathryn stood staring at the judge tight lipped. Her fixed smile had disappeared completely. Sheriff Kimmerghame continued, “I find that your motivations to, in your words, ‘screw Stephen dry’, are the basest. I have had many cases before my court. In the vast majority, there is some sense of grievance, to which I have to work with both sides in order to get a satisfactory resolution. Your case was different. It was based on deceit, motivated entirely by selfish greed, no matter at whose expense it would be. You are clearly a rather nasty and cynical woman, who claims you are a free spirit, and you live by the rule that if it feels good, you do it. This lack of moral compass serves you badly and does much harm to others.

“You decided that it would feel good to pursue a vexatious claim against your ex-husband, and a mendacious claim against your son and his partner. So, you did it. And you will have to take the consequences. You will therefore be liable to not only the costs of the court, but also to those of the Defenders, and those of your own case.

This case has been so vexatious that I will be reporting it to the Lord Advocate to consider that you should be barred from taking civil action in any Scottish Court, in accordance with the Vexatious Actions (Scotland) Act 1898. I am also advising you that your case was so materially false that it could be considered to be perjury, under the Criminal Law Consolidation Scotland Act 1995. I will be making a report to that effect to the Procurator Fiscal. You may stand down.”

The court rose and Sheriff Jonathan Kimmerghame bowed before he left.

Kathryn Chetwynd stared hard at Mr Piper-Goodall before strutting out of the court room. The clacking of her high heels on the stone floor could be heard the whole length of the corridor. She hurled herself into the Merc. All she wanted to do was to get back to The South as quickly as possible but would spend that night at Compton Parfitt Manor.

Rupert Bell-Dick had felt it would be wise to keep a low profile. He had ordered a taxi to take him back to Glasgow Airport, where he would catch an evening flight back to London.

Quick was not in it. The A825 road was slow especially as her time of travel coincided with the evening rush. Cardean was particularly slow; it always had been since the road planners had devised a clever traffic management system through the town

with interminable sets of traffic lights, most of which were badly phased. To make things even worse there were two large and complicated roundabouts, both of which had badly phased traffic lights.

It was late in the evening when Kathryn arrived at the Compton Parfitt Manor Hotel. She marched in to reception still in high dudgeon as a result of the legal mauling she had received from Sheriff Jonathan Kimmerghame, as well as the appalling journey she had experienced on the A825.

“WHAT?” was her screech when she found out that the hotel were expecting her the night before. She had booked for both Monday to Tuesday and Tuesday to Wednesday, instead of Wednesday to Thursday. And she had been charged for the second night’s stay, as she had given her debit card details when booking.

Even though she tried to argue that it was their mistake, it was proved to Kathryn that it was her booking that was wrong, and the hotel had debited the account by three hundred pounds, the cost of her room for the Tuesday night. For Kathryn Chetwynd, being mistaken and apologising did not feel good, so she did not do it. Instead, there followed an almighty row, initially involving the Receptionist, then the Duty Manager, followed by the General Manager, before, finally, the hotel’s owner. As was often the case, Kathryn had noticed that her name had been written as “Cheating”, rather than “Chetwynd”.

The exchanges got gradually more heated until Kathryn felt it was good to swipe a vase full of flowers off the reception desk. So, she did. The Receptionist’s assistant, for whom it was the second evening in the job, was soaked as the vase landed into her lap and fell off, smashing to a thousand pieces. The owner decided that it was high time that the Police were called before murder was committed.

The commotion had attracted an audience from the hotel's guests. It was a performance worthy of many a gritty northern drama on the telly. While some of the audience were outraged and muttered phrases like "she should know better at her age" and "vulgar display of disgusting bad manners", others waited for further acts to the drama unfolding in the hotel's foyer. They were treated to an insight on what it was like to be a "free fucking spirit". The audience waited for Scene Two.

They got their encore. Kathryn's demands that the hotel should provide her with a room was turned down, quite unreasonably, so Kathryn thought. It was even more unreasonable for Kathryn that the price of the expensive vase and the flowers was going to be charged to her debit card. With her head held high, and her feet even higher, Kathryn was escorted to the front door accompanied by phrases like "breach of the peace" and "night in the cells".

Finally, she was thrown out and told never to come back.

It was in the early hours, just before dawn, that Kathryn finally arrived at Windhover Barn. It was cold and unwelcoming.

Ewan Walker and Stephen Melhuish were taken back to Corscadden by Mr Yeoman. He could now pursue the case of getting compensation from Celia Barwick-Green's insurers. It would be very straight-forward.

Ewan had never met Jordan's mother before. If he never met her again, it would be far too soon. He found her so far up her own arse that he was not sure whether she would talk or fart. The only thing that he had enjoyed was to see Kathryn's fixed and insincere smile being wiped off her face. He said this to Chris, who replied that being a Scottish shopkeeper was far simpler.

## Chapter 17

July 2022

Ewan was glad to see the back of the legal upheavals that had come his way. He had not intended anything like this to happen, but happen it did, thanks to an airheaded Cheshire socialite who was now socialising with very low types near Stirling. And there was Jordan's ex-mother who was simply nasty. It would be tempting but wrong to say that she was evil. Ewan never wanted to see her again.

Ewan was relieved that there was to be no fatal accident enquiry. The trial of Mrs Barwick-Green had examined the facts and come to a conclusion that Jordan (and Lucinda Abbott) had been wrongfully killed. The result of the case opened the way to a Damages Hearing for Wrongful Death.

The hearing took place at Edinburgh Sherriff Court. Andrew Yeoman attended to ensure full and proper compensation for Ewan and Jordan's father. Other advocates were doing the same for their clients. The payments ranged from four thousand pounds for the loss of a trailer full of pigs that had been killed, injured, or escaped. The cost of rebuilding the garden wall at Corner Cottage was twenty-five thousand pounds. The total value of the wrecked cars was about two hundred thousand pounds. Fifty thousand pounds each was paid to Mr Abbott and his two children. Compensation of six hundred thousand pounds was paid to Mr Abbott for the loss of his wife. The same sum was paid into Jordan's estate. A sum of five hundred thousand pounds was ordered to be paid to Baxter Ward Associates for the loss of Jordan's services.

The hit to Mrs Barwick-Green's insurers was over two million pounds once costs had been added. A letter was sent to Mrs Barwick-Green informing her that the insurers would not

accept any further insurance proposal from her when she was allowed to drive again. A second letter went to Mr Barwick-Green demanding that his wife's name was to be removed from the policies for all their cars. Any attempt by her to drive under his name would result in the insurance policies being invalidated immediately.

If Ewan Walker didn't want to see Kathryn Chetwynd ever again, he could be assured that the feeling was quite mutual. Her plans were in disarray because her late ex-son had changed his will. No doubt that lanky ginger-haired drip had put him up to it. The kid knew a bit of Law, but a little bit of knowledge was a very dangerous thing. Kathryn wished she had never set eyes on Stephen. She had married beneath herself. She could have scared Stephen off contesting Sebastian's will but bugger that scrawny kid that was Sebastian's boyfriend.

And bugger Rupert who had shafted her. Why did the bloody oaf have a fit of conscience and tell the truth? She was going to have to pay for it, and not just financially. If the Procurator Fiscal (whatever it was) decided to chase up the report on perjury, she could get a couple of years inside. A stretch inside a Scottish nick did not appeal to her one little bit. Her opinion of the Scots was that they were drunken and drug-addled savages. Living with a bunch of criminals would definitely be beneath her.

Kathryn was going to get her own back on Rupert. Setting Windhover Barn on fire was tempting, but that would certainly give her a stretch for arson. She rejected that option. She knew that Rupert was a wealthy man who had bankrolled a right-wing populist party. The particular party had received donations that were in breach of electoral law.

Rupert had a reputation for flying at the limits of the envelope as far as his financial dealings were concerned. He also

boasted that he paid less tax than one of the bank's cleaners who were paid the minimum wage for long and anti-social hours. Much of the money that was due from him to The Exchequer was sitting in a variety of offshore accounts. Like many of the red-faced and overweight men he associated with, the payment of taxes was for the little people. The "little people" were those who earned less than two hundred and fifty grand a year. Kathryn had not been pleased to be a "little person"; she earned one hundred and fifty grand a year. Tax evasion felt good, so Rupert did it.

A tip-off to the Financial Conduct Authority and the Inland Revenue would set off investigations and those would well and truly shaft Rupert. Getting revenge felt good to Kathryn, so she would do it. However, to get the Financial Conduct Authority and the Inland Revenue off their fat arses needed some pretty good evidence. That evidence was sitting in the filing cabinet next to the computer. To the layman, the documents were complex technical and financial papers. Kathryn's accountancy skills were second to none. She was determined to find out exactly what Rupert had been up to. Rupert would notice that someone had ruffled through his papers. Kathryn had a great eye for detail. She would photocopy all the papers, returning everything to exactly where she had found it.

Once she had got all her evidence, she would write a report and pass it over to the Inland Revenue and the Financial Conduct Authority. She wished that some of Rupert's financial misdemeanours were more blatant.

Rupert would be done over good and proper. Revenge was something best served cold. She had to keep a grip on herself. She could scream at him like a raging harridan, but that would drive him off, and he would go away with the evidence. She would talk to him to the minimum extent to get by.

As well as the material from the filing cabinet, there was plenty of material on the computer that would drop Rupert into it. Rupert was lax as far as computer security was concerned. One evening, Kathryn copied all Rupert's files onto an external hard drive.

Other material came through Windhover Barn's letterbox that suggested that Rupert was being a bit of a naughty boy. It was clear that he was having assignations and liaisons with at least four women. She also found that the mortgage payments for both her and Rupert were coming from her account. A call to the bank confirmed her suspicions that Rupert was not paying his share of the mortgage, which was being taken from her account to prevent arrears. This had made her overdrawn at the end of the month, which did not please her.

Kathryn could lure Rupert down and scream blue murder at him. It was very tempting, but her lust for revenge would be more than satisfied when the people from the Financial Conduct Authority and the Inland Revenue called in on him – if they turned up while he was at work, so much the better. His red face at the bank would be well worth it.

Just in case the resolve to drop Rupert well and truly in it faltered, a thick envelope dropped one day through the door. It was from Laineshurst Solicitors with a detailed account of the fees payable for the failed action in respect of the will of her late ex-son. It came to sixty-five thousand, four hundred and fifty-seven pounds plus VAT.

It would wipe out a good portion of her savings. Hopefully the Inland Revenue and the Financial Conduct Authority would give her a reward.

She still needed to complete her report into his dealings, so she did not want Rupert anywhere near her. Fortunately, the extent to which he had shafted her would make him think twice

about coming down to Wapplesfield. Unlike most other things in Kathryn Chetwynd's life, this report was the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

She worked on it every evening and weekend until the end of July. Once every photocopy had been finished with, it was shredded. Her report was password protected. Finally, she printed it off to make a very professional looking report. Taking a day off to go to London, she personally delivered one report to the Inland Revenue, and the other to the Financial Conduct Authority.

For a couple of weeks, there was nothing from either the Financial Conduct Authority, or the Inland Revenue.

Instead, a letter arrived from the Compton Parfitt Manor Hotel. The contents of the letter displeased Kathryn a great deal:

*Dear Miss Cheating,*

*I am writing to you concerning the disruptive events of the evening of Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> June in which you abused a number of our staff at Reception. You used a considerable amount of foul and threatening language as well as smashing a valuable ornamental vase, and soaking our assistant receptionist, thereby causing her considerable distress. Despite our reassurances that it was not her fault, she has left, having decided that hotel work was not for her.*

*I must also point out that many of our guests were considerably embarrassed and outraged by your behaviour. I, as owner of the hotel, share their embarrassment.*

*I must inform you that as a result of your actions, we have charged the cost of the vase and water damage to our IT equipment in Reception to your debit card. If your card provider refuses the payment of £1500, we will put the matter in the hands of our solicitors.*

*As a result of your unacceptable behaviour, I have given instructions to our booking team that any booking that you make will not be taken and that you will not be welcome at our hotel. Your telephone numbers have also been blocked. This ban is indefinite until we receive a written apology. I employ outstanding staff, and I am not prepared to have them exposed to such abuse.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Jeremy Pearson-Anning (Proprietor)*

It was not the ban that irritated Kathryn so much as the misspelling of her name, and they had used the title “Miss” instead of “Ms”. Additionally, there was the fifteen hundred pounds that had been debited to her account that had increased her overdraft at the bank to such an extent that she was very close to her limit. She rang Compton Parfitt Manor to berate them but was cut off immediately. This displeased her even more. An apology was not on the agenda. It would not feel good, so it would not be done. Besides, her father had a saying that he used regularly, “Never explain, never apologise.”

As far as the Inland Revenue was concerned, to be truthful, she did get a letter from the Inland Revenue informing her that she had underpaid her income tax by two thousand, five hundred pounds. Normally she would have gone mad and some poor operative in a call-centre on minimum wage would have got the rough edge of her whiplash tongue. The operative’s experience would not have been made any easier by the fact that she had had to wait for an hour for someone to answer the telephone. It would have been even worse when the operator was confused by the fact that the pronunciation of ‘Chetwynd’ was ‘Cheating’. It seemed entirely appropriate.

Unusually for her she paid it without a murmur. They would take her more seriously if they knew she was an honest taxpayer.

The two letters arrived on the same day. Both organisations were most grateful for the detailed report. They were both starting an in-depth investigation into the financial conduct and tax affairs of David Rupert Roderick Bell-Dick.

Ewan was now a young man of considerable monetary means. Many of his friends would have gone out on a splurge. Ewan disliked showing off. After all it was that Cheshire county set airhead who was flaunting herself by driving a very large and expensive car with a very expensive personalised number plate. Her aggressive driving had cost Jordan his life. He didn't say anything about it to anyone, other than to his family. He put fifty grand into the Walker Family Trust.

The inheritance didn't take any of the pain away from losing Jordan, which had only happened six months before. He far preferred to have Jordan rather than a large sum of money. He did think about buying a car, but in a big city like Edinburgh, a car could be a pain in the bum, especially as public transport was so good. He would get one once he started with Gordon Morton after he had qualified.

He wondered about a few more clothes. Ewan was particular in wearing high quality clothing, but he expected the clothing to last. Also, he and Jordan both had a very similar physique. Both were slight young men, indeed rather skinny. All Jordan's clothes fitted Ewan perfectly, except for his jeans. Ewan had longer legs than Jordan. In wearing Jordan's clothes, Ewan felt that Jordan was still around. One day the clothes would wear out, but he could not bear to think about it yet.

Ewan was a bookish young man. He loved reading a print book. It didn't need batteries. It didn't crash. It felt solid and dependable in a way that a smart phone or e-reader did not. He liked to go through bookshops and often came out with a book he never knew he wanted. He had done this from when he was a young boy, and by his early twenties he had amassed several hundred volumes. Many of these occupied metres of bookcases in Brewster House. His father always enjoyed an excuse to make another bookcase out of oak. (Ewan continued to buy books and read avidly even as a very old man.)

While Ewan was not as accomplished a musician as Aidan, let alone Tamsin, he was not at all bad on the piano, violin, and guitar. In his flat, he had a good quality keyboard. He would put headphones on so as not to annoy the neighbours and spend time playing. His reading and playing acted as a balm against his loss that could reduce him to tears within seconds.

At work, he was busy with the case involving the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary. Mr McCullough was delighted with Ewan's very detailed work and was confident of a powerful case.

Ewan took a few days off at the start of July just before his next diet of mocks and the real professional exams in August. Mr McCullough said he would walk them, but Ewan still had that feeling he could bomb out. Friday 1<sup>st</sup> July saw the end of year event at Strathcadden Academy, which was the curtain raiser for the Corscadden Festival. There were concerts in the Old Chapel for the culture vultures, as well as the Celebration Day for parents. The school was thrown open for the entire community. There were all sorts of exhibitions of the work that was done in the school, as well as demonstration sports events.

Ewan was there because the Melhuish Room was going to be opened. It was part of the school library that had been

refurbished with a bequest from Stephen Melhuish in memory of Jordan. Ewan had donated a small amount in the total scheme of things, although for him, it was a very large sum of money indeed.

Mr McEwan had invited both to attend the opening of the Melhuish Room, and both accepted. It was a good excuse to dress up, which Ewan still enjoyed doing. His Walker tartan kilt and tweed jacket would do fine. As always, he preened himself to perfection before leaving Brewster House. He was a guest of the Headmaster. The last time he had been a “guest of the headmaster”, he was being told off by Mr Mitchell for being very cheeky to Ms Bryant by calling her the biggest sexist degradation of women that he had ever met.

This time it was very different. No longer would it be “Walker, laddie”, but “Ewan” or “Mr Walker”. He would go into the holy-of-holies, the staffroom. Aidy had been in there; it had been a tip, but it would have had a spring clean for this day. Ewan felt very special, even though he would have been far happier if there hadn’t been a Melhuish Room, but Jordan holding hands with him instead.

Stephen was waiting at the front of Dennistoun Park, the large house that formed the administrative offices of Strathcadden Academy. He was in his best suit. They went to the reception desk in the Hall. Stephen, who, because of his work abroad, had only been to Jordan’s school a few times, commented, “Some place, this.”

“Jordan felt at home here,” Ewan replied.

“Ewan, it’s thanks to you that he did so well. I was so proud of him and what the school did. It is a unique place.”

“It is indeed,” Ewan replied.

“Ah, Mr Melhuish and Mr Walker,” said the receptionist, “a very warm welcome to Strathcadden Academy. Mr Farjeon will be down in a minute.”

Craig Farjeon was now the Director of Highers and Advanced Highers. It must have been a part of the qualification of being on the Leadership Team that he could wear a sincere looking smile while he oiled round important people. Ewan had never thought about being an important person. He was a guest of the Headmaster. Stephen was more used to it in his job as an international civil engineer.

“We were so shocked to hear about Jordan at the end of January,” Mr Farjeon said. “How are you two bearing up?”

The answers from both Ewan and Stephen were, “As well as can be expected.”

Ewan added, “Jordan helped me a great deal when my mother passed away.”

Mr Farjeon did something that Ewan had never expected. He said, “Ewan, I want to apologise to you. You remember a one-to-one I had with you when you had a set-to with Lorna Learmont?”

Ewan shuddered as he remembered how he had tried to act the tough guy and totally failed. He had never done it again. “Yes,” he said bashfully.

“I treated you really badly. I was totally unreasonable with you,” Mr Farjeon said. “I was trying to be hard. Instead, I was being very immature. I’m so sorry. I know it was eight years ago, but it was a low point in my career.”

“I wasn’t without blame,” Ewan replied. “I could be a real little prick in those days. I think we both learned something.”

“I can tell you this. Alistair Cuthbert was not very pleased with me. He wasn’t there to give you a second bollocking; he was there to check me out. Afterwards he gave me a real roasting. I was like a naughty little boy. I had a lot to rebuild after that.”

“We both did,” said Ewan graciously. “I think we managed though. You took over Dr Cuthbert’s job a couple of years back...”

Ewan then told Mr Farjeon about how he had got on in his legal training, and how he was looking forward to getting home to Corscadden. Edinburgh had lost its charm, although he still liked the Festival.

The Melhuish Room was a quiet study room for students. It always had been. Now, it had been completely refurbished with new tables and chairs. Woe betide any Caddie who messed things up. There were a number of new oak bookcases with reference books for students to use. The style of the bookcases showed that they were the products of Dad’s big boy’s toys which made a lot of noise and mess, while using a lot of electricity. Ewan knew that on the back of each piece, there would be the familiar initials “JOBW” with the date, applied with a top-quality pyrography kit.

Dad had been busy.

A portrait of Jordan in oils was hanging up. It had been copied from one of many pictures Ewan had of the love of his life. It was signed “Christian Salway-Walker”.

As well as Mr McEwan and Mr Farjeon, Ewan and Stephen gave short eulogies. Ewan tried his best to hold it together, although he did have tears in his eyes.

For the rest of the day, Ewan and Stephen were guests of the Headmaster, which meant that lots of important people made a fuss of them and looked after them. Ewan rather enjoyed it. It

hadn't happened to him that often. When he was a Caddie, Ewan wondered what went on with the important people who came as guests of the headmaster. Now he knew.

While he was in the Old Chapel, Ewan saw that everything was still just as it was. Although the Old Chapel had been built for religious observance, it was only occasionally used for that purpose. It was an assembly hall, examination hall, and even a sports hall. It was also an excellent venue for theatrical and concert performances. The jewel in its crown was its pipe organ that had been restored and refurbished as a result of a most generous bequest. Ewan had played it when he was a student, and he was pleased to note that students were playing the instrument with the same enthusiasm.

Mr McEwan gave his retiring speech as Headmaster. He was now seventy. Ewan had always been quite fond of the old codger – plain talking, gruff perhaps, but his heart was of pure gold. The portrait of Dr Cowan, the founding headmaster of St Oswald's College, the independent school that occupied the site before Strathcadden Academy, still hung on one side of the Old Chapel. There was still a small rip in Cowan's hooter. Ewan looked at it, and quite unconsciously mouthed his familiar mantra, "Henry Cowan, you are a fucking bastard."

It stared back at him and glared. "Good God, Walker. Six years on and you are as effeminate as ever. In my day, you would be dead on the battlefield or shot at dawn for cowardice in the face of the enemy."

Later on in the afternoon, Ewan watched the rowing on the Cadden. He hadn't rowed since he had left the school, but the sport in both the rowing club and the school was again in good heart, driven on by the infectious enthusiasm of Craig Farjeon and Emily Birch.

The day ended on a high with the Strathcadden Academy Orchestra concert. It was a showcase for the great talent that was nurtured by the school. Music, led by Peter Struther, was in very good heart.

Ewan felt proud to be an Auld Caddie.

As always, the Corscadden Festival was great fun. It made Ewan want ever more to come home.

Ewan had concluded rightly that it would take him more than months to get over his loss. Apart from work and his running, he had become rather reclusive. He and Jordan didn't go out that much anyway. They were not unusual for many of Gen-Z, who were too busy saving for massive deposits on flats that were tiny in every respect, except for the price. Even so, they had gone out with friends, maybe for a meal, or to a show. Ewan had not done that for ages. Like many in Gen-Z, he had abandoned his social media accounts. He had found the increasing toxicity repulsive and the trolling and fifth that came up too often were the final straw. One day he had had enough and closed all his accounts. He wondered whether he would feel up to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

Although he was doing very well in his legal training, he had lost much of his social confidence; he was now rather shy. At social events at work, he would speak when spoken to. He had grown to dislike small talk intensely. He felt that if he were to say anything, it should be like the gentle and joyful babble of a crystal-clear stream. The stream had dried up. What was left was stagnant and full of midge larvae.

He much preferred to be back at home in Corscadden. He was very close to Dad and Laura. He loved his excitable little half-brothers. They were the little brothers he wanted when he was a child. Christian was solid and dependable, even though he

worked long hours. Aidan and Tamsin had become like husband and wife, and Ewan felt a little excluded. It was little wonder. Chris and Aidy were now almost twenty-six. He and Jordan too had been like that – head over heels in love. Jordan was no longer there. Ewan was twenty-four but Jordan's death had knocked him back to seventeen.

Doctor Conway had said that Ewan was suffering from mild depression. Ewan did not want to go onto anti-depressants, and Doctor Conway agreed, but gave Ewan strict instructions to get back to him if things got worse. It was little wonder that Ewan was so down, having lost the love of his life. Also, he had had a bad viral infection which had not helped. Ewan was still underweight. Although he had put on a couple of kilos, he had not made up the weight he had lost.

Ewan had become closer to his grandmother who had looked after him when he had been ill after Jordan's funeral. He felt so safe with her. She could wrap him in cotton wool and keep him protected from the dross that the world had thrown at him, not just eight years before, but six months ago. Ewan had lost his way and was in the deepest darkness. If anyone would, Grandma would help him re-join his journey.

## Chapter 18

Late July to Early August 2022

Ewan, who had followed the Celtic tradition of Christianity since he was a teenager, was sitting cross-legged up on his favourite rock outcrop on Corr Hill. To him it was a “thin spot” where he felt a bit closer to Heaven. The view always delighted him; it was uplifting like the stained glass of a magnificent cathedral. Here he would meditate and wait on God. He could not put his prayers into words. But that did not matter.

On this occasion, Ewan was not feeling at all spiritual. He had often felt like this since Jordan had died. The world seemed bigger and worse than normal.

Ewan disliked schemers. Kathryn Chetwynd was one of them. She was a chip off the old block. He had heard plenty from his intended father-in-law. While Stephen could be considered to be somewhat biased, what he had said could be confirmed by many others who were more neutral. Mr McCullough knew quite a bit, as the Dormer-Chetwynds had had legal dealings in Scotland.

They were a family who owned a large amount of land and property in the South of England. Sir Edmund Dormer-Chetwynd was the patriarch of the family. In his early eighties, he had a lot of fingers in a lot of pies. Although very wealthy, Sir Edmund had a reputation for being rather mean. What he had was never enough, and he was known to wheel and deal in order to make more and more money. He had passed his mean streak to both his children, Richard and Kathryn.

Unlike many aristocratic families, the Dormer-Chetwynd family could not be described as nobility. Nobility were meant to be gentlefolk. Sir Edmund could under no stretch of the imagination be referred to as a gentleman. He was self-centred,

bad-tempered, and rude. Sir Edmund was not a good employer. He paid poverty wages. He was quick to chide and slow to bless. He used “no fault” dismissals readily as well as short zero-hours contracts. If an employee’s face didn’t fit, that employee was out.

He had many tenants on his landed properties but was not a good landlord. He did the minimum to get by, doing just enough to comply with the law in the loosest sense. If a tenant complained, he used “no fault” eviction processes to get rid of them, with no regard whatever for the suffering that such action would cause.

Sir Edmund’s wife was Lady Anabel, who, like her husband, was very status conscious. That was the polite way of describing matters. Many would use a more vulgar expression. Drawing room etiquette was very important to her, and social events at the Dormer-Chetwynd house, Kimber Scott Hall, were minefields to anyone new to the family, as Stephen had found out.

Stephen and Kathryn met each other at university. As a teenager, Kathryn had rebelled against her snobbish parents and had gone to a red-brick university instead of Oxford, something her mother never really forgave her for. She dropped the Dormer part of her name. Sir Edmund and Lady Anabel certainly did not approve of her marriage to Stephen, saying that he had nothing to him, and she had married well beneath herself. She was still in her rebel phase when her only child was born, adding the name Jordan to the more respectable sounding Sebastian. This was partly because she was not sure whether she was expecting a girl or a boy. Jordan was a unisex name. This riled her mother who immediately reacted by saying it was very low class. As for living in the wilds of northern England in the town of Barrowcliffe, that was beyond the pale.

It didn't matter that it was connected to the rest of the country by fast electric trains. The houses had electricity, running water, and flush lavatories. The majority of them had fast broadband. The village of Kimber Scott had been left in the broadband slow lane. It was also a mobile phone not-spot, due to Sir Edmund's refusal to allow a mobile phone mast in the village.

Once Jordan went to school in 2003, Kathryn resumed her full-time career in accountancy. Stephen had a well-paid promotion that demanded he should work abroad to oversee the contracts that Constructions Rhône-Rhin SA had taken on in the Far East. Kathryn did not fit in easily with others in Barrowcliffe and she started to hanker for the more exciting life of the South with all its social events. Her rebellious side withered away, and she became more like her parents. She had always said she was a free spirit, but her freedom of spirit made her ever more selfish.

When Sebastian was ten, she took him down to Kimber Scott. It was not successful. Sebastian had managed to put all four feet in it as far as his grandparents were concerned. They had gone to Goodwood Races. All he remembered was that there were lots of identical brown animals chasing each other in a large herd. Some horses had shed their riders but continued on regardless. He thought it rather stupid of them. In one race, a rider-less horse came in first, and Jordan asked his grandfather why it hadn't won. The reply was harsh.

Sebastian's grandparents all but disowned him when he was described by the headmistress of Barrowcliffe High School as being "of very average ability, if not lower than average". He had failed the Common Entrance Examination for a prominent public school. They never forgave him, describing him as an embarrassment to the family.

Sir Edmund and Lady Dormer-Chetwynd were mightily pleased when Kathryn had an affair and ran off with Rupert Bell-

Dick, Head of Corporate Banking at Glynn's Bank. There was a small matter of what to do about Sebastian, but that strange school in the wilds of Scotland seemed to fit the bill. Most importantly the school and Stephen's parents absolved them of all responsibility for Sebastian.

When they found out what had happened with Sebastian, they took no interest whatever. They had nothing to say about Sebastian's success with his Advanced Highers, let alone getting a place at a prestigious university. No mention was ever made of Sebastian's skills in technical and industrial French and German. Sir Edmund and Lady Anabel were of that generation that firmly believed that foreigners should speak English.

After the accident, they never replied to Ewan's letter telling them of Sebastian's passing. He counted as nothing to them.

Stephen assured Ewan that it was not unusual for the Dormer-Chetwynd family to be like that. Although atheists, they loved the old Book of Common Prayer service. They went to the very traditional church in the village to be seen and to network. They only associated with the county set, the "respectable people" who sent their children to the top public schools and could afford the fees, went to society events at Goodwood, Glyndebourne, Wimbledon, and Henley. Kathryn was making up with her mother and father; she knew what side her bread was buttered on. It seemed that things in the Rupert garden were none too rosy either.

Ewan found the whole thing rather repulsive. He was an idealistic young man who hated that kind of elitist snobbery. He wanted his life's journey to be one of harmony and peace with everyone. Jordan had never shown any of the characteristics of his mother and grandparents. They had despised him for his gentleness and aspiration to be a gentle man who was a

gentleman. Jordan's death had given life to a number of others. Ewan still wanted his soulmate to be with him.

The world could be a shit at times and as Ewan sat alone, he cried. He felt he was in a wasteland, hungry and thirsty; his spirit was fainting within him. He wanted the peace of Christ to be within him. He knew that some in the American evangelical churches believed that Jordan's death was a punishment for being gay, which was an abomination. God had given them both the emotional and physical attractions that resulted in the deep love they had for each other. If God had punished Jordan for that, he was an absolute bastard.

That was not the God he knew, the one to whom the mountains surrounding him shouted their praise, and the rock on which he sat was declaring, "God is not dead!" And His was the gentle voice, almost a whisper, that came unbidden, saying, "Eejay, I am here. Jordy is safe; in my house there are many rooms. I will sit down with you."

At the end of the Corscadden Festival, Ewan was back in Deanhaugh Terrace continuing his law studies. As usual, it was in the evening, and he had dressed down. As it was quite warm in the flat, it was a t-shirt and running shorts. After studying, he would meditate from his favourite collection of Celtic Christian meditations snuggled up to one of the menagerie of soft toys that shared his very pleasant Edinburgh flat with him. And that soft whispering of a voice came back to Ewan several times as he sat alone and so homesick. And tears would fill his eyes, not that anyone knew, except the all-knowing and all-seeing God. Often Ewan would fall asleep, which was not very spiritual, was it?

More examinations came in Ewan's direction, mocks in July and real things in August. They were still held in Chamber's Street, as the refurbishment of the Law Society's Headquarters

had become a more extensive job than first thought. Ewan felt that he was rapidly becoming part of the furniture there. He continued to work hard at the exams, as it took his mind off the Jordan-sized hole in his life. The diet of examination took up the first week of August from the Monday to Thursday and, if anything, was even more challenging than the ones in February. While the points of law flitting about like butterflies had settled in his brain at the right time, Ewan did not want to count his chickens, if he could be excused for mixing his metaphors. Much of his recent unpleasant legal experiences had been far too close to home. However, what he had gained in the cases involving him for real had proved invaluable.

## Chapter 19

Mid-August 2022

After his exams, Ewan was doing the final preparations for the Duchess of Midlothian case. Mr McCullough was delighted with Ewan's work. It was detailed, referring to many helpful bits of case law. True there were one or two points that Mr McCullough had picked up, but that was the result of Mr McCullough's decades of experience as a lawyer. Ewan diligently researched them and put them into the case files.

It kept his mind off Jordan. Ewan was starting to cope with the loss better than he had, but there were still times he felt very lonely. He was still rather reclusive, although he was always very welcoming to those who came round to his flat. He longed for Brewster House, where he felt safe. He was looking forward to the Festival Fringe, with its zany shows that Aidy and Chris and their girlfriends would enjoy with them.

On Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> August, he decided to have his lunchbreak out of the office and went to a coffee-shop just around the corner. He would go from time to time and had already acquired a favourite table where he would sit if no-one else was there. He could watch the comings and goings of other young professionals who worked in that part of the city. The staff even knew him by his first name.

On this occasion the table was free. Ewan made himself comfortable. As always, it was an ordinary black filter coffee, accompanied by a shortbread biscuit. He found espresso too strong. Three young women came through the door. One of them, a tall skinny young woman in tight jeans and a T-shirt approached his table.

"Well, well, well! If it isn't Ewan Walker, our very own Squirrel," she said.

Ewan looked up with a start. He looked surprised. He recognised the accent as Buchananshire.

“You remember me?” she said.

“Chloe... Chloe Grey?” Ewan tensed up as he remembered what had happened eleven and a half years before. He had tried a chat-up line that was, to say the least, clumsy. She had smacked him one in the gob, and he had gone berserk. He had to be restrained from planting one on Miss Grey. He was instantly made to work in isolation for the rest of the day. Ms Bryant, his form teacher, wrote a report about the incident that was rather at variance with the facts. Mr Mitchell had suspended him for five school days. Mum had gone mad at him, grounding him for a month. She was not called Scary Mary for nothing. Dad was not that pleased either. Some of his friends had stood up for him, saying that it was Chloe who had smacked Ewan in the chops. Ms Bryant had been advised about making student reports that were factually accurate. Master Walker had been called back in, and Miss Grey had been suspended for three school days.

Ms Bryant took it out on Ewan. She disliked boys in general and could not stand Ewan Walker in particular. She hated him even more when he had had enough of her taunting and humiliating him and told her that she was the ultimate in sexist degradation of women.

“Come on Ewan don’t be coy,” Chloe said. Her two friends were egging her on. Ewan wanted to throw the coffee over her and bolt back to the office. Good manners and the desire not to blow his career before it had started prevented that particular course of action.

“He’s so cute, Chloe,” one of her friends said.

“Hello, Chloe,” he said shyly. “It’s a long time since I saw you last.”

“How’s Jordan,” Chloe said.

“He isn’t,” Ewan gulped, and tears filled his eyes.

Chloe noticed. Possibly she and her friends had been rather tactless. “What’s happened? Have you and Jordan split up? I knew you two were going steady.”

“We were,” Ewan replied, “until the accident.”

“Accident?”

“He was killed in a car accident in January.”

“I always thought he was a steady driver.”

“Some airhead ran into him. She turned across him near Tubberbutts at high speed and smashed into him. He died in theatre. Someone else died later. It was on his birthday when it happened. We were going to France to get engaged on my birthday.” Tears were flowing down Ewan’s face. “I am sorry. I have shed tears by the litre since.”

Chloe put her arm around Ewan. She had passed the entrance exam into the Walker family by putting all four feet in it. Her friends were looking shocked. They were supporting Chloe who was, in reality, feeling rather shy about approaching Ewan, given what had happened in the past.

“Ewan, I am so sorry,” she said. She hugged him. “I never heard about it. I was in London.”

“Let me pull myself together, and I will order coffee for you all.”

Ewan ordered coffee for the three girls. Chloe felt she deserved a punch in the face for her lousy chat up line. Instead,

Ewan had ordered coffee. Her chat-up line was many times worse than the one Ewan had tried on her as a gawky thirteen-year-old. "Squirrel," she said, "I am sorry for what I did in Ms Bryant's class. I was a feisty kitten then. I am now a gentle pussy cat."

"Who are your friends Chloe?" Ewan asked.

"Lauren, and Sam," Chloe replied. "Don't be scared by them. They're pussy cats like me."

Chloe introduced Sam and Lauren to Ewan. Ewan smiled nervously. While he had Jordan with him, he was more at ease with meeting women socially. On his own, he was as afraid of women as he was eleven years before. Eleven years before, Chloe had knocked him into the middle of next week; the three of them could knock him into the middle of next month. He had seen too many films that involved the smack in the mouth the actress delivered. Somehow, the antagonist seemed not to get the message. Eleven years ago, he had, loud and clear.

Lauren and Sam were Chloe's workmates. They worked for an interior design company, just down the road in Castle Street. Chloe had started a couple of months before, having done a year down in London.

Lauren and Sam had finished their coffee.

"Chloe," said Lauren, "we'll go back to the office. Don't hurry back. We'll cover for you."

"Thanks, Lauren," Chloe replied. "I've got my mobile on if I'm needed in a hurry. I should be back in twenty minutes or so. I'm expecting a call from Mr and Mrs Kinmond at about two."

Ewan relaxed. There was no point in struggling. Chloe had him exactly where she wanted him. Would she be the one

who would be his soulmate? Or would she be toying with him like a pussy cat would with a mouse, before devouring him?

“I’m so sorry about Jordan,” said Chloe. “I don’t know what to say.”

“You don’t have to be,” Ewan replied. “You weren’t to know. I’m pleased to see you again. What have you been up to?”

Chloe described her time at uni doing Art and Design. She was surprised that Chris didn’t do Art; he was so good at it. She had graduated with a Two-one in 2019. She had got a job in London for a year’s contract. She then had been put on furlough during the pandemic. She found London far too hot and crowded. She didn’t feel safe on the Underground. She had been mugged at knifepoint for her mobile on the street just before she returned to Scotland. Nobody had helped her. The police were useless. Their attitude was that she hadn’t been hurt, so they were far too busy to investigate. They gave her a call centre number to ring at a premium rate. There she could get a crime number. They warned her it could take up to an hour to get through.

Ewan stared at her in disbelief. Things were far from perfect in Scotland, but England seemed to be cracking up.

Chloe carried on about how expensive everything was in London. She had a tiny room in a flat, the rent for which took about half her salary. There were lists of rules from the landlord which she and her flatmates had to follow. Theirs was not the worst by a long chalk. Although the house was shabby, it was at least watertight and didn’t have rats in the kitchen. There were plenty of rats around. They were not all burrowing animals that lived in sewers.

As for getting about, Chloe was a keen cyclist. She had been competitive as a teenager. The London traffic was scary, and the air was foul. There were areas where the air was cleaner.

She would go running there. In Edinburgh, there were areas where the air was none too good, but the air in Holyrood Park was clear and she could take deep breaths without worrying about the muck that was going into her lungs.

She had had a number of boyfriends, but none of them had worked for one reason or another. A couple were pretentious. One wanted her as a sex doll.

She liked her job, but the post Brexit downturn, and then the pandemic, had slowed down trade. Her contract was not extended. Fortunately, an opportunity came up in Edinburgh. She shared a flat in Dean with three other girls, and the rent took a lot less from her salary. She could live in Edinburgh, rather than just exist.

“So, Squirrel, what did you get up to when you left Caddie-land?” she concluded.

Ewan had been very happy with his time at uni. He found Edinburgh such an exciting place to be. He was thrilled about how well he had done on the course. He had worked hard. He was so happy being with Jordan. He told her how he had got a training post at Johnston McLean and Partners, just around the corner. He mentioned how Jordan had a job as a technical and industrial linguist at the far end of the New Town. He had done really well there. They were going to get engaged in France on his twenty-fourth birthday at the end of February. They were going to get married as soon as Ewan qualified. They were going to buy a flat together and were saving up for a deposit.

“But... It still hurts like hell,” said Ewan.

“Of course, it does,” Chloe replied. “It was obvious how much you loved Jordan. We all knew that at school. I never thought that such a horrible thing would have happened.”

“He kept me level after Mum died,” Ewan replied.

“I had forgotten that,” said Chloe.

“I could be an obnoxious little prick in those days. He was always there for me. I want to say sorry to everyone I was a little prick to.”

“We were kids then. We all could be little pricks at times. I certainly was.”

“The only exception,” Ewan continued, “was Ms Bryant. She hated me.”

“She did. You were totally right when you called her ‘the ultimate sexist degradation of women’. I now know one or two things about that.”

“Mr Mitchell gave me a bollocking for that, but I’m sure there was a twinkle in his eye.”

“You’re totally right, Squirrel. Your share value leapt, not just in Secondary Three, but also with all the teachers, including Mr Mitchell. There was a lot of sniggering in all the staff rooms, especially with the screech she let out. They said she broke ten windows in Fenton House.”

“It’s going to take a lot to get over it. Jordan’s accident happened almost eight years to the day after Mum died.”

“Christ!” said Chloe. “Fate has given you enough shit to last a lifetime.”

“It has. My work keeps my mind off it. And my family.”

“Yes, Mum tells me how close you are as a family. You’re very close to your grandma and granddad.”

“She has been wonderful. I really appreciate her wisdom, and granddad’s as well.”

Time was getting on and both needed to get back to work. They would meet at the climbing wall in Dunedin Street the next day after work.

Lauren and Sam were waiting for Chloe at tea-break that afternoon.

“Well, lover girl, have you got a date?” said Sam.

“I have,” Chloe replied. “We’re both going on the climbing wall at Dunedin Street.”

“You’re one lucky girl,” said Lauren. “That was the worst chat-up line you could possibly have given. A gay man who has lost his boyfriend...”

“I know. I really put all four feet in it. But we got talking.”

“He’s so cute and gorgeous. He is certainly no macho man,” said Sam. “He’s dead sweet. His boyfriend sounded gorgeous as well.”

“He’s even skinnier than you,” said Lauren.

Chloe remembered how when she had hugged him, she could feel his ribs sticking out from his chest.

“Why do you call him Squirrel?” asked Sam.

“It was from school,” Chloe replied. “He looks like one. Sandy hair, lanky, pointed face. He is just like a red squirrel. He climbs up a climbing wall just like a squirrel going up a tree.”

Chloe told her friends about the school she went to where the uniform was very distinctive. The girls wore a tartan skirt, which was not that unusual, but the boys wore a kilt. She showed them pictures she had of her friends at Strathcadden Academy.

She went on to say how lots of girls really fancied Ewan. He had been voted the most gorgeous boy in the school, but he was openly gay, and his boyfriend was Jordan. They were almost joined at the hip. Both Ewan and Jordan were in the school running team, and several of Chloe's friends had joined the women's team purely to ogle at Ewan's skimpy running shorts which showed his gorgeously tight bum, which topped his long legs, to perfection. There was an upside for them. They ended up as good runners and became very fit.

For six years, Chloe had thought about that slim figure of Ewan. She had dreamed about it. His face was so gorgeous, so pretty, in fact. His hair fell about it. Chloe didn't like the fashion for really short hair on men, let alone beards. None of the Walker men could grow beards anyway, something to do with the genes they had inherited off their father. She wished that Ewan had a bushy tail.

None of her boyfriends could match the physical attraction of her Adonis. Nor were they as gentle. Aidan had always been gentle, quiet, and rather shy. Ewan had calmed down in Secondary Six. He was becoming gentle and beautiful in nature. He was a gentle man who was a gentleman.

Chloe's tea was cold by the time she drank it.

At six o'clock the following evening, Chloe arrived at the climbing wall. Ewan had got changed into his sports kit and run down from his flat. Chloe felt excited. She knew her eyes were wide open as she saw Ewan. She felt like the protagonist in the chick-lit books.

He had this gentle aura about him, his gentle smile, his gentle face, and his long legs shown to perfection by his running shorts. Many men had gorgeous legs but were so coy in showing

them. Ewan didn't go for the baggy shorts that hung shapelessly on her previous boyfriends. He may have looked like the skinny weakling that then did the muscle building in the gym. He didn't need to. She didn't need a muscle-hunk. Piles of pecs and six-packs tended to degenerate into pure flab as their owner headed to middle-age.

They cuddled. Gosh, Ewan was so shy. He wouldn't be running off with several other girls. Anyway, he was turned on by young men. Chloe knew Ewan was gay, but it didn't matter. He was a girly boy. She would feel very safe with him as a boyfriend; her exes were all macho men who liked to show off their virility, often by displaying their incompetence, irresponsibility, and immaturity.

She could feel his ribs under his T-shirt. He wasn't worth eating, but there must have been some muscle there for him to be so agile on the climbing wall.

Soon Ewan was scrambling up the climbing wall. Chloe watched him intently, especially his bum which was revealed to perfection by his running shorts. His agility reinforced in her why he was called Squirrel. He clung to the handholds and footholds as if he had claws. That tight bum of his! Chloe was experiencing massive feelings of attraction towards him.

Then Chloe was on the climbing wall. She was no mean climber herself, although on her first pitch, she wasn't concentrating and flopped onto the mat. She squeaked and Ewan was smiling at her. "I'll get there," she said, and she clambered up the boulder wall. Ewan scrambled along a couple of faces, saying, "Come and get me!"

Ewan tried the overhangs. Being so light, he could hang on easily; he had a good power to weight ratio. At one point he hung off the overhang, while Chloe came over and kissed him on the lips.

After their session, they sat outside the gym. Just before they did so, Chloe reached out and fondled Ewan. He smiled and said, “Jordan was the last one to do that to me.”

“Another Jordan has done it to you,” said Chloe. “My middle name is Jordan. It can be a girl’s name as well as a boy’s”

They sat down and started to cuddle. Chloe caressed him, saying, “You have lovely legs, Eejay, my Squirrel. You are gorgeous in those running shorts. You are so pretty, so cute. I think I am going to fall in love.”

“So am I, Chloe.” Ewan replied. It was the first time he had felt really happy for over six months.

If Ewan Walker and Chloe Grey were finding great pleasure in each other’s company, the opposite was true for Rupert Bell-Dick and Kathryn Chetwynd. Although Kathryn did not know it, Rupert was summoned one morning to see the new Chairman, Sir John Mason. Rupert thought that it was going to be a pat-on-the-back for the outstanding performance of the Corporate Banking Department. He was put slightly on the alert when Sir John did not respond to Rupert’s unusual handshake.

Rupert did not expect to be ushered through to the boardroom. “Do please take a seat,” said Sir John. The seat was what was colloquially known as “the ejector seat”, which was often used when top people were about to be “let go”. Rupert was by now experiencing that lurching feeling in his stomach.

Sir Charles Manby-Newton, Head of Governance and Compliance started, “Thank you for coming at such short notice, Rupert. Since you have been a long-standing and valued member of our senior staff team, we decided that we should run these proposals past you as we consider how we are going to restructure our business.

“We know that you have expressed concern at times about the efficiency with which the Board has run things. You were, of course, quite right. We have been rather slack at times, sitting about on our backsides and getting diddly-squat achieved. We have made a decision to change this. We are going to carry out a root-and-branch review of all our operations.”

Sir Charles started a presentation which had lots of tables, graphs, pie-charts, and what-if scenarios. It had a very large amount of management-speak, like “core competencies” and “leverages”. Most of the Board looked bored to tears. They were going to have to watch these umpteen times before the end of the week. Rupert, who was totally at home with management-speak, could understand it all too clearly. There was no mention of the Corporate Banking Department, of which he was head.

Sir Charles then said, “We are bringing all our banking operations under one umbrella. We are aware that certain of our operations, while making the Bank a great deal of money, have been conducted in a manner that, shall we say, pushes the envelope of what is ethical or even legal.

“The Board has made it a priority to investigate whether certain departments have gone out of the envelope. Unfortunately, the Financial Conduct Authority have got involved in the past few days and are going to come down on us like a tonne of bricks unless we get our act together. Several departments are being scrutinised.

“Rupert, I am bound to say that yours is one of them. The FCA have earmarked your department for special attention, as there are many areas for concern.”

“Where’s the evidence?” Rupert shouted. “How did the FCA get involved?”

“Whistle-blower, old chap. Who, we don’t know. What we do know is that the FCA have got their teeth into this. And they don’t let go, either. The main concern of the Board is that this has happened and there are lots of questions to answer. The main point is that investigations like these will do our reputation no good at all. It is something we find most unfortunate.

“Now, Rupert, you too have lots of questions to answer – not to us, but to the FCA who are waiting for you in Seminar Room 8.”

Sir John then added, “Clearly, we cannot have a weak point in our structure, Mr Bell-Dick, so we are letting you go. I have given instructions for your effects to be placed in a carrier box. Your password for the systems has been deleted. Your keycard is no longer valid. As soon as you have finished with the FCA today, you will be escorted off the premises by security.”

Sir John pressed a buzzer, and Rupert was escorted to Seminar Room 8 by the Head of Security.

The meeting was intense, a grilling about what Rupert and his colleagues had been up to during the last eight years. The Corporate Banking Department had gone into a good number of viable companies that had hit temporary problems. They had ousted the management and asset-stripped the companies and the individuals who worked in them. They had made large sums of money in selling off the properties as real estate, leaving employees redundant with the minimum payoffs.

At the end of the day, Rupert was escorted off the premises with his bright red carry-box. There was no ceremony, no thanks for his services. Instead, there were stares from passers-by in the street. The box advertised to the whole world and his dog, “I have been let go.”

Further investigation would be needed on each and every case. For Rupert, the next day's appointment with the Financial Conduct Authority would be in their premises. And he would be under intensive questioning for the next ten working days. After that would be the Inland Revenue.

During a hiatus in the grilling, Rupert had time to visit his solicitors, Barford and Partners in The City. They would negotiate a settlement with Glynn's Bank, which they assured him would run into seven, if not eight figures.

Rupert had time at the end of the day to wonder about who had snitched on him. The people he had dealings with were totally trustworthy, in that they knew the code. They looked out for each other. Whoever spilled the beans knew what they were about and had to have financial technical knowledge. The transactions that were of interest to the FCA were complex, requiring a great deal of expertise. The FCA did say that a detailed technical report had been sent to them. Rupert thought he knew of someone who had the necessary knowledge and skill. He also knew that she owed him a deep debt of ingratitude.

Rupert decided to sell Windhover Barn. Since he was the one that had signed all the legal work during the conveyancing, he had the exclusive right to do so. Kathryn had, by his sleight of hand, signed away any rights that she had to the property, even though she had paid half the mortgage, and was now paying it all. Barford and Partners were experts at sorting out these little ruses, keeping them well hidden from the solicitors' disciplinary tribunals. Should the latter bodies get interested, they could be bought off quite easily with a handshake and a very good dinner. If that didn't work, an inexperienced member of staff was dismissed and hung out to dry.

During another break from his grilling at the Financial Conduct Authority, Rupert rang Blomfields, the Estate Agents in Laineshurst to put Windhover Barn on the market. Now that he was no longer working at Glynn's Bank, nobody would give a damn that he had lost a thumping sum of money on an overpriced house that was now worth about a third of what he had paid. Kathryn was one of several girlfriends. There was no legal bond; they were partners. She was too much of a free spirit for that. Kathryn didn't have any legal rights. She occupied Windhover Barn under a licence to occupy arrangement, which could be terminated at any time.

Since she had well and truly shafted Rupert this time, now was as good a time as any to give her notice to quit. He arranged with Barford and Partners to serve it on her.

Kathryn was out with the girls one Saturday morning when Rupert arrived with Mr Blomfield who had given him a lift from the station. Mr Blomfield spent an hour taking pictures and measuring up. He always did this even though he had the measurements already on file back at the office. A comparison revealed that Windhover Barn had neither grown nor shrunk. That most of the technical gizmos were now non-functional would not affect how sellable the house was. Now that it was surrounded by houses on the Glebelands Farm development, it would affect the price a bit, but houses on the development were selling, even though the starting price for the smallest terrace was by now six hundred grand. Mr Blomfield would market Windhover Barn at just shy of one million.

Rupert found the spare keys and gave them to Mr Blomfield, before going back to the station and making good his escape back to London before Kathryn got back in. That was the intention. However, just as they were about to leave, Kathryn came home unexpectedly. She had had a bit of a spat with one of her friends and had come back home in high dudgeon. Like all

spats, it was over something really trivial, but her friends were like Kathryn. All had large egos and found it very difficult to back down.

“What are you doing here, Rupert?” she snapped. “I don’t want to see you again. And why is Mr Blomfield here?”

“I am selling the house, Kathryn, and Mr Blomfield is putting it on the market.”

“Do you mean to tell me that you are putting the house on the market without even asking me?” Kathryn shouted angrily.

“I don’t have to ask you,” Rupert retorted. “This is my house and mine alone.”

Mr Blomfield edged out. “I’ll get a taxi, Mr Blomfield,” Rupert said brusquely. “There is quite a big agenda.”

“What do you mean that this is your house? I have been paying the mortgage on this place. You have stopped paying it and left it to me,” Kathryn replied with a certain amount of justified grievance.

“I have had other financial commitments.”

“Like paying for several other floosies, including school fees? Don’t think I don’t know! Paying your share of the mortgage made me overdrawn.”

“That’s part of being paid a salary,” Rupert replied casually. “Don’t wet yourself about it.”

“I am not supposed to go overdrawn. I work for a bloody accountancy company; in case you have lost track on what all your women get up to. Do you remember that one of your daughters has done her A-levels?”

“At least I feel something for my children. All you could say about Jordan was that his death was useful to you.”

“Don’t mention his name ever again!” Kathryn screamed. “I am a free spirit! I was going to get his pay-out until you bloody shafted me. It’s cost me sixty grand. You had better pay me that, otherwise I will sue you.”

“And you have shafted me!” Rupert shouted. “You wrote that report to the FCA and the Inland Revenue. They are going to do me over good and proper. Thank you very much.”

“I was getting my own back for what you did over my ex-son’s will. Now my ex-husband has got it all with that scrawny moffie of his. Perhaps he’s taken over from where my ex-son left off.”

“You chose to do it Kathryn,” said Rupert. “You are a free spirit, and you said it felt good, so you did it. And it came back to bite you.”

“Because you shafted me!” Kathryn screamed. “If it wasn’t for you, I would be six hundred grand better off. You blew it for me.”

“Even if I hadn’t been there, you would have lost and you know it. You had made Jordan sign a piece of paper that had no value in law. You treated him like shit, and you know it. Thank God my mother never did that to me. Stephen was right. You are truly a mercenary vixen. No doubt the FCA and Inland Revenue will give you some reward!”

Kathryn screamed loudly and threw a coffee cup as hard as she could, before yelling “It’s none of your fucking business!”

“It’s every bit of my business because you have snatched on me. We were in this together, but you have shown time and again that you are completely selfish. A free spirit. If it feels good, you do it. You can be a free spirit as much as you like because you are going to leave this house. Barfords are sending you an eviction notice.”

“Over my dead body!” Kathryn yelled. “I own half this house!”

“No, you don’t. In Law, you are just someone who was living with me.”

“I signed paperwork!”

“Yes, it is a licence to occupy. It can be terminated at any time, and it’s being terminated now. You have a fortnight to move out.”

“What about the mortgage I paid?” Kathryn shouted.

“You can regard it as rent,” Rupert said smugly.

Kathryn screamed so loudly that passers-by could hear the commotion. She hurled a saucepan at Rupert. It missed and smashed through the screen of the television that was on the wall.

“Look what you have done to my television!” she screamed.

“It was you who threw the pan at me!” Rupert shouted. He wanted to plant one on her but didn’t want a charge of assault.

“You should have stopped it!”

“With my fucking head?” Rupert shouted. “I am going back to London. I am back in two weeks, and I want you out.”

Rupert went over to the computer and started to take it apart. “I am taking this to London,” he said.

“Over my dead body!” Kathryn screamed. She grabbed hold of Rupert’s laptop.

“Get off my fucking laptop!” Rupert yelled. “And get off my fucking computer!”

The row got even more intense. Kathryn was screaming like an enraged fishwife. Every other word was an expletive and was accompanied by an object hurled at Rupert. As it went on, it grew ever more unconstructive. It only stopped when there was a heavy banging on the door, which indicated the presence of two police officers. The North Sussex Police answered to incidents where there was shouting, somebody was bleeding, or something went bang. This job was threatening to become the combination of all three.

Neighbours were concerned for the safety of the residents of Windhover Barn. There had been a considerable amount of shouting, swearing, and throwing of objects. A couple of bruises revealed that Rupert had been the target of the barrage. Kathryn quite falsely said that Rupert had beaten her up, although there was no evidence that he had. The security cameras that Kathryn had installed showed that she was the one causing ninety percent of the rumpus. She did not take kindly to being told that she should grow up, and that a woman of her age should know better. When it was suggested that a night in the cells would help to calm her down, followed by a visit to Etteringden Magistrates' Court, Kathryn restrained herself.

Rupert recovered his computer and his laptop before the police took him down to the railway station. He felt conspicuous as he sat on the train holding the computer and its peripherals. They were also heavy and cumbersome.

## Chapter 20

### Mid-August to Late August 2022

Ewan and Chloe would meet for coffee on Wednesdays at lunchtime and go on the climbing wall in Dunedin Street on Thursdays after work. They exchanged addresses and phone numbers.

It was getting close to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. One Tuesday evening Ewan noticed the tickets for the Fringe in the living room. He and Jordan had bought them when they went on sale in early January. With everything else that had happened, Ewan could have been excused for forgetting them. It was a chance comment that Chloe made about the Fringe. She had found it was impossible to get into most of the popular acts. The likes of Ewan and Jordan had snapped the tickets up as soon as they had gone on sale. It would not even have crossed Ewan's mind to make money out of touting them at exorbitant prices as others did.

Therefore, Chloe was looking forward to going with Ewan, who wondered what Aidy, Tamsin, Chris, and Gemma would say. Ewan took a couple of days off work to enjoy the weekday acts. Chloe was able to do the same. The first act was a zany performance that had the audiences in stitches. It poked fun at various populist right-wing politicians of the time who were very good at stirring up discontent, but rather less good at providing solutions. Chloe and Ewan loved it.

That afternoon, they met up with the rest of the tribe and went to Aidy's flat for a bit of lunch. There was a lot of excited chatter from Gemma, Chloe, and Tamsin. The last time they had met Chloe was on the banks of the Cadden seven years before. They had discussed baby-faced boys with gorgeous tight bums and who was going to lay eggs in which nest. Certainly, two of

the three were making progress with pair-bonding. The third was going to have to take her time, so her quarry didn't fly off in a squawking panic.

Back at the flat, the boys were in the kitchen making a light lunch. They liked vegetarian dishes and salads. Chris had a knack of knocking something delicious out of whatever was there. The girls had "retired to the drawing room", as Tamsin put it. They were still regaling Chloe with everything they had done. Then Chloe confessed, "I put my foot right in it when I met Ewan. He was having coffee in that nice shop in Castle Street; you know the one. I went up to him and asked about him and Jordan. I just didn't know. I was expecting him to thump me one, just like I did to him eleven years ago."

"That's not our Ewan's style," Gemma replied. "He would have legged it back to his office. I put my foot in it when the accident had just happened. It was Jordan's birthday. We had gone round to Ewan's flat for the birthday meal. There was no one there, so we waited. Then Ewan came round the corner in his running gear. He had run back from the Duchess of Midlothian. It's more than 10 k and he did it in half an hour. I asked him, 'Where's birthday boy?' He rushed up to the flat and was sick in the bathroom..."

"It was a big shock to all of us," Tamsin added. "Ewan was so sweet about it as well."

"He was sweet with me," said Chloe. "He still misses Jordan a great deal."

"He does," said Gemma. "They were teenage sweethearts, as you know. Jordan kept him on the rails after his mum died. You know how they were joined at the hip. The main thing is not to push him too hard. Ewan has become quite shy since he lost Jordan."

“What makes Ewan tick?” Chloe asked.

“Ewan has always been quite spiritual,” said Gemma. “He is not religious; he doesn’t go to church on Sundays. He does believe in God, though. He’s into Celtic Christianity and talks about Jordan being his soulmate on life’s journey. So, when Jordan was killed, Ewan had lost his soulmate and lost his way. He says his church is in the woods, the scenery is his stained-glass windows. His altar is a rock outcrop. If you go for a walk with him out in the country, he will go over to a rock outcrop and will sit cross-legged on it. He seems to go into a trance for five minutes or so. Just sit next to him, but don’t disturb him. It’s very important to him. He’ll also do it at home. By the way, he likes to wear his kilt at home. He normally doesn’t go out in it, but today he’s got his kilt on because lots of young men have them on during the festival.

“Also, he is something of a bookworm. He has lots of books at home.”

“I have seen his collection of books in his flat,” Chloe replied.

“Ewan can’t go past a bookshop without buying a book he never thought he wanted. He will then curl up with it. Or he might go into the bathroom with it – so get in there first! Otherwise, you will end up waiting for twenty or thirty minutes.”

“What kind of stuff does he read?”

“Classic and modern novels, poetry, stuff about law, Christian meditations, art, and history. He is very brainy – and musical.”

“He was when we were at school,” said Tamsin. “I went home once, and said to Mum and Dad, ‘There’s this crazy kid in Secondary Five who knows everything about everything.’”

“He doesn’t brag about it,” Chloe said. “Am I brainy enough for him?”

“None of us are,” Gemma replied. “He was the brainiest kid in the school. He was brainier than most of the teachers, and certainly the headmaster. He was as brainy as Mr McEwan.”

“He knows his stuff about Law,” Tamsin added. “Mel works in his office. He knows as much as the senior partner.”

“He’s never said it to us,” said Gemma, “but he wouldn’t. He is not that arrogant. If he enjoys the book, he’ll tell you all about it. He’s so enthusiastic that you will want to read it too. You’re good at poetry, aren’t you?”

“I like it.”

“Get him onto poetry, and you will get on like a house on fire.”

“He’s not a bible-basher, is he?” said Chloe. “I can’t bear all those quotes with ‘thee’, ‘thou’, and ‘-eth’. You get them on posters in stations.”

“He reads a modern bible and meditates on it. Watch out for the crossed legs. He’ll say things, but only if you are interested. He wants to show the beauty of God and his creation,” Gemma replied.

“I don’t want to catch religion,” Chloe replied. “Churchy people can be so insipid.”

“You won’t catch it from Ewan,” said Tamsin. “He would totally agree with you.”

“I remember when Craigie Boy caught religion,” said Gemma. “He became almost human.”

“I still think Ewan is too brainy for me,” said Chloe. “I wouldn’t want to give him a headache thinking down to my level.”

“You won’t, Chloe,” said Gemma. “You went to uni and got a high two-one. You’re certainly not that thick. Besides you are a successful interior designer and you’re doing a distance course in horticulture. How are your grades in that?”

“I’ve got distinction in all my assignments, so far.”

“Well, there you are. Ewan doesn’t know much about plants. A couple of Latin names and he’s lost. He loves gardens, but don’t get him to weed. He’ll take out all the plants you want. Give him a lawn mower. Chris is the gardener in our tribe, but he doesn’t get much done as he is so busy at work.”

“Chloe, just be a pussy cat and Ewan will fall for you - guaranteed. Besides, brainy men are sexy.”

“Rubbish,” Tamsin retorted. “The men in this flat are all gorgeous, but they certainly are not sexy. They are cute. They all have to carry a proof of age card.”

“My previous boyfriends thought they were sexy,” said Chloe. “They wanted me as a bonking machine. I want to be more than that.”

“You will be. In this tribe, all the boys come from a man who is a big zero as far as a stud is concerned,” said Gemma.

“But he did bring five boys into the world,” said Tamsin.

“Five?” said Chloe. “There are only three here.”

“There are seven-year-old twins at home,” said Gemma.

After the afternoon shows, the clan went to an evening concert performed by the Marchmont Orchestral Society. Throughout the concert, Ewan and Chloe had held hands and she had laid her head on him. Chloe lay there contented, listening to Ewan's heart beating in his bony chest. Ewan propped his head against hers. She caressed his face.

Ewan walked Chloe back to her flat, hand in hand. When they got there, they kissed and cuddled. Chloe had guided his hands to her boobs. The two young people were getting more relaxed with each other. They were holding hands. She had fondled him, but he was still plucking up the courage to do the same. When she did so again, this was surely the time to reciprocate. An intense feeling of joy ran through Chloe as Ewan cuddled her. He looked so cute and innocent. He was so gentle. He had lovely eyes, and his pupils were wide open. He was almost a full year younger than her, unlike her previous boyfriends who had been aged between thirty and forty. In many ways he still looked like the gawky teenager he was ten years ago. She savoured this moment as they snogged... no this was Ewan. He was far too refined to do something as crude as snogging. Chloe preferred the ornithologists' term, pair bonding.

Ewan walked back to his flat. Until a few days ago, Ewan had never conceived that he would be holding hands with a girl, let alone snogging, feeling her boobs (invited), or fondling her. It was a funny feeling. Chloe had invited him to do much of what he and Jordan had done in their private moments.

When he got into the flat, Ewan picked up a book.

Half an hour later, he was sitting cross-legged on his settee. He was trying to meditate over the day's occurrences. He was starting to trust Chloe but was terrified about what would happen if it all went wrong. If it didn't work, he would stay single for the rest of his natural. Or find another boyfriend; he knew a

couple of young men to whom he felt attracted. Nobody could make up for Jordan.

Ewan was tired, and his eyes were heavy. The music on *Radio Three* was relaxing, as it was intended to be. He had fallen out of love with *Classic FM*, as he found the adverts were mindless and its playlist was rather limited and repetitive. The presenter's voice was gentle and soporific. As she announced the next piece, Ewan flopped on his side and curled up, cuddling one of the soft toys that was on the settee.

Now that was not very spiritual. Nor was it very reverent, the way Ewan's kilt had ridden up as he had flopped over.

Ewan's dream was similar in many ways to the one he had when he was ill. The Celtic cross was centre stage. Jordan was there, stage right, while Chloe was next to him, close enough to make Ewan wonder if he should have felt jealous. Grandma stood stage left. All were lit with a bright light from the back. From behind the cross, a fourth figure came in whom Ewan recognised as Christ, who said, "Ewan, whom are you looking for?"

"You know that I am looking for the Lord," Ewan replied.

"Do you look for Him with your whole heart, your whole strength, and your whole soul?"

"I do, Lord. I do my best."

"Do you love me more than all of these?"

"Of course. Lord have mercy."

"Look at this cross. See the love of God. The same Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and for ever more."

Then Jordan spoke, "Eejay, I was your soul-friend for eleven years, and you were mine. I loved you and you loved me. Where I am, no calamity will hurt you. There is no pride, no prejudice, no hate, no anger, no deviousness nor manipulation. You have tried hard to keep away from these vices. The Lord will continue to watch over you. Trust him, keep in touch with him, and he will show you the right way. Your meditations are beyond mere words, and they delight him. Believe me.

"The Lord understands and has measured the litres of tears that have poured from your soul and heart over the last seven months. He is sending a new soul-friend to you. She is here, Chloe. Don't be afraid to love her with all your heart and all your soul. And she isn't afraid to love you with all her soul and heart. You are going to take her on your long journey until we meet again. Seventy years will be but seventy minutes to me. I still love you so much and I am looking forward to meeting you again. By the time you reach journey's end your bodies each will be a decrepit ancient monument, but God will give you a new body, as he did with mine. My body is forever twenty-five. Yours and Chloe's will be the same. We will meet again."

Then Grandma said, "Eejay, put aside your fear of women. Take Chloe by the hand and lead her. Let her lead you as well. You will help her to find Christ, not by quoting Bible verses at her, but by being Christ to her. When she asks, you must tell her, but do not thrust things at her before she is ready. Let the Lord do the work. He will do it in exactly the right way for Chloe.

"Walk hand in hand with her. She will walk hand in hand with you. Learn from each other. The pair of you will then walk with confidence. Your road will have a garden of her making that will bring delight to everyone who sees it. Your mother will leap about it as a teenage girl. The Lord himself will walk in it."

Then Chloe said her lines, “I want my Cuddle-Squirrel. What are you waiting for?”

Like a squirrel, Ewan felt himself jump towards Chloe. There was a thump as his book and empty coffee cup were knocked to the floor by a twitch of his whole body.

Ewan put the book back on the shelf and washed the cup. *Radio Three* was still playing. It was half-past eleven. He wrote the dream down so that he wouldn’t forget it.

Ewan changed into the sports clothes he wore in bed, before curling up in a ball around a red squirrel soft toy. Ewan and Jordan were both culture vultures. Chloe was going to be one as well.

Another thing that Chloe was going to do was to join the Walker tribe for Aidy’s and Chris’s joint twenty-sixth birthday on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> August 2022. Like all the special birthdays in the Walker family it would be at the Glenclawe Hotel. Mr and Mrs Campbell enjoyed the custom of the Walker tribe; their money was good and would keep them afloat. Besides they were a lovely family. Glenclawe had hosted Uncle Alex’s fortieth a couple of years back. Aunt Imm and Uncle Alex were also regular customers for a quiet night out.

Chloe was an instant hit with the Walker tribe. She became close to Laura. Joby and Laura were thrilled that she and Ewan were getting on so well. They had been so worried about Ewan after he had lost Jordan. They were still anxious about him, but Chloe was alleviating their worries no end. After all, Ewan had not regained all the weight he had lost as a result of losing Jordan and being so ill.

Ben and Dan took to Chloe as well. They loved meeting new people, especially ones who paid them lots of attention.

Chloe did not fail in this respect. When she had started going out with Ewan, she got to know Aidy. She had also met Chris. She had, of course, known Chris as Head Boy at Strathcadden Academy, along with Gemma, who was Head Girl. She remembered that conversation on the riverbank at Corscadden Regatta, where she, Gemma, and Tamsin had discussed cute baby-faced teen boys with tight bums and who was going to lay eggs in which nest. There was a comment that as far as Christian Salway was concerned, “There’s more than meets the eye.”

She knew that Chris had worked in Walker Bros since he had landed as a “waif and stray” at the school in late 2013. Almost instantly everyone had recognised a great similarity between Christian Salway and Aidan Walker. While Aidan had short brown hair, Christian had blonde hair, colouring he had clearly got from his mother. Otherwise, they were identical from their facial features to their build – even to their mannerisms. If anything, he looked that bit younger. The twins were simply smaller versions of Chris, even down to their long hair. It was all a bit odd, but good manners prevented her from asking. It was for them to know and for her to wonder for the time being.

Chloe had never seen Brewster House before, even though she lived ten minutes’ walk away in Kenhailes Green. She was taken with it, especially the garden. While it was by no means wild, it was crying out for tender loving care. She could see where Chris had tried to use his artistic skills on it, but it was obvious that he didn’t have the time to do it. He worked all God’s hours at Walker Bros, for Aunts Jenny and Sarah were winding down for retirement.

It was her dream garden. Her mother was a keen gardener and the garden at her parents’ house was a picture. Her mother though was rather possessive. While she would chat to Chloe for hours about plants, Mum didn’t want anyone touching

her garden. Dad was confined to his man cave. He wasn't even allowed to do the mowing.

By contrast, Ewan's dad was often given his orders to do the mowing, which required him to get out another big boy's toy, a large ride on mower that made short work of the job but couldn't get into every nook and cranny of the garden, of which there were many. A second machine was needed. The operator had to walk behind it. Joby would grumble about the time it took from his weekend. Although Chloe never said it, if she managed to lay her eggs in Ewan's nest, Brewster House and its big garden might become hers one day.

She could see why Ewan wanted to come home. He had been born in Brewster House, and he loved it. Chloe wanted to come home as well. London had been an adventure, but it had given her some scary moments, especially when one of her boyfriends had wanted to go considerably further than she wanted. She wanted out of there and was very happy to go to Edinburgh. She liked her job in Edinburgh. Edinburgh was exciting for youngsters like her, but it was too busy. Possibly at the age of twenty-six, she was starting to get old. Something dreadful had happened to the music that teens and her flatmates listened to. It had become banal and trivial. She liked the music that Ewan and his boyband had played at the Corscadden Festival a few years ago. Lots of girls of her age liked it then. Mostly it was because the four boys who played were cuties and looked gorgeous in their short kilts. That all four were openly gay was beside the point.

Each of the members of the boyband had gone his own way in the intervening years.

She liked the idea that the Walker family liked to dress up nicely for posh events. So, she had bought a new outfit from Jenners, a smart dress and jacket to do the same. All the boys,

including the little twins, had put on kilts. Joby had recently bought himself full highland regalia, just like his dad. Chloe took lots of pictures on her mobile.

Chloe had never been to the Glenclawe Hotel before, although she had heard of it from her Caddie friends. Her Mum and Dad regarded the Crown Hotel in the town centre as dead posh. The hotel overlooked Buchanan. As they arrived, the grounds looked stunning in the early evening sunshine. Chloe's reaction was to say "Wow!" The gardens were wonderful. They would form a wonderful topic for her major project for her Edinburgh Royal Botanical Gardens garden design qualification.

The meal was a typical celebration of the Walker family, lively with laughter, lightness, and love. Chloe sat between Ewan and Muriel. While she played footsie with Ewan, she spent a lot of time talking to Muriel. She understood how Ewan was so close to his grandmother. She was a very sweet and gentle woman. She was very elegant for a woman of her age. Much of their conversation was about gardens and Chloe's distance learning Edinburgh Royal Botanical Gardens course. Muriel said that Brewster House had a garden that was crying out for some skilled tender loving care. Chloe's eyes lit up.

Laura overheard. She agreed. Joby was hopeless in the garden. She thought she should ask Ewan if it would be cheeky to ask Chloe if she wanted to have a go at sorting it out.

As they talked, Muriel felt very strongly that Chloe was going to be Ewan's soul-friend. She was confident and charming but not overbearing. Chloe was nowhere near as feisty as Mary. While Mary loved Joby dearly, she had a very strong personality. She could live up to the reputation of Scary Mary and did not tolerate fools gladly. Their grandsons had a dominant mother and were definitely mummy's boys. Both needed a partner of great gentleness. Aidan had one in the form of Tamsin. Ewan

had Jordan, but what had happened to him was so painfully tragic.

Chloe could understand why Ewan was scared of women. She hadn't helped when she was a feisty kitten – nor had Michelin Woman. For the rest of her time at Strathcadden, Chloe had admired Ewan for calling Ms Bryant the ultimate sexist degradation of women. The memory of Ms Bryant's screech that reverberated around Fenton House would remain with her all her life. If it came in a dream, Chloe would wake up in her bed at attention. She told Muriel all about it. Muriel had heard about it, and Ewan had certainly gained much street-cred within the family. He had certainly gained his mother's admiration.

After the dinner, Chloe went out with Muriel to admire the garden. Ewan was playing in a band with his friend Cameron, who was a member of the original boyband. David and Anne Heady were there too. They had practised in the morning and got it together quite quickly. It was now dusk, but there was enough to see, with plenty of plants giving their presence away with their scent. It was a most pleasant late summer evening.

Chloe asked, "Do you know the people who own the garden?"

"Very well," said Muriel. "Charles and I have known them for years. Jamie and Lorna Campbell: they are regular customers at Walker Bros. They are lovely people, and I am sure they will be delighted for you to base your project on the garden. I will introduce you to them before we go.

"It's wonderful that there's someone interested in gardening in our family. Of my grandsons, Aidan doesn't come home very often. Ewan hasn't had the heart for obvious reasons. Christian has had a go. He has some wonderful designs but is far too busy at work to do anything about them. My son, Joby, isn't interested beyond machines that make a lot of noise."

“Joby?”

“The younger of my two daughters called him that. His proper names are Joseph Oliver Baxter. He’s quite a bit younger than my girls. Sarah was ten when he was born. It was a lovely name for a girl to give to her baby brother. Neither of my daughters have children. Joby provided us with all the grandchildren. Charles was worried about keeping Walker Bros in the family. Chris is doing a wonderful job in the business.”

“I didn’t know that Chris was part of your family,” said Chloe who was somewhat surprised by the revelation. “He came to our school late, and we all thought he was a close friend of Aidy’s.”

“You will get to find out soon enough, so I will tell you. It’s the worst kept secret in our family. Christian is our grandson. You will have noticed how similar he is to Aidan. Joby is his father. I won’t go into what happened, but Laura was a blast from the past. They met after Mary, Aidan’s and Ewan’s mum passed away. There was a little secret that Joby had kept hidden. He was a very naughty boy, and I told him so. You will also notice that Christian uses “Salway-Walker” as his surname. There was nothing naughty about the little Twins.”

“Why didn’t Aidan and Ewan go into the business?”

“They are very like their father. Charles and I knew that Joby had more brain than us two put together. But he didn’t really have the business sense that Jenny and Sarah had. He’s done very well in his line of electrical engineering. Aidan and Ewan are academics as well. Ewan really has the brains of the family. He is not only very knowledgeable but also is very quick witted. That’s why he’s done so well in his legal training.”

With revelations like that, Chloe felt that the Walker family was enveloping her. And she liked it. She then asked, “Has Ewan mentioned me to you?”

“Lots over the last few weeks – he’s very taken with you. He says how gentle you are with him. Like all my grandsons, Ewan hates quarrels. He much prefers to run away from them. They upset him terribly. When he was a teenager, as you well know, he would put up a bit of a fight. Then he would run away. Aidan used to just run away. Ewan was very close to Jordan. They were teenage sweethearts. Ewan went to pieces after Jordan’s accident. He has probably told you that. Jordan built up his confidence after his mum died. Jordan’s life was none too easy, and Ewan helped him too. Jordan’s mother suddenly walked out on him when he was fourteen and rejected him. Ewan and Jordan were made for each other.”

“I don’t want to live under Jordan’s shadow,” said Chloe.

“You won’t. Ewan says how gentle you have been with him. I can assure you that his love for you is growing all the time. He was scared of you to start with, but he is getting more confident. That confidence has become trust, and that trust is becoming love. You will know that he really loves you when he sends one of his poems to you. He used to write them for Jordan.”

It could not have happened more on cue. Chloe’s mobile trilled. There was an e-mail from Ewan with an attachment called *My Love*.

*Shall we go together, my love,  
Into the garden of our dreams?  
Shall we play among the flowers,  
On a warm and sunny afternoon?*

*Shall we walk together, my love,  
On the sides of Cadden’s fair dale?  
Shall we seat ourselves on the rocks,*

*To drink in Caledon's pure air?*

*Shall we romp together, my love,  
Like two red squirrels on a tree?  
Shall we scamper through the woods,  
Before we cuddle in joyful bliss?*

“Do you see what I mean?” said Muriel. Chloe hugged her and tears were flowing down her face. Muriel continued, “Ewan loves you very dearly. Do you see that you are made for him?”

Chloe smiled gently. She didn't dare tell Muriel about her dreadful chat-up line a few weeks before.

Ewan joined his grandmother and Chloe outside in the garden. It was now getting quite dark. He and Chloe held each other tight, while Muriel smiled to herself. There seemed to be something in the chemistry that was spot-on. Muriel had been something of a matchmaker for much of her life.

For Chloe, there was more to Ewan than a pretty face and a gorgeous tight bum. There was a gentle and loving personality that she was starting to adore. All of the tattooed oafs that had been her previous boyfriends had been selfish dullards. Ewan, almost a full year younger than her, had more brains than all of them put together. His nest was more than worthy to receive her eggs.

Not really happy were Rupert and Kathryn. Rupert wanted to get rid of Windhover Barn and, with it, his ex-girlfriend Kathryn, who had shafted him, costing him his job and at least several hundred thousand in fines and overdue taxes. Kathryn was not really happy either, because Rupert had shafted her by witnessing against her when she had tried to get hold of her ex-son's will. She had the legal fees to pay, and Laineshurst

Solicitors were getting niggly. Still, she had got her own back on Rupert. On the other hand, he was evicting her from the house, and she had discovered that she had no rights of tenancy.

She had got in touch with her brother who was now managing the Kimber Scott Estate. It wasn't that far from Wapplesfield – about forty-five minutes' drive. It was actually closer to her work. He had agreed to get rid of one of the tenants of a house in the village so she could move in, where she could live for a nominal rent. Mother and Father would be pleased to have their prodigal daughter back in the village. Kathryn was getting on far better with her parents, now that her rebellious phase was well and truly over, and she was fully participating in all the occasions of the South Sussex County Set.

Kathryn wanted to go on her terms, not Rupert's. Therefore, she got hold of a locksmith from Etteringden, who changed all the locks, and agreed to send the bill to Rupert.

The next day, Rupert got a call from Mr Blomfield. Some clients wanted to view Windhover Barn. He had taken them up to Wapplesfield, but none of the keys would work. Rupert was surprised. He was sure that all the keys he had handed over to Blomfields were functional. Still, he had nothing better to do, so he caught the next train to Laineshurst and met Mr Blomfield in his office.

On arrival at Windhover Barn, Rupert found that his keys did not work either. Slowly he started to add two and two together. Mr Blomfield was ringing the locksmith in Etteringden. Rupert heard him say, "I'll put Mr Bell-Dick onto you now."

"It sounds very odd, Mr Bell-Dick," said the locksmith. "I did a job at Windhover Barn a couple of days ago. The lady there gave me your name to send the bill to. You live in London, don't you?"

“The lady, as you refer to her, had no right to do that. I would certainly hesitate in calling her a lady. Vixen, more like. She has a short fuse and a whiplash tongue.”

“You can say that again. She’s dead posh, but so rude - up herself, I’ll say. I’ll be thinking twice about sending any of my lads out to her. I told her I would not be handing over all the keys until the account was fully settled. I have still got the second set.”

“Can you come out quickly?” asked Rupert. His tone was remarkably civil. He knew that it would be to his advantage if the locksmith came at once. He even offered to pay double the call-out fee. It worked. The locksmith had just finished a job and would be over just as soon as he could.

The locksmith was as good as his word, a new experience for Rupert as far as tradesmen were concerned.

“She called herself Miss Cheating or something like that,” the locksmith said. He got out his iPad and showed the job and the account. “She said to send the bill to you, Mr Bell-Dick. She said you were her partner.”

“Not really,” said Rupert. “She had no right to do that.”

“If you pay off the account, I’ll give you the second set of keys,” said the locksmith.

“The trouble with that is that Ms Chetwynd has the other set of keys. I am evicting her. She’s no longer my partner. I’ll pay you for a new set of locks and the bill she has landed me with. Compared with some of the bills she has landed me with, yours is small change.”

Rupert paid both accounts, which were, to most people, rather more than small change, and the locksmith got down to work. The new locks were top of the range high security models.

To break them would require a good charge of plastic explosive. As a final flourish, Rupert stuck the eviction letter from Barford and Partners that had arrived that morning, to a window next to the front door.

Kathryn was on a conference. Since she would not be back until the following evening, Rupert ordered a container from North Sussex Self-Storage, and some men to shift Kathryn's furniture.

The job was completed in half a day. All Kathryn's furniture and other items, including clothes, were packed and loaded into the container. It was locked and the key was deposited with Mr Blomfield. A note to that effect was placed next to the final eviction notice that had been taped onto the window next to the front door. Kathryn would have to pay the account on collection of the key. The container would be picked up the following afternoon and taken to North Sussex Self-Storage in Etteringden.

With the satisfaction of a job well-done, Rupert went back to London with his tail held high.

When Kathryn returned from the conference, she immediately found that her brand-new key did not work. Her reaction was caught on the CCTV installed in Windhover Barn. It was also an entertaining display for the neighbours, none of whom liked her. She threw herself on the ground with a screaming tantrum that was most unbecoming to a member of a supposedly aristocratic family. A little crowd gathered for the show, and she was applauded at the end. Her reply prompted booing and a slow handclap. It was suggested that an ambulance be called to take her to the loony-bin. Others suggested that her screaming and swearing was not a good example to the children. A policeman had arrived and told Kathryn that any further

behaviour of that kind would result in arrest for breach of the peace.

Getting the message, she got back into her Mercedes. In her late forties, she was quite old for a boomerang kid.

## Chapter 21

September 2022

The case concerning the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary was heard in the Edinburgh Court of Session. A good number of parties had brought a class action with allegations about poor care of patients and their immediate families. The case of the pursuers had been put together by a rising star in the Scottish legal firmament, a young trainee solicitor called Ewan Walker. His work had been carefully supervised by the senior partner of Johnston MacLean and Partners, Mr William McCullough.

While Ewan had done court work as part of his training, and was good at it, this was his first major case. There was a lot hanging on it. He was nervous. On getting up that morning, Ewan sat cross-legged in his living room meditating. When he got into the court, he was as prepared as he could be.

Mr McCullough set out the case for the Pursuers. It was long and detailed. From time to time, he would pause, and say, “My Lord, may I be permitted to call my learned friend, Mr Walker?” and Ewan would elaborate on the technical points of law on which the case was based.

The case took almost all of September. The Defenders used their in-house legal team. They gallantly represented their client but could only go on what had been said. Several solicitors and advocates had taken control of different aspects of the case with no-one taking an overview. Additionally, they thought that the Pursuers’ advocate was over-confident in using a very young trainee solicitor. While Ewan had become rather socially shy since Jordan’s accident, it did not apply to the courtroom. He would pounce on any inconsistency in the Defenders’ evidence. Although he always had impeccable manners, Ewan could see

instantly the weaknesses in his opponent's case and expose them mercilessly. Mr McCullough was certainly impressed.

The case for the Pursuers was upheld, and the Duchess of Midlothian Infirmary had landed itself with not only a goodly sum to pay in damages, but also massive legal bills. For Mr McCullough, it was a landmark case. For Ewan it was an invaluable experience that would prepare him well for his final examinations.

Chloe and Ewan were dating regularly, whether it was for running, bouldering, having a meal out, or going to a concert. Tamsin was performing regularly at the Reid School of Music as part of the syllabus for her PhD. It was also an essential part of building up her repertoire to get a position in the highly competitive world of professional music. The music she had to play was fiendishly difficult and had to be done from memory. Ewan was a competent pianist, but it was way beyond what he was capable of. Aidan could play some of Tamsin's repertoire with the music but certainly couldn't do it from memory.

Tamsin also played her own compositions of different styles. Some were decidedly avant-garde. She had also started to compose music for informal, gentle and meditative Christian worship.

During one of the concerts in which Tamsin had played with an orchestra, Chloe fell totally in love with music. It was also the occasion when she totally fell in love with Ewan. Tamsin and the orchestra had played an awe-inspiring performance of Percy Grainger's *Handel on the Strand*, a fast toe-tapping clog-dance. As Chloe and Ewan walked home, Chloe was trilling away at the melody, skipping along at the same time. And Ewan did the same.

It was that evening that Ewan and Chloe went to bed together in Ewan's flat. It was the first time Ewan had ever slept with a girl.

The year 2022 was turning out to be something of an *annus horribilis* for the Walker Family. Towards the end of July, Brenda's parents, Fred and Violet Hayward, passed away within a week of each other. Both were well into their nineties. It had been their intention to move to Buchananshire, but Vi had become increasingly unwell. Brian and Brenda would go down to see them when they could, but because of Brian's job, they couldn't do it as often as they wanted.

The loss of their grandparents was a big blow to both Laura and Imogen, as well as to their mother. That said, both Fred and Vi had had a good long life. Recently they had got their daughter and son-in-law back from that loony church which had been the front for a criminal enterprise. They had given a lot of support to Brenda and Brian as they had gone through their religious detox a few years before. They were thrilled that both their granddaughters had landed on their feet after everything and were delighted at how their great-grandson was now taking up the reins in the Walker family business. Their other two great-grandsons were delightful little boys.

For Brenda, despite the pain of her loss, there was an upside to all of this. She and Brian would inherit. Fred Hayward had sold his company, Haywards Coaches, for a very handsome price.

Fred and Violet Hayward had lived a life in which they had shared everything, good and bad. They even shared their funeral and grave.

Brenda's days of driving buses were coming to an end. Cadden Motor Services had been taken over in a merger with the Western Scottish Motor Omnibus Company. It was an exercise in streamlining of operations. In other words, there were cutbacks and people were being made redundant. A very generous redundancy package was made available, including a large lumpsum and enhanced pension. Brenda had been paying into the Professional Drivers' Pension Scheme for all her working years; from the day she started driving for Hayward's Coaches in the early seventies. She had not let that Pastor Elsheimer get his grubby little paws on her pension when he had demanded that his congregation should hand over their pension funds to a grubby little scammer called Anthony Scott. Brian had lost half his pension pot into Scott's little scam, which was the reason that he was still working as the janitor at Strathcadden Academy.

Waldron Brain Elsheimer (real name Richard Benjamin Springer) was six years into a twenty-five-year sentence, and as more of his nefarious activities were found out, extra time was being added. The various frauds and thefts committed by Springer's partner in crime, Anthony John Scott had landed the latter with a fifteen-year sentence to run concurrently with seven years for causing injury by dangerous driving and a litany of other serious motoring offences. There were several other on-going investigations into Scott's many little dodgy schemes. By the time Scott was due to leave prison in 2023, he was due to be re-arrested, and a new trial was to take place. He would be given an extra three years for refusing to cooperate with the investigators who were trying to clear up his frauds.

One evening, Brian came in late back to the janitor's lodge. He was duty janitor at Strathcadden Academy, the large secondary school that now occupied the house and grounds of Dennistoun Park. The Caddies (as the pupils of the school were affectionately called) had gone home ages before, but there had

been a staff training evening. It had taken Brian for ever and a day to lock up.

Imm and Alex had called in to see how Brenda was. When Imogen saw her father, she said, “You look like you have had a long day, Dad.”

“It seems to have gone on for ever,” Brian replied. “I have missed most of the footy.”

“You can see it on catch up after we’ve had dinner,” said Brenda.

“I am too knackered. John’s on tomorrow evening. I’ll see it then.”

Imm then said, “Dad, you’re getting on now. You are eligible for your state pension. Isn’t it time for you to retire and enjoy life with Mum before you end up like Grandma and Grandad?”

“I’m not that old,” Brian replied. “I’m nearly sixty-six. They say that sixty is the new forty.”

Brenda said, “I’m finishing at the end of this month. I don’t want to be mooching about the house on my own for ever.”

“John is thinking about retiring at the end of the school year,” said Brian. “I must admit I have wished I was doing the same. It was that bloody man Elsheimer.”

“Why don’t you, Dad?” said Imm. “Elsheimer got his just desserts.”

“I’ve got this redundancy pay-out,” Brenda added, “and a lumpsum for my pension. Gordon Morton told me that Mum and Dad’s estate will be finalised in the next week.”

“How much is it?” said Imm.

“That’s for us to know and you to wonder,” said Brenda. “We won’t be exactly living like kings, but it will see us through.”

Brian was looking pensive. “You’re right,” he said. “I’ll finish at the end of July next year. That will give the new Headmistress time to get two people. John and I can get them trained up for Mid-August. We’ll have to move out of here, but we’ve got plenty of time to find somewhere.”

“And we’re getting a motorhome, so we can go travelling,” said Brenda.

Imm looked at her father. It was clear that he had been struggling to make a decision for some time. Now it had been made, she could see the tension easing. She said, “Get that letter to Mrs Spencer written tomorrow.”

While September 2022 was a month of change for many people, it was overshadowed by the passing away of Britain’s long serving monarch. The day after meeting the then Prime Minister (the one who used his official residence as a party house during the pandemic) and his successor (whose tenure lasted less than the shelf-life of a lettuce), Her Majesty passed away on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> September. Thus, the new King took over, and the country went into official mourning before The Funeral. When His Majesty’s Prime Minister went to see him, she was greeted by, “Oh dear. Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear.”

Many concluded that not everything in the nation’s garden was rosy. And the world leaders increasingly believed that His Majesty’s Government had statecraft that had deteriorated, if that were possible, to the level of a standing joke, if not a laughing stock.

For Kathryn Dormer-Chetwynd, September 2022 was not one of her better months. It started off on a positive note. The decease of Royalty had had no impact on her at all. As long as it did not interfere with Kathryn's freedom of spirit and pursuit of pleasure, she could not care less. There was the Salon Privé at Blenheim Palace. Her father liked to go, as there were lots of fast cars. He had bought a Bentley there some years before. Sir Edmund was something of a petrol head, a characteristic which he had passed on to his son. Lady Anabel liked to be seen in upmarket cars but had no interest in how they worked. As far as she was concerned, what went on under the bonnet could have been black magic. She liked to be there to meet her friends from the Cotswolds set.

In Lady Anabel's opinion the civilised world finished on the northern boundary of the Cotswolds. Anywhere north of that was inhabited by savages who spoke with accents. Unfortunately, that could be said for her late grandson who had failed his Common Entrance examination. Many of her friends from the Kent, Sussex and Hampshire county sets would attend the event.

Kathryn was looking forward to renewing acquaintances from her existence before her rebellious phase in which she went down-market when she met Stephen. She had real experience living in the north of England. It was grim there, and her tales would convince many of her acquaintances not to bother going north of the Cotswolds. She would allow no mention of Stephen, or her late ex-son; she was glad to see the back of Sebastian. She was still a free spirit.

After the event had finished, Kathryn had renewed many old friendships from school. They were going to meet at various eateries in the next few months. The first one was going to be on the following Saturday in Royal Tunbridge Wells.

It was a raucous affair, a performance more like a meeting of an undergraduate dining club than a get-together of high-status middle-aged women who had attended a top independent girls' school. The proprietor had asked them to turn the volume down and to turn up the quality of the language used. The shouting and swearing had upset other diners, some of whom had walked out.

The final straw was when Kathryn decided to order some more champagne. One of the waiters was a man in early old age. He was serving other customers when Kathryn moved to attract his attention at several decibels above the safe limit. She whistled in a vulgar manner and shouted, "Oi! Waiter! Another bottle of Champers over here – NOW!"

The proprietor decided he had had enough. He ordered them to pay up and leave; otherwise, he would call the police. For his trouble, a bowl of vegetables was tipped over him. The refusal to pay was accompanied by some very robust and offensive language, more appropriate to an equestrian facility.

He left to a shower of crockery, cutlery and food hurled at him. Shortly after, the police came. Some of the women, including Kathryn, had slinked out. They had done a runner. Unfortunately, Kathryn had booked the venue under her name with the address to which she was going to move in when the tenants obliged by moving out.

That was the problem. The tenants had refused to move out and Richard, her brother who was estate manager, was going to have to go to court. They were not exactly happy to redirect Kathryn's post to the big house. And this particular piece of post would be incendiary if her mother or father found it.

In the end she rang the proprietor of the restaurant and agreed to pay for the damage and the unpaid bill, provided he called for the case to be dropped by the police. The sum was substantial, and a grovelling apology was demanded, especially to

the waiter, who was only working because his pension fund had been stolen by a scammer. The apology was the hardest thing for Kathryn to do, as it showed weakness, and was against her principles of being a free spirit.

She therefore shunned any other old girls' reunions. Still, there were other events to tickle the fancy of a Sussex socialite. In the middle of September, there were the Autumn Races at Goodwood, the highlight of which was Ladies' Day, where women of high status dolled themselves up with fashionable clothes that were minimalist in every respect except for the price. Like the icing on a skewed cake, bizarre and expensive headgear was the norm. It was not just the clothing; everything was highly expensive from the entry to the enclosure to the drinks in the bar. It was all about conspicuous consumption and being seen to spend colossal sums of money. Kathryn had met with several past friends. This time they did not wreck a restaurant, but, as they drank more, their behaviour was increasingly raucous. Several times they whistled loudly at waiters and ordered Champers in a manner that was decidedly rude. It wasn't a case of bad manners; it was no manners at all.

Theirs was not the only group that behaved in a vulgar way. The more high-status the people, the more likely it was that they had left their manners at home. Within the enclosure, there seemed to be very little attention being paid to the groups of identical brown animals that were racing around the course.

On the afternoon of Ladies' Day, a heavy thunderstorm broke out over that particular region of West Sussex. There was some of the heaviest rain within living memory. The grass around the course was wet from a couple of days before. Now it was sodden and was rapidly turning to mud. Racing was suspended for at least an hour. The more sober were leaving to get to their cars.

There were boos when it was announced that all further racing was cancelled. When Kathryn left the suite, the grass was mud. She slipped on her high heels and fell on her bum into a puddle. As Kathryn fell, she knocked another woman over, and she caused a domino reaction. The air was blue with oaths uttered with high-class accents, but crude and vulgar all the same. Lots of minimalist and expensive dresses were soaked in muddy water, the mud running down in brown rivulets in the rain. The soaked dresses left nothing to the imagination, to the delight of several press photographers keen to send in interesting copy that could be considered pornographic.

Kathryn's hat was ruined. When a photographer took a picture of her full-on, she slapped it across his camera.

"You can't do that," he yelled. "You've ruined my camera! I'll sue you."

"Well, I have," said Kathryn, "and I'll do it across your face if you don't get out of my fucking way."

By the time she had got back to the Range Rover, she had slipped twice more. Ignoring the fact that the white leather interior was now covered with mud, Kathryn joined the interminable queue to leave the site. While her car could gain traction on the muddy grass, lesser mortals did not have four-wheel drive, and their wheels could not grip the wet surface. It never occurred to Kathryn that she could have used her big car to help to tow out at least one other car. Instead, she shouted and cursed.

A big bill for valeting her car was going to come her way. Just as a little bonus, she was clocked for driving through a red light. Yet she managed to get away with driving while well over the alcohol limit.

At least Kathryn did not need to use either of her cars to commute to work. She had been recently promoted to a senior management position at Robson & Gibbs, the accountancy firm she worked for. She was no longer based in Etteringden but had moved to Head Office in Portsmouth. Compared with the drive, the train journey was easy. Additionally, Portsmouth and Southsea Station was just a few minutes' walk from her office. She had heard on the rumour mill that all the staff at the Etteringden office were delighted at her promotion. They couldn't wait to see the back of her. That did not please her one little bit, and she now had the Etteringden office under close scrutiny.

Another thing that did not please her one little bit was what was in one of the tabloids that were on sale at the station. She couldn't miss it as it was in a pile next to her normal paper, *The Daily Telegraph*. It showed her covered in mud with her minimalist dress revealing rather more than she would have wanted. Her face was contorted with anger, which made her look decidedly unattractive. She had her hat in her hand. The headline read, "Mud Wrestling at Ladies' Day". Her expression that morning was identical to the one in the paper, especially as the train was twenty minutes late.

It was still the same when she got into work. Things got no better later that morning when she was summoned by the managing director.

"Kathryn, you may well have seen this," he said passing the morning's tabloid rag across to her. "I saw it and recognised you instantly. What was going on?"

"It's none of your business," said Kathryn aggrieved.

"It is when members of staff here are laughing about it," the managing director replied. "You are in a senior position here

and like all of us in senior roles you are expected to set an example to all our staff.”

“I was away on leave yesterday. I was not on company business,” Kathryn snapped.

“Kathryn, you should know that whatever you are doing, you are acting as an ambassador for our company. You have made that same point several times to several colleagues you have berated in your previous positions. I have the reports you have written in front of me. You have been strict about applying company policy to others, but you seem to be questioning it when it applies to you.”

“Look here,” Kathryn snapped, “you know what it was like yesterday. All racing at Goodwood was cancelled. It was like a mud-bath. This photographer pointed his camera at me. I am not having it. It’s invading my privacy!”

The MD showed the caption which had quoted Kathryn verbatim. He continued, “The proprietor of *le Matin d'Énigme* in Tunbridge Wells happens to use our office in Tunbridge Wells. He was doing some business there a couple of hours ago. He had seen the picture this morning and recognised you instantly. He mentioned this to Andrew Hill and told him about how a group of women got drunk and abusive. They trashed his premises, and several did a runner. He also mentioned that you had made the booking. You gave your full name, Kathryn Dormer-Chetwynd. Andrew was concerned and rang me.”

“I paid,” snapped Kathryn. “Again, that’s a private matter. Andrew Hill had no right to do that.”

“I think he was right to be concerned. A senior member of our staff is seen behaving in a vulgar manner, swearing, and whistling orders at a waiter. The group that she is with goes on to cause damage to his premises. Some leave without paying. If the

proprietor finds out that a senior member of our staff was responsible for the group, he will take his business elsewhere.

“So, Kathryn, I want you to think about it and urge you to be more careful about your conduct outside office hours.”

Kathryn was livid and stormed back down to her office and typed out an e-mail in a white heat of fury to give Andrew Hill a very substantial piece of her mind. She was going to keep the Tunbridge Wells office under close scrutiny as well as the one in Etteringden.

As well as her none-too-auspicious start at her new post at work, Kathryn was finding her home circumstances rather tedious. In her parents’ house, she had to keep her free spirit suppressed. Her mother was still as up herself as she ever was – so much so that there were times that it wasn’t clear as to whether she was talking or farting. She had to follow her parents’ routine, which meant that she had to be up at seven thirty at the latest, even at weekends. She had to make polite conversation with her parents’ many acquaintances, all of whom were elderly and had as many airs and graces as her parents. They were so boring, hardly company for a free spirit with a propensity for doing whatever things felt good.

In other words, Kathryn had to behave herself. It irked her.

The source of the irritation was the family that Richard, her brother, had tried to evict with two weeks’ notice using a no-fault eviction notice. The wretched people had consulted their solicitor and found that the Dormer-Chetwynd family had no legal leg to stand on. They had another six months on their lease and were not going to move out of their house until they had found a suitable house to buy.

Richard had tried all sorts of ruses to get them to move out before their tenancy was up. These included tipping some ten tonnes of manure at the bottom of their garden, or parking estate vehicles across the drive. Their solicitor had the final laugh; he threatened to take the Dormer-Chetwynd family to court for harassment.

## Chapter 22

October 2022 – February 2023

It was a Thursday evening in early October. Ewan had changed into his sports-kit and was waiting for Chloe up in his flat for their evening session of bouldering. He and Chloe would chase each other like red squirrels for an hour before they ran back to Chloe's flat. The doorbell rang as usual, and Chloe came up in her sports-kit. She did not want to disappoint Ewan but scrambling about on the boulders seemed to be the last thing she wanted to do.

"What's up?" Ewan said nervously.

"I'm being made redundant," Chloe replied, coming straight to the point. "Business has been difficult lately, and Mrs Knight has let two of us go. I am one of them."

"Shit!" said Ewan who couldn't think of anything more constructive to say.

"That's what I said," Chloe replied. "I don't know what to do next."

"At the moment, nothing," said Ewan. "You are in a state of shock."

"I need a cuddle," said Chloe. She and Ewan sat down on the settee. Both held each other tight, while Chloe cried. Ewan caressed her. Chloe put her legs over Ewan's and stroked Ewan's bare legs. She felt safe now. Ewan loved her and she loved him. For Ewan, Chloe's long bare legs were so silky smooth. Ewan had that same fuzzy feeling that he had had with Jordan. Her fluorescent pink socks clashed dreadfully with his fluorescent green ones, but somehow, they seemed to go together. They continued to cuddle. Then Chloe said, "I have had enough of Edinburgh. I want to go home."

“So do I,” Ewan replied. He stopped himself from saying that Edinburgh had somewhat paled for him since Jordan had been killed. It would have been tactless.

“I want to go home for good,” said Chloe. She was feeling very hurt and vulnerable. She wanted to be with Mum and Dad, and Sandra, her younger sister.

“I know what you mean,” said Ewan. “I want to go home. And I don’t mean just this weekend.”

“But isn’t this where your job is?”

“Until the end of October next year – you know that my job is a training post. Come October, a new trainee takes over from me. You know that Mr Yeoman at Gordon Morton has offered to take me on,” Ewan replied.

“I don’t want to be in Edinburgh and you back in Caddie Toun. I want to be with you.”

“You will be,” Ewan said. “How’s your Edinburgh Royal Botanical Gardens course going?”

“I’ve had distinctions in everything I have done, so far. The final exams are in November.”

“Chloe, don’t think about anything yet. I’m going home tomorrow. Come with me, of course.”

“Mum and Dad are on holiday. Sandra is at uni.”

“You know where you can stay. Our tribe always likes to see you. Shall we go bouldering?”

“Just give me a couple of minutes...”

The next day Chloe looked rather more bright-eyed and bushy-tailed than the day before. Partly it was that she was going back to Corscadden with her boyfriend. She and Ewan snuggled together on the train; they had been lucky to get two seats next to each other. “I got another distinction in my course,” Chloe said. “My tutor told me I should walk the exams – unless I do something stupid, before you say it.”

“That’s awesome,” Ewan replied. “Have you thought of doing gardens, other than ours?”

“Of course. I was talking with Mrs Knight yesterday afternoon about what I could do after I have been let go. She said that she felt I could make a go of it on my own. She said I had good business sense, as well as the design skills. As far as she knows, there isn’t anyone doing this kind of thing in Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil. She suggested that I should think about a one-stop shop for both garden and interior design.”

“Sounds good,” said Ewan.

“There’s one little problem,” said Chloe. “At the moment it’s just an idea. I need to get it off the ground. I need premises, and I need somewhere to showcase my work.”

“You’ve got Brewster House,” Ewan said slightly tongue in cheek.

“Your dad said I should do the garden. I have some ideas for it in my head. I haven’t put it into my computer yet. But I can’t go up to your dad and say your house needs new design from top to bottom.”

“You can, actually,” Ewan replied. “Dad loves making furniture, but he hates DIY. He has been meaning to do a programme of painting and decorating for years. Mum used to go on at him. She tried herself, but it took her ages, and she decided she would do it when she retired...”

Ewan looked pensive for a few seconds. The loss of his mother still hurt. He continued, “Dad and Laura have their hands full with Ben and Dan, as well as their jobs. Dad has threatened to get a painter in, but it would cost a fortune. At Dad’s rate, he would start, stop, and make a mess of it. By the time he got to the end, he would have to start again. He describes our house as shabby chic. The last time it got a coat of paint was before I was born.”

“I can do a website but could do with premises in town to catch people’s eye.”

“You could ask Chris about both. He’s a dab hand with websites, and he’s thinking about renting out small premises for start-ups. If your idea isn’t a start-up, I don’t know what is.”

Once at Brewster House, Chloe’s conversation with Ewan became the conversation with the larger Walker tribe. Joby and Laura were delighted that somebody was willing to do the house. Yes, it was shabby chic. The kitchen was the only place that had been refurbished and that was ten years before. Mary had done the downstairs cloakroom at the same time and decided that if she did things at that rate, she would have been dead by the time she finished. (Unfortunately, that prognosis had come to pass rather sooner than anyone expected.)

Joby had thought about getting the jobs done by professional tradesmen, but his experience with tradesmen had convinced him that getting several tradesmen in at once was like herding cats.

Chris suggested that Chloe could have a project management role in her company, which meant that she could do the herding of tradesmen. As regards premises, Chris was having some buildings done up in South Kirkstoun Mews, which was at the back of Walker Bros. They were annexes to the main site, which had been used as a wonderful glory hole of junk. When

Chris had told his grandad and aunts about it, they came down to find a treasure trove of stuff that had been at Walker Bros since Richard and Raymond had had the place. What was not utterly useless had been nibbled by mice or contained nests of several species of birds. To make up for the removal, several bird boxes were placed under the gutter.

The work on the mews buildings had cost a fortune, but Chris was confident that the units would be fully occupied quickly. Chloe could come down the next day and see them. He would reserve one for her.

He would do her website for her at cost-price.

Chloe and Ewan went out into the garden. Chloe seemed a bit crest fallen. "I didn't realise he was going to charge that much in rent," she said.

"It is a commercial rate," Ewan replied. "They have spent the best part of a hundred grand in doing the place out."

"It's whether the bank will give me a starter loan. I don't want Mum and Dad's house to be taken as surety. If it goes tits up, I don't want them and Sandra losing the house because of me."

"I have an idea," said Ewan. "I don't want the others to know, but I will help you get started."

"How will you do that?"

"When Jordan was killed in the car accident, Stephen Melhuish, Jordan's dad, and I got a large sum in compensation. We have shared it. I have put fifty grand into the Walker Family Trust. It owns Walker Brothers. Grandad set it up, and it supports a lot of what happens in the town. I will put a further fifty grand in to get you going. Your mum and dad are putting in twenty grand, as you told me. That's seventy grand. You won't

need a bank loan. Also, Dad said he would pay you at the going rate, and that's your first client. You heard him say you could showcase our house and garden to your clients."

"Ewan, thank you," said Chloe. Both hugged and cuddled, before going back into the house.

Christian was in the hall. "If Aidy was here, he would be going on about dark horses, Eejay."

Outside, it had started to rain heavily.

A few days later, Unit 4, South Kirkstoun Mews was going to be Chloe's new office. It had a large ground-floor display area with an office upstairs. Behind the display area there were staff facilities. A computer network and super-fast broadband were to be installed. A task for Chloe was to design her office and sales space to her own specifications. Chris was very proud of the new units. There had been a lot of interest. Chloe secured her lease with a five-hundred-pound reservation fee from her own account. She still had to get the company up and running.

Chloe had put her money where her mouth was.

A couple of days later, a neat sign was placed on the frontage, *Cadden Interior and Garden Designs*.

That Sunday, Chloe and Ewan caught a train to Maunday and walked up to Barrock Cross. It had been Ewan and Jordan's favourite spot, and Ewan still loved it. It had always been an inspirational place, where Ewan and Jordan had had many a deep conversation about their love for each other. Ewan had talked to Jordan about his very quiet but deeply held Christian faith in the Celtic Tradition.

Barrock Cross was a thin spot, where Ewan felt much closer to Heaven than anywhere else. There was a rock outcrop where he would sit cross-legged to meditate. To Ewan the beautiful views across Strathcadden to the hills beyond formed the stained glass of his church. Animal calls and the sigh of the wind were the choirs. The fragrances of plants and the wet soil were the incense. It all made for a symphony of creation to accompany Ewan as he contemplated before the Lord his God. It was not a very fashionable thing to do. Some would have decried it as “sad”, in its contemporary meaning of “contemptible”.

In these contemplations, Ewan would say that he was sitting before God, not asking for the world, but just being. At the moment, he wanted to have Chloe as his Soul-Friend, just as Jordan had been.

It was clear and sunny, but rather cold. Ewan was in shorts, while Chloe was wearing the cut-off jeans she often wore when she went hill walking. Long thick socks kept their calves warm, while T-shirts, shirts, thick sweaters, and warm jackets kept their bodies warm. Chloe loved to see Ewan in his shorts; it emphasised her physical attraction to this gentle young man.

Ewan sat contemplating for a few minutes, while Chloe was thinking over what she had seen in the flat a week last Thursday evening. This lovely young man had offered to help her into business. There weren't many boyfriends who would offer fifty grand to a girl whom he had met a couple of months before to get a business going. He was clearly committed to her. He looked at her with his gentle smile. That warm fuzzy feeling was coming on.

“Squirrel,” she said, “I need to ask you something. I was reading a book you had in the bathroom in your flat last Thursday evening. It was about *Anam Cara*. What's it about?”

Ewan talked about the Celtic tradition of soul-friends. He quoted St Brigid who said, “Anyone without a soul friend is like a body without a head”. He explained how the Celtic tradition of Christianity underpinned his understanding of the world, and how it had kept him going through the recent very dark times. He explained the importance of women in the early Celtic Christian traditions. In some ways he felt he wasn’t quite in control of what he was saying, but Chloe looked at him intently. He wondered if she thought he was talking pious drivel. She did not give that impression. Instead, she held his hand. When he stopped, she looked down the valley to the hills on the other side and said nothing. They sat hand-in-hand for several minutes not saying a thing. Ewan started to worry again about Chloe saying that he had gone completely off his trolley, and she would catch the train back to Edinburgh.

But she didn’t. She didn’t call him a beardy weirdy. That would have been wrong anyway; Ewan did not like beards, despite the fact they were fashionable among many young men of the time. Like his brothers, he could not grow one.

Instead, Chloe looked at Ewan and said, “Can I be your Anam Cara? Will you be mine? Can I walk with you for our lives’ journey?”

Ewan smiled before replying, “Will you be my Anam Cara, my soul friend? I have prayed for this for many weeks.”

The two youngsters snuggled together. Chloe caressed Ewan’s thighs and face, before she said, “Oh my baby.” She was feeling very emotional. In Ewan’s head, he was seated at the organ in the Old Chapel, playing his heart out. Instead of playing the noisy keys, his hands were caressing Chloe’s silky-smooth thighs. Now they were kissing deeply. Both had that warm fuzzy feeling.

Chloe and Ewan committed themselves to each other on that rocky outcrop. They would not tell the family until Ewan was settled back in Corscadden, and Chloe's business was going steady. They would get engaged at the chateau where Ewan and Jordan were going to propose. A more immediate thing to do was to get back to Maunder station to catch the train home.

The only commitment that Kathryn Dormer-Chetwynd had was to herself. She continued as a free spirit, owing nobody a thing. Sense of responsibility to others was so passé. She was living in her parents' house, so she had to go through the motions of being committed to her parents and her brother. There was, of course, an ulterior motive to this. Her brother was organising a house for her on the estate, so she had to stay in his good books. When her parents snuffed it, which they showed no signs of doing, she would inherit half the estate. She would make damned sure it would work for her. She would make sure Stephen didn't get a thing. She was glad her ex-son was no longer about to get his little mitts on it either. The trouble was that Sebastian's boyfriend knew quite a bit about law.

The good news came at the end of November. Those pesky tenants had moved out. On the other hand, the house was to be refurbished and that would take time. It took even longer as there was a break-in, and all the copper piping was stolen. There was a big flood because, damn them, the villains who stripped out the piping didn't bother to turn off the water supply.

It was covered by insurance, of course, but the house had to be dried out and there was a considerably greater amount of work. Kathryn was banned by her brother from going down to see what progress was being made, in case she antagonised the tradesmen so much that they would walk off the job.

Kathryn relieved her frustrations by throwing her weight around at Robson & Gibbs. She treated her immediate staff as if they were her property, not colleagues hired by the company. She wrote furious e-mails to almost every office. She could see a molehill and turn it into Mount Everest. Many young staff were disciplined or dismissed. Things came to a head when an industrial dispute short of strike action was called across all the offices. The staff union, Prospect, sent a senior representative to meet the senior management, including the joint chairmen, Mr Robson, and Mr Gibbs. The latter were horrified and agreed to investigate the staff grievances in full. There were red faces on the board; this miserable episode had occurred on their watch.

On Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2023, Kathryn Dormer-Chetwynd was suspended from her role as Operations Manager with immediate effect, while a complete investigation was carried out by Mr Robson and Mr Gibbs for the company, alongside a Mrs Wright, a senior representative for Prospect. Unlike her junior staff, Kathryn Dormer-Chetwynd was allowed full process with legal representation.

Two months later, the report highlighted considerable bullying, humiliation of staff, and a wide range of rude and obnoxious behaviour from Ms Dormer-Chetwynd. A disciplinary process was put in place, the result of which was that she was dismissed from the employment of Robson and Gibbs. She had to be removed forcibly from the premises.

Thereafter peace was restored at Robson and Gibbs, which returned to business as usual.

At the start of 2023, Chloe Grey started her business, *Cadden Interior and Garden Designs*. She had her first major client, Dr J O B Walker. It was going to be a big job as her brief was to renovate Brewster House and its garden from top to bottom.

Since Brewster House was a fine Victorian family house, she would keep the best features and get rid of the hotchpotch of stuff that had been put in during the latter part of the twentieth century. Pendant light fittings were kept only in the hallway, landings, and corridors. These were of superior quality. The other rooms were to have lights that were mounted in the ceiling, or on the walls. Chloe disliked cheap single pendants in the middle of a room and loathed fluorescent lighting even more.

Each room was to be painted in gentle colours with individual designs, ideas for which she gleaned from the garden and were approved by Joby and Laura.

The bathroom upstairs was from the nineties apart from *The Colossus* and *The Clondburst*, which had been installed when the Walker family had moved in. A *Jacuzzi* had been installed. It worked like an ordinary bath in that it could be filled and emptied. The electrics had failed some years before and had been disconnected.

*The Colossus* and *The Clondburst* were to stay. The rest of the room acquired fittings of Victorian heritage style to match. Since *The Colossus* and *The Clondburst* had both been made by Thomas Crapper of London, it was natural that the rest of the room should be fitted out with products made by the “Original Name in Bathrooms”. The en-suite to the master bedroom was similarly treated.

The work through the house took from the start of January to the start of April. Chloe found herself being quite particular on the choice of tradesmen. She paid well but tolerated no nonsense. She expected them to turn up at the appointed time and would not accept lame excuses. If they failed, they were fired. They soon realised that Chloe had very high standards. Nor did she accept any banter. Within weeks, she had an outstanding team. One of her best contractors was one Thomas

Grey, Electrical Contractor. The fact that he was Chloe and Sandra's father wasn't in it. He was not only an excellent and hardworking tradesman, but he was also a master craftsman. In return, she not only gave them regular trade, but also a generous retainer.

Chloe's next commission was going to be from Mr and Mrs Campbell at the Glenclawe Hotel. Although the main hotel itself had been fully refurbished just a couple of years before, large parts of the beautiful gardens had formed the subject of Chloe's major dissertation for her Edinburgh Royal Botanical Gardens Diploma in Horticulture. This and her final examinations had given her a top level distinction and the prize for the most outstanding student. The gardens therefore would benefit from Chloe's artistic skills, and the annexes also were to be facelifted.

In the meantime, Ewan was hard at work getting ready for his final qualification examinations. He had two mock exams on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023. They were the first of many. He was quiet and withdrawn. He disliked post-mortems on examinations. They made him worry that he had got things wrong. In reality it was the others who had messed up the questions. It hadn't occurred to his colleagues that that day was the first anniversary of Jordan's death in a car accident. That evening he was quite content to be alone in his flat. He loved Chloe dearly, of course, but Jordan had been his true love for ten years. At least she would not see him in that state. The last thing he wanted was to be told to snap out of it. The scenes from last year played over in his mind and the tears flowed again. Unbidden came that very gentle voice saying, "Ewan, I am here. I will sit with you." He tried to meditate. Instead, he fell asleep, which was not very spiritual. He accidentally revealed all to the all-seeing God. It still was not very reverent. It had not been the first time, and the all-seeing God would know about it anyway.

Again, Ewan had a dream about Jordan. Jordan had always been a very good-looking young man. In this dream, Jordan was, as always, in his teal jumper, a rugby shirt, and a T-shirt, shorts, and sports socks. This time Jordan looked stunningly beautiful. In the dream, Jordan said, “Eejay, I have been away from you for a year, but to me it has been hardly an hour. I still love you so much and I am waiting for you. Chloe is walking with you and wants you so much. She is looking forward to you returning to Corscadden for good.

“Chloe will be with you and will help you when the path becomes steep. There will be some steep bits of the path, but God will look after you and he will help you to get up them. You will arrive at the sun-kissed uplands, but the way will not always be sunny. There will be cloud, rain, snow, and lightning. None of these will harm you, nor will they touch Chloe.

“Always remember God in everything you do, and he will show you the right way, the way that will give you a long life in all his abundance. Chloe wants to know more about the path, and God will give you the right words at the right time. He will help you teach your daughters and sons to walk in his path.

“In the meantime, I am waiting for you, but to me the years will be little more than an hour. I am still twenty-five and you and Chloe will become twenty-five again. God will renew the ancient monuments that will be your bodies. So go forward with confidence. Work hard and you will smash the exams. There is a lot of talent that God wants to use. Peace be with you and God’s blessing.”

As before, Ewan awoke with a twitch that went down his whole body, and all was revealed. Fortunately, nobody could see him, except the all-seeing God who was not in the least bit appalled.

As Jordan had predicted, Ewan walked through his exams, just as he had done the previous year. He won the Law Society of Scotland prize for the most outstanding trainee. He was now looking forward to going home to work at Gordon Morton Solicitors, just over the road from Chris and Chloe.

## Chapter 23

April 2023

While it is a fact of life that there is tragedy in all lives at some point, the Walker family was not in the least bit prepared for this one. In the last year, there had been enough as it was, with the untimely demise of Jordan, followed by Violet and Fred Hayward. At least with Laura and Imogen, the passing of their grandparents was not unexpected. They were old and they had had a full life. Still, it was not pleasant seeing their grandmother becoming frailer, and their grandfather looking more tired. He passed away less than a week after Vi. They were buried together in Lorrington churchyard, metres from the bottom of their garden.

Brenda was devastated, but she was their only child and was due to inherit handsomely. It was some comfort to her, having been through the mill with loony churches.

On Friday 7<sup>th</sup> April, Jenny, Sarah, and Chris briefed their staff as normal at the start of what should have been a very ordinary trading day at Walker Bros. Indeed, that is what it was for the first part of the morning. Chris did a couple of hours on the shop floor, just as his grandfather had done. Sarah and Jenny were working in their offices, before going on the shop floor after coffee. They would have coffee with the staff. It was a good way of picking things up, good or bad.

On this day, Chris went up to the office suite to get his aunts. Jenny came out of her office. Sarah was not there. Chris went to her office and knocked on the door. There was no reply, which was unusual. He gingerly opened the door to find his aunt slumped over her desk. She did not look well. She did not respond to Chris's call.

“Jenny,” Chris shouted, “something has happened!”

It had indeed. Within minutes a first responder was at Walker Bros on his motorcycle. Jenny met him, while Chris was attempting to resuscitate his aunt. The responder took over and listened for signs of life. Christian's efforts had been in vain.

The ambulance arrived to take Sarah to the Strathcadden General Infirmary. Accompanied by Jenny, Sarah was taken into the Accident and Emergency Department but was declared dead on arrival.

Rumours raced about Walker Bros like wildfire. Christian held the fort and attempted to dissimulate until there was a definite answer. It came just after lunch. Sarah Walker had passed away. Chris had to ring her husband, Uncle Jon, who was working in Inverlunker. After that he rang Grandma and Grandad. They had already heard; Jenny had rung them from the hospital in a considerable state of distress.

"Do you need me there?" Charles said. He needed to do something useful to stave off the shock.

"You need to be there for Aunt Jenny," Christian replied. "She's coming over to you. I'll hold the fort. I will tell the staff at the end of trading. Jenny and I will certainly need you in the weeks to come."

Jonathan Millington drove over in a state of shock to Walker Bros, and Christian took him up to his office.

"Please tell me that this is a wind-up, Chris," he said as he sat down.

"I am afraid it isn't," Chris replied.

"What happened?" Jon's mobile rang. It was the Strathie. Mrs Sarah Millington had been brought into A&E at about midday. She had been declared dead on arrival, and they

were going to do a post-mortem. Would he be kind enough to come in to identify formally the deceased?

Christian told Uncle Jon about what had happened. There was no evidence that she was unwell when she came in to work. She had completed the trading figures for the previous week and was just about to finish her report. She had pushed her laptop to one side. It seemed that she knew something was wrong. Uncle Jon told Christian that she had been under the weather for several days. She had said that she wanted to retire before the job killed her.

Christian had a strong feeling of foreboding that Jenny would soon be announcing her retirement. His aunts had mentioned it several times. If Jenny decided to retire there and then, he would not blame her. Chris was twenty-six but still carried a proof of age card. He felt very inadequate to be the boss of a fashionable department store employing two hundred people and having a turn-over of twenty million pounds a year.

He wondered if he should tell Dad, but Grandma would have done that. He rang Mum instead. She knew already. Things like that would get round a small hospital pretty quickly.

At half-past five he went downstairs to address his staff.

“Thank you for staying behind, colleagues,” he started. “I have to bring you some very bad news. Our colleague Sarah Walker was taken ill suddenly this morning and was taken to hospital. It is my very sad duty to tell you that she was pronounced dead on arrival...”

Christian arrived back at Brewster House to find his father in tears. He had been devoted to his big sister and had been stunned by her sudden loss. When Dad had recomposed

himself, he said, “Chris, how do you feel about running the business on your own?”

“Scared, Dad.”

“Jenny is very shaken up by this, as you can imagine. She is going to take some time off, starting tomorrow.”

“I can hold the fort for a couple of weeks. I have done it before.”

“I think it’s going to be more than a couple of weeks, Chris. She told me, Grandma, and Granddad that she is going to retire immediately. She’s nearly sixty and wants a bit of life after work.”

Chris could think of little more than holding his father close, as he had done with Ewan on that terrible day in January 2022. Laura did the same.

When Imogen came home from work, she arrived at the same time as Alex. As they put their stuff down in the hall, Imogen said, “There’s something wrong at Laura’s.”

“How do you know?”

“I’ve got this funny feeling. I have had it before when Chris was put in hospital after his so-called friends spiked his drink.”

“Give Laura a ring to see if everything is alright.”

The phone call confirmed Imogen’s feeling of foreboding. Things were not right in Brewster House. Within a few minutes, they were there.

Christian had gone upstairs to change. To say that he was feeling anxious was an understatement. His foreboding had been correct. He was in at the deep end. He could sink or swim. If he sank, he would take two hundred employees with him. If he swam, how long he could keep going was anyone's guess. He could try to sell the place as a going concern, but the fact that it was a going concern was entirely due to the fact that the family owned the properties outright. There were no loans or mortgages secured on them. Who would want to take on a large business with massive business loans? How would they make money in a general department store in a remote area of Scotland, especially as so many people nowadays shopped online? Besides, Granddad had been bought out by the Synergy Consortium in the early twenty hundreds, and they had crashed the company within months. It was not an option.

Granddad had decades of experience of running the business. True, things were simpler in those days. Nevertheless, Granddad had taken over when he was in his late twenties. It must have been just as daunting for him.

Gemma had gone home to Kenniebrig. He would have valued her opinion. She would give it on Monday, sure enough. The episode was less than twelve hours old, and decisions would have to wait. The family needed his support, and he would need theirs. Aidy, Tamsin, and Eejay were coming from Edinburgh. Chloe knew as well. As for the twins, they were eight. They had experienced family tragedy. The important thing was to keep them on an even keel.

First thing next morning, Chris made a notice for the doors into the store:

*Sarah Susan Clayton Walker (1965 – 2023)*

*It is with great sorrow that we, the Walker Family, have to announce that Sarah Walker, one of the directors of Walker Bros, passed away suddenly and unexpectedly on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> April 2023. She was 58. She was a much-loved daughter, sister, wife, and aunt.*

*We offer our deepest condolences to her husband, Jonathan Millington, and to all her friends.*

*The store will continue to trade as normal.*

*A book of condolence is to be opened at the entrance to the restaurant for any customer who wishes to pay their respects.*

*Christian Salway-Walker, Director.*

Christian was now the big boss man of Walker Brothers. He felt a very small boy in a very grown-up role. He still needed his proof-of-age card.

His first job as Managing Director of Walker Bros was to write to all his suppliers to tell them of the terrible news.

A few days later, Gemma had suggested that, now that he was the Boss at Walker Bros, Chris should have his hair cut a little shorter to look more professional. Even though he would put it into a neat ponytail before going to work, it just didn't seem quite right, so he visited the hairdressing department in Walker Bros to have it restyled. The results were very pleasing. The only problem was that his new image made him look even younger and even more in need of his proof-of-age-card.

The Procurator Fiscal's office received the report from the Strathcadden General Infirmary. Aunt Sarah had died from a heart attack. Her condition had been undiagnosed; it appeared that it was a weakness that she had had from childhood. It appeared to have been very sudden, and she would not have suffered. There certainly had been no suspicious circumstances.

The funeral was held on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> April 2023. St Columba's Church was crowded with staff, suppliers, and friends. Walker Bros was closed that day. The Reverend Alex Witton led the service giving a fulsome tribute to Aunt Sarah. Her nephew, Aidan, provided the music. After the service, Aunt Sarah was laid to rest in the Andrum Woodland Burial Ground.

In the weeks following the funeral, a meeting of the Walker Family Trust was held, in which Jenny announced her immediate retirement as Managing Director of Walker Bros. She would remain as a trustee. Christian was formally appointed to be Chairman of Walker Bros. He also became a trustee.

Although Aunt Jenny was not going to work again at Walker Bros, there would be a retirement do there. Like Charles, Jenny would be available for advice on strategic matters. The controls were firmly in Christian's hands. At least he had Richard McRae, who had been General Manager for twelve years. What he didn't know about the business was not worth knowing.

Christian needed to assemble a senior management team. If he tried to do everything himself, he would be following Aunt Sarah rapidly into his box. He was too young to be centre of attention before the altar of St Columba's Church. His first appointment was Richard McRae as Managing Director. Although it was a tedious process, he managed to get good fields of candidates for the posts. He put them through the hoops that his granddad had put him through some nine years before. Richard's experience helped him a great deal.

The main thing for Christian and his team was to ensure that the customers and suppliers would not notice a thing. And nobody did. It was very much business as usual during the upheaval. The new management ensured that if it existed, Walker Bros could get it.

## Chapter 24

August 2023

After Chloe had spent the winter and spring of 2023 working on Brewster House, she had the spring and summer of the same year to apply her attention to the garden. Tennis on the lawn had been abandoned with the opening of public tennis courts at Strathcadden Sports Centre. It no longer required the fastidious attention with the boys' father's lawnmower. While the majority of the lawn featured in Chloe's plans, there were floral displays, a grass border and a dry garden. The latter would seem strange for an area known for its high rainfall, but the area was well drained, and, with few exceptions, the planting settled in well. It was an appropriate contrast for the extended water garden and its associated bog garden. The rock garden was also extended for alpines, using rocks that had been dug out from the works on the garden. The existing vegetable garden was restored to its former glory. There was erected a substantial fruit cage in which a variety of fruit was grown, including raspberries and tayberries. The greenhouse had been somewhat neglected over the years. It was spruced up and would be the "powerhouse" of the restored garden.

For the heaviest work, Chloe employed a landscape contractor who had a range of big machines that made light work of the job. She did the cultivation and planting herself, taking extensive photographic records of the work. While the heavy work was being done, she made video recordings of the machines at work. Other times while she was cultivating and planting, she would get Chris to do the photography and videography. All the files were backed up, and the best appeared on her website. When Sandra came back from university for Easter and summer, Chloe put her to work in the garden; she had picked up her mother's green fingers.

There were even times that Chloe dragooned Ewan into the planting. For someone who maintained he was not green-fingered, Eejay was not that bad. Unlike a proper squirrel, Chloe's Cuddle-squirrel did not eat the plants.

The garden was stunning and acted as a beautiful showcase for Chloe's outstanding skill, not just as a designer, but also as a skilled gardener and knowledgeable plantswoman. Later in the summer of 2023, the Walker family opened the garden to the general public to feature in the Corscadden Open Gardens which were a part of the Corscadden Festival. The last time this had been done was when Mary Fairbairn was alive, and doing so now was considered to be an appropriate way for Aidy and Eejay to remember their mother.

It was a big job, but one that proved to be a valuable learning experience for Chloe. She had thought that she had known something about running businesses, but into the Brewster House job, she realised how much more she had to learn. She had three very important resources, her father and mother, and her previous employer, Mrs Knight. Her mother was an excellent administrator, keeping her father's business up to date with important matters such as paying the bills, and taxes. Chloe would pay her for doing the same for *Cadden Interior and Garden Designs*. The main lessons were to trust people to get on with the job and to delegate. This gave her the opportunity to do the hundred and one tasks that she had needed to attend to without burning herself out.

Chloe had also spent a considerable amount of money on a new(-ish) small van as she had a considerable amount of equipment to cart about to her jobs, as her orderbook was starting to fill up. Some of the jobs were small, for example she would upgrade a single room. She would often do the work herself. Other jobs were to refurbish whole houses, where she would call in the army of contractors.

Chloe missed Ewan, her cuddle squirrel, a great deal during the summer, even though he was able to come down most weekends. During the week, Ewan was working hard at Johnston, MacLean and Partners in Edinburgh, while studying for his final diet of examinations. Ewan was definitely homesick. In July, there were the mocks in which all the trainees were well and truly put through the hoops. Even Ewan stumbled. This was not due to any failing on Ewan's part. The mocks and oral examinations were set at a particularly challenging level. Even the senior partners were known to struggle with them.

In early August, there were the real things held in the Edinburgh University examination hall in Chambers Street. At the end, Ewan felt exhausted and felt he had nothing else to give. There were the oral examinations the following week. That weekend, Ewan stayed in Edinburgh.

More than ever, Ewan wanted to be back home. He was so lonely in the flat. The attraction of Edinburgh had not just paled since Jordan had been killed, it had disappeared altogether. Ewan was still as fastidious in keeping the flat nice and tidy, but, with its happy memories of Jordan, it now no longer had any appeal to him. He still meditated on the settee, only to fall asleep and wake up with a twitch and find that his short kilt had ridden up. Not that anyone could see, except the all-seeing God who did not mind one little bit. Unbidden came a voice of great gentility, "Eejay, I am here. I will sit with you."

There were times he wondered whether things would work out with Chloe. Had he really been wise to invest fifty grand in getting her company off the ground? It was a lot of money, and suppose it went tits up. Or what if Chloe told him where to go with a smack in the gob, like they did in the movies? She had done it before, albeit as a feisty fourteen-year-old some thirteen years before.

If that happened, he would try an online dating app in order to meet up with a similarly minded young man. But surely not? Chloe always seemed excited to meet him, and even a phone call would result in lots of sweet nothings. That warm fuzzy feeling would return to him. Catching the late afternoon train from Waverley to Corscadden, and the early morning train back on a Monday morning was, by now, a regular weekly routine. But there was always that lingering fear in the back of his mind.

At weekends, Chloe would stay at Brewster House, and if the weather was fair, they would often go on long hikes. Neither had a car then. If Chloe needed a car, she would borrow her parents' car. Ewan would use his mother's Ford Fiesta, which still ran well, even though it was getting somewhat long in the tooth.

If Chris needed to travel to Buchanan or Inverloker, he would go by train. It was far quicker and less stressful than trying to battle his way up the A825 road.

In late August, Ewan and his fellow trainees were given an extended period of leave after their final exams. Chloe and he spent a week on the Kyle of Tonsil peninsula.

Although both Ewan and Chloe were frequent users of the train, neither had ventured north of Inverloker. They wanted to explore the area from which so many distant Caddies emerged from after the weekends at Strathcadden Academy. They had frequently heard of how there was a very early train on a narrow gauge electric railway that picked up most of the Distant Caddies early on a Monday morning and deposited them back on a Friday evening.

This was the first time that Ewan and Chloe had used the narrow gauge North Scottish Electric Railway, a unique community owned enterprise that contributed much towards the transport needs of the north part of their region. As well as

passengers, a great deal of freight was carried, since the road network of the area was rather inadequate for the task. Indeed, many of the roads were not even tarmacked until the early sixties. Chloe was particularly amused to see that the electric locomotive that hauled their passenger train from Inverloker to Kyle of Tonsil was called *Haggis*. The carriages were comparatively modern, spacious and comfortable. To her delight she also spotted another electric locomotive that sported the name *Tatties*. Later on in the week, Chloe and Ewan rode on an ex-Lisbon tram called *Collop* up to Trochanter. They found the little town charming. Ewan was amused to see that two larger electric locomotives were called *Bridie* and *Stovies*, while a diesel shunter rejoiced in the name *Chips*, and another diesel was named *Heffalump*. Perhaps it had an elephantine gait.

On their trip to the Kyle of Tonsil, they rented a holiday “chalet” near Craigdunchie. Well, that was an optimistic description of what was a shepherd’s bothy, albeit well appointed. It was off grid but had solar panels for the electricity and a small amount of hot water. There was a hot tub heated by a wood fire. The eco-credentials of the place made them feel rather smug, until they had to attend to their needs. The facilities were rather basic, and both agreed that they left something to be desired. Or were they getting old? The facility reminded Ewan of the Wests as they were originally. Of course, Chloe had never used the Wests, although Lisa Hopwood and Abigail Burwood had as a dare. Never again. Grandad’s father and uncle had had to put up with similar as youths living on a croft. In the North-East of England, it would have been called a “Nettie”.

Besides, Ewan had slummed it before with Jordan on similar jaunts, and Chloe had slummed it with Sandra. They had experienced the like before.

Craigdunchie was a particularly good place to stay. There were walks a plenty onto Dunchie Moor, Sturla Moor and Sturla

Woods, where there were the ruins of an ancient Celtic abbey. They could walk over Col Niddrie and go down into Glen Torva where there was a distillery. There was a large and historic distillery next to Craigdunichie Station as well as two going up the line to Trochanter. The latter branch line gave passengers to Trochanter wonderful panoramas of Loch Eilidh, where there was a hydroelectric power station.

Ewan and Chloe had a ride down to Kyle of Tonsil (the town of that name) on a heritage train hauled by a small steam locomotive called *Blossom*, which Chloe thought was cute.

Their longest walk was over Col Niddrie, down into Glen Torva. At the summit of Col Niddrie there was a rock on which Ewan sat cross-legged while he meditated. Chloe sat beside him soaking in the beauty of the surroundings. It was a sunny late summer's day, albeit cool. Both were in their shorts, but were glad to have pullovers over their t-shirts, as well as their hiking jackets. She leaned against her boyfriend and felt so content. Ewan was totally unlike her other previous boyfriends. They wanted her as a bonking machine. So much so, she had thought about having a girlfriend instead. She felt same sex attraction to both Gemma and Tamsin, both of whom were close friends at school. That was not uncommon among the girls at Strathcadden Academy. And she still did. She knew that Gemma, although a tomboy, fancied her and Tamsin. She was Bi and knew that her boyfriend was gay; it had been common knowledge for ten years. If Ewan loved her as much as he loved Jordan, Chloe would be a very happy woman.

Anyway, she was with Ewan, and he was caressing her and she was doing the same to him. Thrills ran through her body as she gazed up and down this extremely beautiful young man. Unlike her previous macho boyfriends, Ewan had a definite feminine streak in him. Indeed, Ewan would admit that he was slightly effeminate. He was, compared with Chloe's other (ex-)

boyfriends. But he was a very gentle man who was a gentleman. He was still quite shy as far as love was concerned, and she took the lead. He was not a hunk, building muscles that would surely degenerate into flob; she had seen that many times before. Indeed, he was really quite skinny, as was she. His ribs were prominent as she felt his upper torso. And he still had the long colt-like legs he had when he was a Caddy. And Chloe had the filly-like legs that she had had then. Although she had shared a bed with him when she had stayed at his flat or in Brewster House, it would not have occurred to him to take advantage. As far as “sleeping with her” was concerned, that’s what it was – they fell asleep and there was no question of shenanigans. She was definitely going to lay her eggs in his nest.

Half an hour later, they were coming down the track from Col Niddrie. They passed under Glen Torva viaduct and sat down again for their lunch which Ewan fished out from his rucksack. There were faint wafts of heather, as it was just beginning to adorn the hills with a purple cloak. Chloe started, “It’s like heaven here. All the flowers and their scents.”

“You would know them all,” Ewan replied with a gentle smile. “The garden you did for Mum and Dad is lovely, but nothing like this. You’re right. This is what I imagine Heaven to be like. I often say that the scents of all these flowers are like the incense in a cathedral. Up there, where we were, is one of the thin spots, where the gap between Heaven and Earth is the least.”

Chloe gazed at her young boyfriend, and thrills ran through her body, as well as that delicious fuzzy feeling. Again, the pair of them caressed intimately. Nobody could see where she had her hands, nor where she guided his hands. The all-seeing God could and was not in the least bit shocked. In fact, he was delighted, as he is when any people fall in love.

“Squirrel, being with you is like being in heaven. I love you so much. Oh, my baby...” Chloe said, and she and Ewan kissed deeply. In the meantime, *Tatties* passed over Glen Torva Viaduct with a train of timber, heading to Inverlucker.

Presently the love-struck couple were skipping along the River Torva, still a petulant mountain burn, towards the village of Glentorva (the village’s name was one word). The village was charming. They needed a pit stop before buying supplies for the evening. Having an hour before the train back to Craigdunchie, they had a good look at the church. With its whitewashed exterior of ancient stones, it exuded a rustic charm. Ewan admired the organ but decided to forgo any temptation to play it. It was an elderly instrument and the last thing he wanted to do was to break it.

After that, Chloe and Ewan walked hand-in-hand up to the station. The railway had a passing loop to allow trains from opposite directions to get past each other. There was also a short branch line to the Glen Torva distillery whose heady aroma permeated the village. A limited stop train to Kyle of Tonsil pulled into the station. It was hauled by a large green electric locomotive with the name *Bridie*. Shortly after that, a dark red twin unit machine hove into view with the stopping train to Inverlucker.

“Look at its name, Squirrel,” Chloe called out excitedly. “It’s called *Neeps*!”

“Sounds like Burn’s Night,” Ewan replied, “*Haggis*, *Tatties* and *Neeps*.”

Soon after Chloe and Ewan got back to the shepherd’s bothy, it started to rain, a frequent weather pattern in that area. There was a single umbrella to shelter them as they went behind

the bothy to the “Nettie”. It was not an evening for the hot tub. On their return to the bothy, a blazing fire in the stove started to warm the room through. While Ewan rustled up a tasty and spicy vegetarian meal, Chloe sat back on the settee and gazed at Ewan as he busied himself. Their “dressing for the evening” consisted of taking off their hiking jackets and swopping their hiking boots for their trainers. Chloe loved to see her young boyfriend in his shorts, and little thrills ran through her body to supplement that warm fuzzy feeling brought on by being in love.

They had their dinner before snuggling together on the settee. As before, Chloe took the lead showing the physical expression of her love for Ewan. It was an intensely private moment and there was nobody there to see where she had put her hands or where she had guided his. Finally, the warmth of the room, a full stomach and gentle classical music lulled Chloe, who was awash with cuddle hormone, to sleep with her left hand on Ewan’s bare thigh. Ten minutes later, Chloe’s body twitched and she woke up with a start.

“I’ve just dreamt of The Dragon when we were in Secondary Three,” said Chloe.

“A nightmare, more like,” Ewan replied.

“It was when you were gobby at her,” Chloe continued, “and told her she was the biggest sexist degradation of women you had ever met. And she was too thick to understand. The screech she let out shook Fenton House to its foundations.”

“I got a real bollocking from Mr Mitchell, and then from Mum.”

“You didn’t realise it at the time, but lots of people, including the teachers were really sniggering about it. But that screech still makes me jump to attention.”

“Michelin Woman hated me. She made me scared of women.” Ewan stopped himself from mentioning that his first dealing with Chloe was when she smacked him one in the gob when they were both in Secondary Three. His chat-up line had been very clumsy, that of a gawky thirteen-year-old youth, but the reaction it provoked was not expected.

“You’re not scared of women, now?” asked Chloe. “Be honest.”

“I am easier now with your and Grandma’s help.” Ewan replied, “but I sometimes feel awkward. But I do love you, Chloe.”

“You know that I am not the feisty kitten that I was when I was fourteen. At twenty-six, I am a pussy cat. And I love you so much as well. However, there’s something that’s bothering me, Squirrel. Be honest with me. How would you react if I told you that I was AC-DC?”

“AC-DC?” For one having one of Scotland’s potentially finest legal minds, Ewan looked decidedly gormless.

“Yes. I am bi. You know how I am very close to Gemma and Tamsin. I have known Gemma since she came to Caddy-land in Secondary Five and have had a crush on her ever since. That was also when I met Tammie; she was in Secondary Four. Lots of girls had crushes on other girls back in Caddie-land. Some were open about it and had girlfriends, just like the boys had their boyfriends.

“When I was in London after uni, I was very confused with my orientation, and I tried to sort it out by throwing myself at men. Either they weren’t interested and they told me about their wonderful girlfriend, or they wanted the whole hog and take me to bed. To them, I was only fit for bonking. They were getting on for middle age, and some were married. I wouldn’t do

that sort of thing then and I won't do it now. I even thought of dating a woman. Gemma and Tammie were often back in Caddie Toun at the weekends when I came back, and they listened to me. If they hadn't, I would have probably flipped."

"Are you scared of men, like I was scared of women?"

"In a way, yes. You remember what happened in Secondary Three. I was, and still am, sorry. I was so afraid. I fancied other girls. Miss Bryant stitched you up and that was terrible. Until I met you again, I was wary of men, but you are so gentle. You must still miss Jordan terribly."

"I do," said Ewan and tears started to fill his eyes. "It was only nineteen months ago. They say that time heals all wounds, but mine have a long way to go. That airhead and her posh big car. I have to forgive her, but it isn't easy. She stole my soulmate."

Chloe and Ewan continued to explore each other emotionally while they cuddled and petted. Ewan added, "Chloe, I was scared of women until I met you. I know how you feel as far as Tammie and Gemma are concerned. What do Aidy and Chris think?"

"They seem very relaxed about it. Aidy was very sweet about it when Tammie talked to him. Chris was very understanding with Gemma."

"That's what they are like. You know well that I was Gay Ewan at school. Even the teachers would often refer to me as such. Don't let anyone into this secret. Aidy fancied Cameron Baird, and Chris was about to start dating his best friend, Ryan Fleetwood."

"Gemma told me about them."

“I will tell you something else. My late mother was bi. Although Dad was her tomboy’s toyboy, she was more than my Aunt Sarah’s best friend. Aunt Sarah passed away suddenly in April. When Dad was in Edinburgh, Sarah would often stay the night, ‘to help with the kids’. Aidy and I never saw what went on in Mum and Dad’s bedroom. There were always clean sheets on the bed when Dad came back on a Thursday.”

“Gemma and I were quite intimate,” Chloe confessed, “more than what you and Jordan did.”

“I’m not going to freak out,” Ewan said with a gentle smile. “I still love you as you are. I haven’t said this as you might think I am weird. Some months ago, I had a dream about Jordan in heaven. He was with Jesus. He said that you should be my soulmate. You were there, too. You asked me what I was waiting for. Will you be my soulmate?”

“What are you waiting for? Please be my soulmate and I want to be yours for the rest of our lives. Squirrel, my baby...”

Chloe was choking up. It was a private moment of intense emotion for both of them. They cuddled and kissed deeply.

It was getting dark and was raining even harder than before. Chloe said, “Squirrel, I need to go round behind the bothy. I’ll take the torch and you take the brolly...”

The following day was their final day of their short break. Their breakfast, which Ewan made, consisted of a large bowl of porridge and then toast for them both. As one who loved the English language, Ewan recalled that the eighteenth century writer, Samuel Johnson, had defined oats as a “foodstuff for Scotsmen and horses”. Well, Ewan loved porridge; he was a Scotsman and could outeat a horse (yet remain very skinny). As

for Chloe, she had a big appetite suited to a young woman of great energy and physical activity. Afterwards Chloe and Ewan tidied up the bothy. It would not have occurred to either to do otherwise.

The weather had improved; the clouds were broken and there were bright intervals. It was still quite cool. Despite the fact that they were wearing shorts like the day before, they were glad to have long socks with their hiking boots, and to have pullovers over their t-shirts as well as their hiking jackets. They both had their rucksacks as they were not going to return to the bothy; they had left the key to enable the owner to prepare it for the next guests. They were going to walk along to Sturla Moor, Sturla Wood, visiting the ancient Celtic ruins of Sturla Abbey, before picking up the stopping train to Inverluer at Glennuinan.

For Chloe and Ewan, the previous evening had been one of emotional and physical exploration and the feelings of mutual love had become more intense than ever. Chloe delighted in her young boyfriend who wanted to be her soulmate. Not only was he very beautiful, but he was so gentle and sweet. He was serious with good reason. He had lost his mother at the age of sixteen, and eight years later, his boyfriend whom he adored. He was shy. He was genuine. She had the best confirmation of her attraction towards him; she felt completely safe with him. She had guided him as they explored each other. He had opened up to her, especially about being gay and how loving a woman was a completely new experience for him. He had understood her same sex crushes; he had had exactly the same. And he had celebrated her sexuality. His spirituality was not in the least bit condemnatory; it was truly Christian as she understood it. That was Corscadden, that inclusive community they so loved. Unlike the men who wanted her as a bonking machine, Ewan would never defile her. Ewan respected Chloe's femininity and that meant so much to her.

The walk the two of them had planned seemed to pass by in a whirl. Chloe and Ewan both had a rush of cuddle hormone and Chloe rejoiced in the beauty of Ewan's gentleness. They both had that warm fuzzy feeling. They stopped frequently, cuddled and petted, kissing deeply and, when no one was looking, being rather more intimate. They both seemed to have a lightness in their step. Chloe commented that she felt God was walking with them. Ewan felt certain and he rejoiced in the beauty of the creation he saw, and the incense of the heather blossom. In his mind, there was music playing. It was not a massive organ sonata, but a quiet but deeply emotional and lyrical piece.

All good things have to come to an end, and Ewan walked Chloe back home to Kenhailes Green, with its collection of neat, detached family homes. Rather smaller than Brewster House, 8, Kenhailes Green was still a spacious three-bedroom house for Tom and Melanie Grey and their two daughters, Chloe (26) and Sandra (21). For the first time, Ewan met Chloe's parents who were fascinated by Ewan's and Chloe's adventures on the Kyle of Tonsil. Much to Chloe's embarrassment, Melanie Grey told Ewan about how her daughter could be a little monkey when she was a little girl. To this, Chloe reminded her mother that grandma told her how Melanie was just the same. And Ewan admitted that he was far from perfect.

Tom and Melanie Grey had been on the North Scottish Electric Railway twenty-five years before and had found it quite charming. In those days, none of the electric locos had acquired names; the names that they had were quite amusing. Tom Grey related how, when he was a young apprentice, he had helped to rewire Brewster House, when old Mr Walker had bought the place. When he had done the job commissioned by his daughter, he had found the wiring to be as good as when he had left it all those years ago.

After Ewan had left to go back to Brewster House, there was much excited chatter in the Grey family about Chloe's new boyfriend. Melanie Grey remembered how, in Secondary 3, Chloe had come home and had excitedly told her that there was a crazy kid in her class and that "he seemed to know everything".

They all agreed about what a charming young man he was. Although he seemed so shy, he was quick witted and had a gentle sense of humour. Thomas Grey remembered Joby Walker who was in Secondary Six when he was a wee caddy. No mention was made about Ewan being the one that Chloe had smacked in the gob all those years ago. The Grey family went to bed late that evening and Chloe had that wonderful warm fuzzy feeling. Chloe would have liked to have Ewan at Kenhailes Green, but, like her sister, she only had a single bed.

Chris had got back from work and was with Mum and Dad when Ewan got back to Brewster House. Gemma had gone back home to be with her family for the weekend. Chris was back at work the following day. Still, there was much equally excited chatter about dark horses as Chris and Eejay prepared the dinner.

For the twins, it was so much grown-up bla-bla. The model car racing track in the games room was far more attractive for eight-year-old boys.

For both Ewan and Chloe, it was back to normal. For Chloe, she was no longer the love-struck little girl who had just met her prince charming. She had a business to run and get back to work on her commissions. Sandi had looked after the shop while Chloe was away and had been there when more potential clients had called in. Chloe had to follow these leads up as well as

working on the project to revamp the gardens at the Glenclawe Hotel. Fortunately, she would have the much welcomed support of the head gardener and her team.

That late afternoon, after several hours' work, Chloe went up to Brewster House after she had completed her work. Laura enjoyed having a bit of female company, as Gemma was away at home with her family. Throughout that Saturday, the weather was decidedly sultry and in the early hours there was a terrific thunderstorm which woke up Ewan. Thunderstorms were not uncommon in the Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil Region during late August. Ewan was very glad that he had Chloe next to him; he still thoroughly disliked thunder and lightning. She had slept right through it.

Although it had rained heavily during the thunderstorm, the garden had not come to any harm. The dry garden didn't seem to mind having twenty-five millimetres of rain dumped on it. (Joby was given a high quality weather station for his birthday a while back. He had taken daily weather readings on his computer ever since.) The large cistern, connected to the greenhouse roof and potting shed roof, was installed by Chloe. It was full, ensuring plenty of rainwater to water the garden with. It was powered by a bank of solar panels connected to a battery to provide the power to a pump, which in turn was connected to an irrigation system. Chloe was delighted with the result.

Unlike the years before, Ewan had not managed to get tickets for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. He had been up to his neck in his work and professional exams. It had been worth it; his results were outstanding. Not only was his written work deemed worthy of the Scottish Law Society's Prize for the most outstanding trainee solicitor, but also the reports from the oral examinations were fulsome in their praise. Mr McCullough was

delighted, as he was with all the trainees whose performance across the board had been outstanding. That cohort had been splendid ambassadors for Johnston, McLean and Partners.

While Ewan allowed himself to bask momentarily in the glory of his achievement, he did not allow himself to get big-headed over it. In his last few weeks, he and his colleagues on training contracts were assigned to mentor the latest intake of new recruits, who would be in the same position as they were two years before. And Ewan had an extra challenge as part of his professional development before his start at Gordon Mortons. He was to learn a new foreign language, Spanish, to complement his fluency in legal French and German, as he was going to take on a lot of work for clients who had overseas interests. Chris, his half-brother, was good at Spanish and would help him.

The flat seemed as lonely as ever. At least it was warm in the evening, and dressing down was to wear his running shorts and a t-shirt. Although he loved Chloe dearly, she was back in Corscadden and working all hours on her commissions. Cadden Interiors and Garden Designs was acquiring a growing orderbook. Soon Chloe was going to have paid staff, which would require an extra level of responsibility.

Whenever Ewan was alone in the flat, he still missed Jordan terribly. It was only nineteen months before when he had been stolen from him. It still hurt like hell. Time would heal all wounds, so they said, but this seemed to be an eternity.

Ewan had intended to take Chloe to the French chateau that was going to be the place where he and Jordan were going to propose to each other on the day before Ewan's twenty-fourth birthday, before that plan had been scuppered by that Cheshire society airhead and her extremely large car. It gave him no satisfaction that she was in the slammer near Stirling. He wished

it had never happened and that he and Jordan were still together and that Mrs Barwick-Green would be with her husband and daughter. However, he knew better that to air such thoughts to Chloe. She would not take kindly to the notion that she was second best to Jordan. Anyway, the second of her first names was Jordan (it was a girl's name as well as a boy's. She was very loving, romantic and very pretty. He loved her dearly, every bit as much as he loved Jordan.

Unfortunately, the chateau plan was scuppered a second time. At the end of August, a letter arrived informing Ewan that the hotel had, for unforeseen reasons, been forced to close. In Ewan's words, it had "gone tits up". The use of this agricultural phrase had stemmed from the Walker family's experience as crofters, in which their sheep continued their death wish by finding ever more inventive ways of dying.

Ewan yearned to go home. Home was Brewster House, that large late Nineteenth Century house into which he was born. And Chloe would be there, wouldn't she? Perhaps she might reject him in the spectacular way she had in Secondary 3. They did that sort of thing in the movies. Usually, the man was so thick that he didn't get the message. He would and wouldn't stop running until he collapsed. As Ewan still had feelings of same sex attraction, such an outcome would confirm to him that he was still gay, and he would find another young man to share his life. Finding one as gentle and loving as Jordan would be a hard task.

That society airhead in her huge and powerful car had so much to answer for. Ewan found his meditation hard to take in that evening. Tears flowed down his cheeks yet again, before he dropped off on the settee. That was not very spiritual, but that familiar unbidden voice came to him, "Ewan, I am here. I will sit next to you."

## Chapter 25

October 2023 to October 2026

On Friday, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2023, Ewan finished his time at Johnston, MacLean, and Partners, having spent some time after his qualification as a solicitor to be a mentor to the newly arrived trainees. The next day, Chris came down to Edinburgh in a van that he had hired from Cadden Car and Van Hire. The two of them removed all Ewan's personal effects, the largest of which was the sofa bed that Ewan and Jordan had bought when they had moved in at the end of 2020. There was also the large menagerie of soft toys that had provided Ewan such comfort during his darkest evenings after his terrible loss; they would continue to do so in the comforting surroundings of Brewster House. Additionally, there was the computer equipment and Ewan's piano keyboard, as well as Jordan's clothing.

In the two weeks' leave that Ewan had, he not only prepared for his new role at Gordon Morton Solicitors but also spent time with Chloe. They went out running. They both were getting their fitness back after Ewan had somewhat let go of his after his loss and the pressures of his work and professional qualification exams. His dose of Norovirus hadn't helped either. The two also scampered up the climbing wall at the Strathcadden Sports Centre. It was not as extensive as the one at Dunedin Street, but it did have some challenging pitches.

Ewan was by now twenty-five, and in a few months would be twenty-six. Chloe was a year older, twenty-six, going on twenty-seven, but that did not matter. Ewan seemed to have regained his joy in life, and every time they met, he had that warm fuzzy feeling that he had with Jordan. Sharing his bed with Chloe was no longer the same strange experience that it had been the previous year.

At the start of November 2023, Ewan took up his new post at Gordon Morton Solicitors, just opposite the Walker Bros department store. He recused himself from doing the legal work for Walker Bros, in case it could be seen as a conflict of interests. Chris had felt the same, and the legal work for Walker Bros was supervised by Andrew Yoeman, the senior partner. Ewan found himself doing a fair amount of case work at Buchanan Sheriff Court, working closely with Sheriff Jonathan Kimmergame. Ewan found quickly that the latter was not the inscrutable and aloof judge as seen in the court room but had a dry sense of humour and was always most affable.

As befitted a businesswoman of her ability, Chloe was the organiser. Ewan was brilliant at matters legal and running a legal practice but, like his father, was hard put to it to organise binge drinking in a brewery. Aidan was the same, rather scatty. Christian had inherited his mother's organisational skill. He had to; he was running a multi-million pound business.

While Chloe would stay with her parents in Kenhailes Green during the working week, she would spend the weekend at Brewster House, providing Laura with some much appreciated female company. She enjoyed the fruits of her design work in Brewster House and the results of the labour of her tradesmen; they were indeed master craftsmen.

As for her gardening work, Chloe designed and entered the Gardening Scotland Show. It was an extra challenge on top of all the work she was doing with her business, and she was thrilled to receive a silver-gilt medal and the accolade of Best New Entrant. It was a feather in her cap that she wore with pride, and it was definitely good advertising for Cadden Interior and Garden Designs. She appeared on the telly being an expert gardening presenter on a well-liked programme.

## Chapter 26

### Epilogue

At the start of November 2023, my father, Ewan Walker, returned to Corscadden to take up his position as Solicitor Advocate at Gordon Morton. It was another step in a meteoric legal career that led him to the highest legal positions in Scotland. Dad spent three years training with Andrew Yeoman as his “Devil-master”, the term used for an advocate’s mentor. Both Andrew and my father disliked the term, preferring the word “mentor”. When he qualified in 2026, he was acknowledged to have one of the finest legal minds in Scotland.

He was part of the team that oversaw the legal aspects of Scotland’s accession to the European Union. He also trained as a judge and, having taken over from Sherriff Jonathan Kimmerngame, he presided for many years at Buchanan Sherriff Court. He may have been a most gentle person outside the courtroom, but in court he was quick-witted and missed no detail however small. He had amazing powers of concentration, and his summings-up were second to none. It gave him no sense of power when he had to mete out justice to the guilty, which he did to ensure that victims got the justice they deserved. It was important to ensure that justice should be done and seen to be done, just as society expected. He never wanted custodial sentences to be the final outcome and fervently hoped that the guilty parties would be able to be rehabilitated. And, in many cases, they were.

He later undertook judicial work at the Edinburgh High Court of Justiciary and presided over some particularly serious cases.

In 2059 he was appointed as the Lord President of the Court of Session and the Lord Justice General and took the title

of Lord Strathcadden. To my family he was still Dad. To his friends and family, he was Eejay. To Mum, (Lady Strathcadden), he was still Squirrel. He said he didn't look any different in the bath. He still would disappear to spend time reading books. For a man of such great status, he remained very down to earth.

One would have expected him to spend much of his time in Edinburgh. He did have a flat there, but he preferred to be at home. Home was Brewster House. He had been born there, and he died there in his ninety ninth year. For much of our lives there was a brass plaque on the gatepost with the legend *Mr Walker, Advocate*.

Our mother's business, Cadden Interior and Garden Designs, continued to go from strength to strength. From its small beginnings in an annexe to Walker Bros, Mum picked up a substantial client base as people moved to Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil to enjoy its quality of life. The garden at Brewster House went from one that needed some tender loving care to being a design masterpiece, showcasing Mum's innate skills as a designer and a gardener. In 2024 she got a silver-gilt for her entry to the Gardening Scotland Show. In 2030 she achieved the ultimate accolade, Premier Gold.

The gardening design and construction became her bread and butter, although she continued to have many interior design projects.

On Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2025, Dad took her to the Glenclawe Hotel just before her 28<sup>th</sup> birthday. There he went down on bended knee and proposed to Mum, and they were engaged. It had been the worst kept secret in a family that was not very good at keeping them in the first place. On Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> October 2026, they were married in St Columba's Church, holding their reception at the Glenclawe Hotel in Buchanan.

They spent their honeymoon in the Pyrenees, basing themselves at a wonderful chateau.

Mum and Dad filled Brewster House with a noisy and lively family. In November 2027, my sister Eleanor was born. I followed in April 2029. Our little brother, James, was born on Dad's birthday in 2034. All of us children inherited Dad's sandy looks and his skinny build. Mum was a woman of great energy. Our grandparents told us she could be a little monkey when she was a young girl. She was strict with us and would take no nonsense, but she was a very devoted and loving mother. We often wondered how Mum managed with her business and the three of us at the same time. She did.

Like Mum, Dad was devoted to his family and would take us on all sorts of adventures. Although much quieter than Mum, he had a wonderful sense of humour. He had a very gentle personality and loved to read to us and gave us all a deep love for the English language. We also picked up his talent for foreign languages, which he spoke with utter ease.

Both Mum and Dad were very proud to be Auld Caddies, and we are too. It remains one of Scotland's outstanding state schools. It still retains its distinctive uniform, based on the kilt, as do the other high schools in Buchanan and Kyle of Tonsil and elsewhere.

Dad had predicted that when his children went to Strathcadden Academy, Mr Farjeon would be Headmaster. He had taken over from Mrs Spencer, who retired in 2031. Mr Farjeon retired when James was in Secondary Three.

Family life at Brewster House was great fun. Dad loved children and could keep us entertained for hours with little stories he made up. He couldn't remember every detail, which we had to remind him of. So, he wrote them down. Mum drew pictures to go with them. Not for us the electronic baby-sitter!

Both Mum and Dad loved playing sports. They had a wide range of sports ranging from running and rowing to tennis and badminton. They would take us out running from when we were small children, and all three of us were in the Strathcadden Academy running team while we were there. James became a particularly keen runner and rower. Mum and Dad would boulder and rock-climb at the Strathcadden Sports Centre. James had a go, but I and my sister were not very keen on it.

We had two dogs who both needed a lot of exercise, and we loved to go on long walks with them. They told us in no uncertain terms when they had gone far enough; they sat down and refused to go any further.

Dad would often wear a kilt at home, with a shirt and thick jumper. Brewster house was still not easy to heat.

Dad loved books and he passed that on to us. He could not pass a bookshop without going in. Nine times out of ten, he would come out with a book that he had never heard of, let alone thought he wanted. They were avidly read.

Mum was the same with art shops and craft shops.

There were metres of bookshelves throughout Brewster House with his books on. Granddad made them with his tools in the garage. Mum too was a dab hand at woodworking, and she made several more bookcases.

Just after dinner, Dad would always go into the cloakroom with a book and spend some time there. Grandma and Granddad said that he often did the same when he was a teenager. It was his time out to meditate and to think or just relax.

In Dad's study there was a painting of Uncle Jordan. Uncle Chris had done it. Jordan was a beautiful young man. The picture was of Jordan sitting on a rock above Strathcadden. The

painting came from a photo Dad took when they were hiking. Every January 23<sup>rd</sup>, Dad would be very quiet and rather sad. We were in our teens when we realised how much Uncle Jordan meant to Dad. It all came out when our brother James announced he had a boyfriend, Nicky, and if Mum didn't like it...

Mum did not do her nut and told us everything. What she didn't say, Dad said. He became quite tearful when he recalled Uncle Jordan.

Dad had had quite a lot of sadness in the first quarter-century of his life.

Our great-grandmother Muriel Walker, to whom Dad was very close, started to become frail as she got older, and our great-grandfather Charles looked after her. They had lived for decades in Laurieston Villa, but in 2025 they moved to a spacious ground-floor apartment in Adam Place, as they found the old house increasingly difficult to manage. Charles passed away within a week of Muriel at the age of ninety-seven. James had just finished Secondary One when our great-grandparents passed away.

Our grandparents, Joseph and Laura, moved to Laurieston Villa, which had been Joseph's childhood home. Uncle Chris and Aunt Gemma bought a house in Brearlands, soon after they got married in 2025. The Twins, Daniel and Benjamin became Caddies in August 2026. Mum's parents continued to live in the same house that they had had since they had got married in 1995.

Uncle Aidan and Aunt Tamsin married in 2026. They lived in Edinburgh, where Uncle Aidan was a lecturer in the Foreign Languages Department. Although Aunt Tamsin was a fantastic pianist, she could never break into professional performing, even though she had had a number of auditions. She

regularly played with other studio musicians as well as performing in her own right. However, she gained lucrative employment by writing music for video games, and Christian worship songs. She was not well-known as a composer of classical music before her death, but her music is now frequently played on classical music stations.

Aunt Tamsin's musical career took an unexpected turn. She was approached by the Marchmont male Voice Choir to be their choirmistress after the previous choirmaster had had to withdraw due to poor health. She did this for many years, and was, just a year later, appointed to be the Assistant Director of Music at the Episcopalian Cathedral. A promotion later led her to take the post of Director.

Our cousins (Uncle Aidan) are Charlotte and Lucy. They still live in Edinburgh, but we see them regularly. They are talented musicians like their mum and dad.

Uncle Christian and Aunt Gemma had a girl, Julia, then a boy, Gavin. Uncles Daniel and Benjamin did not marry or have children. They are still alive, although they are no spring chickens. Yet they are full of life and energy. They share the flat in Adam Place that our great-grandparents had. They started working with Uncle Chris at Walker Brothers in their teens, before joining full-time after they left university. While they were at Walker Bros, the place was genuinely run by three Walker brothers. Our cousins Julia and Gavin are now running the business.

My father lived to his ninety-ninth year. He outlived both Uncle Aidan and Uncle Chris, although both of them were in their nineties when they passed away. Mum was in her late eighties when she passed away. Therefore, Dad was left a widower for the last twelve years of his life. Their passing affected him deeply, but he bore his loss with great dignity. His

Christian faith was a solid rock to him, as it was when he was a young man. For many years, he and Chloe were members of the Iona Community. He became a more regular churchgoer, as the church increasingly embraced the Celtic tradition.

Every day, Dad would read a section of his Bible and would meditate on it, using his laptop to read meditations online. He had done this since he was a very young man. Later on, he would use the Iona Community channel to watch the daily worship service. As children, we said that Dad was “going to church”. And Mum would “go to church” with him when she could.

Dad’s Christianity was never in your face. He would never force it on anybody but was always ready to tell anyone who was interested about what it meant to him and how it sustained him ever since he was a teenage boy. His was a God of light, life, love, joy, power, creativity and beauty who accepted him as he was. For him, the life of Jesus of Nazareth was the perfect example, not that he could follow it anywhere near perfection, but there was infinite forgiveness for all his human imperfection and fallibility. His church was outside in the beautiful hills of Western Scotland, the stained glass windows the scenery, the pillars the trees, the altar the rock outcrops, the choir the bird song, the congregation the animals and the incense the scents of the country. And he would worship and give glory to God.

Dad had little time for religion, and he was at pains to distinguish faith in Jesus Christ and the lists of man-made and legalistic rules that put so many off any vestige of faith. After all, Jesus had little time for the religious élite of the day, and they eventually handed Him to the Roman occupation forces to be tortured and murdered in a way that was so brutal that even the Romans later banned it. He did not like religion that was purely

for show and networking. Nor did he like religion that judged others and condemned them.

Some churches were insipid, run by old-boys networks from the public schools. Certainly, there was little evidence of the love of Christ. There was more life in the graveyard. So many stuck to outdated traditions and attitudes, and they “magnified God’s strictness with a zeal He would not own” (as an old hymn put it). He had attended services that were so traditional that even the language came from the seventeenth century. God had not stopped work in 1662. In others there was unspeakable abuse of young people that went beyond the sinful to the criminal. In his time on the Scottish judiciary, he had had to deal with such cases, which he found particularly upsetting. He never relished sending anyone down, and afterwards he would sincerely pray that the prisoner would think about what he (or she) had done and turn away from crime. When the convicted were high up in church leadership, they should have known better.

There were churches that appalled him. These were the ones that were led by preachers of hell, fire, brimstone and damnation. His stepmother had fallen pregnant as a young woman and was shamed and expelled from the congregation by a particularly cruel preacher. That they prayed for the death of his half-brother when he was ill in hospital was beyond evil. In the early twenty-first century, there were churches who preached all sorts of hateful vitriol against gay men, immigrants and the “woke”. If Dad’s following of the example of Jesus of Nazareth was woke, he was “woke” through and through. When he was young, he was openly gay, and his boyfriend was Uncle Jordan.

How people could maintain their faith in such places was, to him, evidence of the superiority of true faith that would grow in such unpromising and infertile ground.

Dad was a tall man of very dignified looks and manner. He was a stunningly good-looking man when he was young. He kept his good looks into his old age. Even in his nineties he had a full head of hair. He never carried any excess weight; he was skinny to the last. Even to the day he passed away, he had a formidable intellect and was working on legal documents to the last. His record keeping was second to none.

Dad's diaries are the foundation of this work. He started writing a diary when he was in Secondary One of Strathcadden Academy. They were hand-written in those days in his very neat handwriting. When he was fourteen, he was given a lap-top computer of which he was very proud. It was stored with his other archives in an attic room in Brewster House. Despite its great age and its antediluvian operating system, *Windows 7*, it still works, as do his other laptops that he acquired at various points in his life. Some of his records were written in his neat hand. He also helped Mum by keeping her records straight. He retained every bank statement in a large file, as well as having the family finances on a computer spreadsheet.

Dad kept extensive legal records as he worked. We have sent his archive to the Scottish Law Society, which they are poring over with great interest. Much of what he decided has become legal precedent. He was the author of a number of authoritative legal textbooks. He wrote a number of thrillers, basing them on his own legal experience, as well as historical novels. My family persuaded him to publish them, after he had said, "Nobody would want to read this rubbish."

They did.

On that last night Dad said to us that he was soon going to meet the two loves of his life, Mum and Uncle Jordan. They would all be twenty-five. We felt he was being mawkish, but that

night, Dad fell asleep and never woke up again. He had had enough. He went home to be with his Lord and Master, as well as Mum and Uncle Jordan. He was buried in the same grave as Mum, which is alongside Uncle Jordan's final resting place in Andrum Wood. Dad was born in Brewster House, and he passed away in Brewster House, the lovely family house that he was so proud and delighted to call home.

Ewan James Samuel Walker is forever twenty-five.

Brewster House

Sunday, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2097