

Fingers of Fate, Part V

Part V of V – Read all available Parts [here](#)

by [Janet Charlesworth](#) (January 2025)



Village Street (British School, mid 20th Century)

Thirty-Three

It was the damndest thing. It was clear enough on the map, but at the crossroads, following the way signposted for Foxend put her on a road that ran around the Hope Estates, and brought her back to the village from which she had started.

Jess decided that doing this manoeuvre twice was quite enough. She stopped and parked her car. She was going to have to ask someone to give her directions. She stood for a moment, looking around, and saw a bent old man walking along the sidewalk with the aid of a very knobbly and well-worn walking stick. Later, she realized, she should have been warned at the sight of that stick. It was an individual stick. There probably wasn't another one like it in the whole wide world. A unique old stick with character, like its owner no doubt. However, at the time, she was intent on her objective of finding Foxend.

She approached the old gentleman. "Can you help me?" she inquired.

"I can give it a try, lass," he responded.

His face was as gnarled and brown as his walking stick, and he peered up at her out of a bent back, and clear twinkling blue eyes.

Jess explained, "I'm looking for Foxend, and I seem to have lost my way."

"O aye," he said. He looked down at his shoes, and looking up at her again, with a grimace on his face that could just have been an effort to hide a smile, he said "tha sees, lass, it's a bit difficult like, for tha canna get to Foxend from here. Its way over yon, beyond hope."

She couldn't tell for sure if he was joking or not. However,

the description of "beyond hope" stimulated what remained of Jess' sense of humour in her circumstances.

With a deadpan expression, she responded, "really, beyond hope, umm sounds serious."

Without missing a beat, the old man replied. "Aye, it is that, an its more serious fer some than fer t'others. As I said, tha canna get there from here. You'll ha ta find your way to t'old crossroads first, and then tha'll ha to make tha choice. Goo'day to thee lass." And off he went.

Jess watched him walk away from her, and was sure she heard him chuckling.

Back at the crossroads, which she assumed was the crossroads the old man called the old crossroads, Jess decided to take the turn to Foxhill, and ignore the turn to Foxend. Sure enough, in about a mile, she came to an intersection; to the right was Foxhill, and straight ahead was Foxend. There you go, old man, she thought, I guess I made the right choice. And the road did take her through a village called Hope.

Once in Foxend, and finding a place to park, which was in itself a considerable feat, Jess made her way to the address given by Harold and introduced herself to the local vicar. He was waiting for her, and had set the books out on a table in a room which was clearly his library. Jess would have loved to be able to examine the books on the shelves, and maybe have a discussion with the vicar about theology and the patriarchal church's apparent fear of women, but she confined herself to scrutiny of the parish records.

She located the Longden records, and very quickly found that Edward Cudworth had married and had two children, Jacob Symes Cudworth and Sarah Ellen Cudworth. Edward had died of consumption in 1863. There were no further references in the Longden records to Edward, his wife, or their children. So, on Edward's death, his family would have had to leave the farm.

Lilly must have provided Edward's wife and his two children with a home at Cubdale. Sarah Ellen Cudworth was in the Cubdale/Whetstone records. But there had been no reference to Jacob Symes Cudworth. Jess felt uneasy to see Jacob's second name but she reassured herself with the very sensible thought that there must be hundreds if not thousands of people called Symes.

She thanked the vicar and wandered into what passed for the town centre to look for a place to have lunch. As she rounded a corner, she saw a dark blue BMW exiting a roundabout, and heading off down the road sign-posted for Foxhill. Her heart lurched. She raised her hand, and almost called out, hopelessly, for the car had quickly disappeared. Jackson. Feeling suddenly forlorn, and with an aching heart, she turned and started walking, aimlessly, along the main street of the small town. She stopped to look at two dresses on display in a dress shop window. There were obviously originals, and obviously very expensive, and very lovely. As she gazed at them, remembering the days when she would have had to own something of the sort to be an accepted member of the in-crowd in that part of the world, she caught a glimpse of her own reflection, and realized that she had wanted to call out to the driver of a car that she had thought was Jackson, but who could have been anyone but Jackson.

The realization left her feeling more bereft.

She turned away from the window, and all the associations she felt around the garments in it and, in an effort to bring herself back to the present, went into the first café she came to with the intent of buying lunch. She had to focus her mind on the pesky problem of how she was ever going to find out what had happened to Jacob Symes Cudworth. Maybe, she thought, I need to be looking to see if I have any surviving relatives who would remember those days. Maybe there is a distant cousin, or an aunt somewhere, who may know something. With that thought in mind, she decided to go back to Whetstone, and

see if she could find someone with a connection to her great grandmother, someone who just might know what had happened to Jacob.

As far as she knew, all the family she had ever known had all died. She knew there was a cousin from her father's side who might still be alive. They had never had anything to do with her father's side of the family, and she had never met the cousin. It was a doubtful prospect. The connection to the Cudworths came down through her maternal great grandmother. Her father's side of the family would have had nothing to do with them.

Jacob was not mentioned in the records for Cubdale. There was no record of his death, so he must have left Cubdale. Of course, he could have left Cubdale and died in a ditch, and no one would have known who he was. But why would he leave Cubdale? Why would a young man leave Cubdale? To go to war perhaps? She thought of Wickham in *Pride & Prejudice*, and wondered if Jacob, being disinherited, or at least, believing that he was, had gone off to find a more adventurous life.

There were lots of wars in the late 1800s; the Ashanti Wars alone would have driven a need for soldiers. Maybe the prospect of his keep, a small income, and the glamour of a red coat for the ladies had tempted him away from the green fields, and the peace of Cubdale. And what was there for him in Cubdale after all; an old aunt Lilly, his mother, and his sister. Maybe he had wanted to get out and see life and not be depended on as the only man about the place.

How on earth was she to find out if Jacob had gone off to fight as a soldier, or had perhaps joined the navy and gone off to sea. For the first time since she had arrived in the area, she was wishing she had access to the Internet.

She had a fleeting thought that Shaw might know where to look, or maybe his sergeant. She was to meet Townley later. She

could ask him. In any event, she needed to go back, back to the old church, the Dillthorpes, the old curmudgeon and his tapping of his nose. Well, she reasoned, she at least knew about Jacob now. Interesting, she thought, that the Dillthorpes had not mentioned anything about Jacob. Surely they would have known about him. They seemed to know a lot about everything else, so why had they not mentioned him?

Jess headed back to the car park with a renewed energy, and the intention of sharing her newly acquired knowledge with the Dillthorpes. She was determined to get to the bottom of it all.

Sergeant Townley was waiting for her at the hotel. They went into the public lounge area, and she ordered coffee. He wanted to know if she wanted to give her statement there, or would she prefer to meet with him at the station in Foxhill. Foxhill, she said, was not convenient and she had nothing much to say. Townley produced his notebook and having settled down with his pen at the ready, he invited her to speak. She took a deep breath, and feeling uncomfortable watching Townley writing down everything she said, she began.

She had gone to Symes' pub. It had been one of those synchronistic, or accidental, meetings. She had no idea that it was Symes' pub. He had shown her around, had seemed pleased to meet with her again, had taken a photograph, and she had left. End of story. And no, she had not noticed anything unusual, and no, she had not met Symes' wife, or anyone else for that matter, apart from the staff member who had given her a drink and taken her order for a prawn sandwich, and no, she had no intention of ever going back there again.

"And how did Symes seem?" Townley asked.

"Well, proud, complacent, pleased with himself and his pub, and frail."

"Frail?"

“Yes, frail. He didn’t seem well to me.”

“And is that it?”

“Yes, that’s it. It was a brief enough meeting, and I never did get my prawn salad sandwich.”

“And why was that?”

“Because I was too stunned at finding him there. He walked out of my past and into my holiday. I was not expecting to see him there. I didn’t expect to ever see him again, anywhere. I didn’t realize I hadn’t had my sandwich until sometime after I left.”

“So, you didn’t know then that it was his pub you were going into?”

“No, I did not.” Jess paused and gazed into the distance. Then, with a slight shake of her head said, “I was feeling very challenged when I saw him sitting there. I thought about leaving straight away, but then I thought, no, its been years, I’ve done lots of work to overcome my own issues around our relationship, and, you know, I did marry him once, and he is the father of my children, and so I overcame my fear of seeing him, and went over to him to say hello. He was surprisingly friendly and welcoming, he showed me around his pub. Very nice it is too.” Another pause. “I was confused about the meeting, I would have expected a less friendly reception from him. When we finished the tour of his pub, I just left. It wasn’t until later that I realized I hadn’t had my sandwich.”

“Why would you have expected a less friendly reception?” Townley wanted to know.

Jess turned to look fully at Townley and, in a low firm voice, said, “we had parted in difficult circumstances. I wasn’t to know if he had changed, or was still the same. I didn’t know if it was safe to approach him, if he would still be abusive,

angry, hostile.”

“Well, I have to ask, clear up any possibilities. I’m sure you understand. Could you tell me more about the circumstances surrounding the break-up of your marriage to Symes. I mean, why did your marriage to Symes break up?”

“He found another woman, and wanted me out and her in. I obliged.”

Townley looked confused. “And your children, what happened to the children?”

“I left them with their father and the surrogate.”

Jess watched Townley’s face for the shock of that to register. She was used to seeing that expression on the faces of those who pushed her to the point of revealing that she had left her children.

“It was their best chance. I loved them. I wanted to do what was in their best interests, and not think of my own heartbreak. Besides, I had been raised to be a good girl, and to always put the man first, and to understand that the man must always have what he wants. Symes wanted to keep the children. He did not want to pay alimony. He wanted to keep the house. And he wanted his new woman in place in that house. He had the job, a professional job in academe, the income, the house was in his name. I had nothing and no support of any kind from anyone. I was a battered wife. I had tried the police, the church, my doctor, and my parents. There was no support to be had. I was in a bad way. Without support, all I could do was what he wanted me to do.”

“Right, well.” Townley shifted uncomfortably in his chair, “and you haven’t seen them since?”

“I tried to stay in touch with them initially, but found it very difficult. They grew away from me. It was heartbreaking.

I left England and moved to Canada.”

“Why would you think Symes might still be angry or hostile toward you?”

“He was always angry and hostile toward me,” said Jess, “well, let’s say that right after the birth of our first child, he was angry and hostile toward me, and that continued until I left.”

Townley fidgeted, feeling uncomfortable that he had asked his question.

“So, you haven’t seen Symes then for some years?” He asked.

“No sergeant, up until my accidental visit to the Red Lion, I had not seen Symes for over 20 years.”

“And the children?” queried Townley.

“No, nor the children.”

“I’m sorry,” said Townley.

Townley found he was unable to look at Jess for more than a quick moment from a flushed face. He was having difficulty maintaining a composed expression while he struggled to take in what she had said. How on earth had she survived. He knew his own wife would sooner die than be without her children.

Jess noticed his discomfort, and that a change of subject was needed.

“If you’ve finished your questions, I wonder if you can help me?” Jess asked.

Townley, visibly relaxing, asked, “How?”

“I’m trying to track down my ancestors, and one of them has disappeared off the parish records. I’m wondering if he went off to war or something. I would like to find out if there is

anywhere that would have that kind of information. If he went off to fight in the king's army, or joined the navy, there would surely be a record of that somewhere. Do you know anything about that sort of inquiry?"

Townley felt even better. He really liked this lady. He knew instinctively that she was what he felt was the right sort. He trusted her. He believed her. It was unconscionable what had happened to her. Now he could help her, show her that the world could be kind and that not all men were like Symes.

"Ah, you're into that ancestral stuff," he said, "my wife likes to do stuff like that. I could check it out for you on the Internet." He pulled an iPhone from his pocket and proceeded to search for relevant information.

He found a website called Finding British Army Ancestors. Jess had no idea of Jacob's group classification, however, there was a chance that Jacob had been discharged after 1883. If he had been 17 when he joined up in 1870, he would still have been a serviceable age at 30 and might well be listed in the W097 database. Townley checked that, and found a Jacob Symes Cudworth. The pension records were then searched for the period 1715 to 1913, and Jacob was listed as receiving a pension. Jess took down the contact information. She and Townley agreed that the best course would be for her to call the pension records office the next day, and see if there was still a record of the address for Jacob. There would have had to be an address on record somewhere for them to know where to mail the pension.

Sergeant Townley left his meeting with Jess feeling exhausted, sad and angry. He fervently hoped that she found what she was looking for, and determined that he would help her as much as he could if she should ever ask for his help again.

Tony was furious. The weather was terrible: cold, blowing, beginning to rain. Mike had said he would join him. Tony had taken a day off work so that they could avoid the weekend climbers. They were to practice a couple of difficult climbs together before tackling the Hebrides, but Mike had ducked out. Tony was not impressed. What use was that, he thought. Ponce. If Mike can't stand a bit of wind, cold and rain here in the valley, how could he expect to cope with what they could expect to experience in the Hebrides. Maybe he should call the whole thing off. All that money, for what, if Mike was going to be crying off and wanting to stay in the hotel all the time. He stormed up the path to the bottom of the steepest crag. He would do the climb solo. No reason why not. He had all the gear, all the safety equipment. If he was careful, there would be minimal risk. He made his way through the overgrown bracken, and clambering over the rocks littered at the bottom of the over towering crag, looking for a suitable place to start his climb, he found a woman's dead body.

He called the local police.

He then decided that he would give up climbing.

He was interviewed of course. No, he didn't know her. He had just come across her body as he was making his way to do a climb. Terrible shock.

The police were unable to find any signs of bodily harm, other than what was to be expected from a fall from the top of the crags to where the body was found.

The body was identified from the driver's license found in the wallet in the inside pocket of her jacket.

The Police put out a general call for anyone who knew her to come forward. They also released information about her VW Golf, which was parked in the layby near the entrance to the trail which led over the top of the crags. Someone surely must

have noticed it.

Thirty-Five

The next morning, Jess called the public record office for the military. They were remarkably efficient. All the records had been transferred to a computer database, and it was a simple search to find that Jacob Symes Cudworth had stopped drawing the pension in 1890, the year he had died. He had also dropped the Cudworth name on leaving the military, and was known simply as Jacob Symes. Jess was given the mailing address in Manchester.

Jess was beginning to feel an inner building dread that she may well find that she and Symes were actually distantly related, and that both of them were descendants of the Cudworth family. His name kept coming up. The prospect of her searches resulting in an enrichment of Symes turned her stomach. If it did turn out to be the case, the only redeeming feature would be that her son and daughter would eventually inherit, assuming that Symes didn't waste the inheritance before her children could take it up.

To know, for sure, she would have to go back through Symes' family history.

She did not like Manchester. It was a huge, sprawling city. She conceded that it likely had its pleasant areas, and was home to millions, and treasured as such. However, for her, it was a place she would normally have avoided at all costs. The most contact she had ever wanted with the city for decades was the convenience of the location of the airport for her favoured spots in the valley, and for the north of England generally. She could hire a car at the airport, and very quickly, using the motorways, leave the place behind.

Her heart sank as she made her way to the street where she

knew Symes had been raised. It was dirty. Graffiti everywhere, Litter everywhere. Broken pavements. Overgrown grass. Broken down walls surrounding unkempt gardens. Peeling paint. Broken windows. Groups of hostile looking youths loitering on corners. She knocked on the door of Symes' parents' home which opened to reveal a bare footed none too clean youngish man clad in trousers and a vest who greeted her with a hostile "what do yer want?" She explained that she was looking for Mr. & Mrs. Symes, and had understood they lived at that address. "Don't now," he said, and closed the door.

The local church was boarded up, covered in graffiti and ready for demolition. Her inquiries of a group of youths hanging around near its front porch as to where she could find the vicar were met with derision, laughter, and a thorough kicking and thumping of her car.

She realized she should have prepared herself better before setting out on what was turning into a fruitless journey. She made herself go around the area for another hour or so, asking at various shops as to the whereabouts of Mr. & Mrs. Symes, to no avail. Feeling thoroughly depressed and hopeless, it wasn't until she turned her car, and headed back over the hills into the countryside that she began to formulate a plan. She would find a local solicitor, in the valley, and have him or her, or his or her clerk, or an investigator they felt it suitable to hire, to do the search work. They could try to find out about Jacob, but they could also start with Symes, and work backwards. She was feeling increasingly certain that the two strands of inquiry would eventually meet.

She could also talk to the solicitor about what documents would be needed to have any hope of succeeding in a claim on the Nether Hall Estate. She had copies of the relevant pages from the various registers she had examined, but she expected there would be need for more than that.

Feeling encouraged and resolved, she drove happily back to her

hotel. She wondered, fleetingly, where Jackson was, or if Shaw might show up for dinner.

Thirty-Six

The solicitor's office was in a rather fine townhouse in a row of such buildings in the more affluent part of Foxhill, which was the largest town in the area. As she climbed the stone steps to the imposing front door, she smiled to herself as she remembered her days in another life when she had worked as a typist in a law office housed in a similar building. Her desk and stand-up manual typewriter had been located in an attic room, shared with two other typists. The roof over their work area had a vaulted ceiling, and its window was small. The lighting had been from one exposed electric bulb hanging from roughly the centrepoin in the ceiling. There were four flights of winding stairs to negotiate to drop off work for the lawyers, or to pick up work from them; the lawyers were housed on the ground floor, in large spaces, with lots of daylight. It was Dickensian.

She pushed open the heavy front door. It was painted a dark midnight blue, and hosted a highly polished brass knocker with a face on it that could have been an image of Scrooge. She entered a small hall where a receptionist invited her to take a seat while she waited. The solicitor, when he arrived, ten minutes or so later, had the perfect name of Fergus Periwinkle. He looked a kindly man; middle aged, tired, rumpled suit, grey complexion, greying hair from a receding hairline, glasses pushed back over his forehead, a bit of a paunch, more tall than middle height, and a patient, dispirited air about him. She felt they would get along very well.

His office was lined with shelving to accommodate most of his books, the rest of which were lying around on the floor, along

with piles of papers. He retreated behind his very large antique desk, and offered her the upright chair located before it. There were no offers of coffee or tea.

Jess took a deep breath, opened her briefcase, laid out her file on the desk, and began her story. Fergus Periwinkle leaned back in his ample chair, elbows on the arms of same, fingertips pressed together, and regarded her with a clear and penetrating attention which reassured Jess of his intelligent grasp of what she was telling him.

Questions were asked. Answers were given. Fergus Periwinkle agreed that the first task was to establish the male line flowing from Jacob Symes Cudworth. He had a contact in the Manchester area who would be able to undertake that task. Assuming there was evidence that Symes was indeed the heir, he would then have to write to the present owner of Nether Hall and alert him to the situation. Documents would have to be provided and reviewed. She was counselled that she could expect resistance to such a request, and an application to the court may have to be made. To that end, all her work on establishing the ancestors would have to be checked, verified, and put into a legal format. Once that was done, and assuming all was well, Mr. Periwinkle would share those results with the current owner's lawyers, and present her case. He expected, again based on the assumption that his own research would confirm what Jess had found, that they would be reasonable about it, and not force a court action.

Jess asked if it was possible to change the entail. It seemed it was, with the consent of the current heir. A deed could be executed to remove the entail and establish a different arrangement. Jess felt it unfair to her daughter, not to mention the distant cousin, if they were to not benefit in some way. Periwinkle promised to look into what alternatives could be put in place.

All of this was clearly going to take some time, more time

than Jess had wanted to spend in England. Mr. Periwinkle promised to do what he could to speed up the process, and reminded her that a lot would depend on the attitude of the current owner's solicitors.

Of course, if the investigation into Jacob's family proved her wrong in her premonition that Symes, and so her son, were the true heirs, he would have to take further instructions from her at that time.

She left his office in high spirits and with a sense that she had picked exactly the right solicitor, and she was in unison with the gods.

Thirty-Seven

"Well, hello again." Shaw settled himself down into what he was beginning to feel was his wing chair. She was in her usual spot, with her usual cocktail on the table by her chair. She had been reading a book. She looked up at the sound of his voice, and giving him a welcoming smile, closed her book.

"Hello. How are you? How's the investigation going?"

He was taken again by the sight of her. Those clear intelligent eyes, the perfect skin, the composure, the beautiful clothes, her air of relaxed openness. He felt a deep pleasure to be once again in her company.

"I'm well, thank you. And as for the investigation, are you able to join me for dinner?"

"Thank you, with pleasure."

"Another cocktail while we check out the menu?"

"Thank you again, but I'm still making my way down this one."

"I'll just get myself a drink then, back in a mo."

He made his way to the bar, feeling like the cat that got the cream. While he waited for his drink, he glanced over to where she was. He could only see part of one side of her. The wing chair in which she was sitting was turned away from where he was standing, obscuring a fuller view. She was gazing into the fire, not looking his way. The light from the fire illuminated what he could see of her face. Beautiful. He realized it wasn't just what he could see of her face. It was her whole ambience. For a moment, his legs felt weak and he questioned his sanity, or vanity, in approaching such a woman. He also questioned his sanity as the investigating officer in a murder inquiry in approaching a woman who was involved, no matter how peripherally, in his investigation. He picked up his drink and made his way back to the wing chairs and the fire.

"I've been thinking about you, wondering how you were getting along," she said, as he placed his drink on the table by his chair.

"Well," he said, "and I've been thinking about you and your quest. How are you progressing in your ancestral search? Townley told me about the search he did for you."

"Oh no," she laughed, shaking her head, "this time its your turn to tell me about you. I want to know about you, how you came to be here, your accent isn't local, how did you get here, and why?"

He smiled, and sitting back in his chair, shook his head, ruefully. "Well, I'm sure my life is nowhere near as interesting as your's."

"Let me be the judge of that," she rejoined. Still smiling broadly, she said "your life is interesting to me. I want to know about you."

He felt very uncomfortable. He was used to being on the questioning end, and taking his own thoughts and griefs back to his home, where he dealt with them in private.

Keeping a smile on his face and shuffling around in his chair, he said, "I'd much rather talk about you, I'm sure you will not find my life interesting at all."

"Well, I don't want to impose," she said and, with a wry smile, "or make you feel uncomfortable."

She fell into silence, and picking up her glass, sipped her martini while she gazed into the fire. He felt stupid. Of course she was right. He spent most of his working day imposing on folk, and questioning them about stuff that made them feel uncomfortable. He felt he had closed a door that he had wanted to open. He felt exposed, cowardly.

"Ok then." He stretched his legs out to the fire, and relaxed his body. "I'll tell you a little about me, enough for you to understand why I'm here in the north with a southern accent. How's that?"

"Its a start," she said, turning toward him and smiling.

"OK then, you play detective and ask away."

"Oh," was her rejoinder. She sat back again in her chair and was quiet for a few seconds. "You know, I really don't have the skills, or the inclination, to be a questioning detective. I would much prefer it if you would just give me your summary, sketch, whatever you feel I would need to know to understand why you are here," she opened her arms in an expansive manner, "in a place which seems so out of place for you."

Now he felt more relaxed. Easing further back in his chair, and enjoying a few sips from his martini, he gazed into the fire and wondered where he should begin.

"Well, as you have noticed, I'm not from these parts. I lived in the south for most of my life. I joined the police in London after completing a degree in political science, and worked my way up to my present rank. I asked for a transfer to

a different area after my wife and daughter were killed in a motor vehicle accident. I've been up here now for going on 3 years."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to bring up painful memories, how awful for you." Now it was Jess who was feeling uncomfortable.

"Do you want to talk about it?" she ventured.

"Not really," he replied. "I'm over the worst. Being up here in the countryside has helped enormously, and, of course, the class of crime is generally less gruesome than the type that can abound in London."

"Ummm, until you got a call to the Red Lion perhaps?" she queried.

"Now that investigation is still open and I cannot discuss it with you," he said, with a smile and a twinkle in his eye.

She chuckled. "I guess not."

"There is one thing I could ask you. If your son asks to know where you are, should I tell him or not?"

She drew in a deep breath, and looked away, back into the fire. He waited patiently.

Eventually she said, "I suppose, if he asks, but only if he asks."

"Good decision," he said, nodding his head. "Now, what's for dinner," and he reached for and opened the menu.

The evening passed as pleasantly and easily as before. Jess related to Shaw about having found records relating to Edward and his two children, and that there was a definite connection between herself and Edward's daughter. She also mentioned about Jacob Symes, and the connection with Manchester, and

that she had now given instructions to the local solicitor to finish the search for any descendants of his. If her intuition was correct, they would find that Symes was Jacob's descendant, and that he, and so her son, were heirs to Nether Hall and its estates.

Shaw, who had already been briefed by Townley, had been very interested to hear of Jess' search into Symes' ancestors.

Later, and back in her room, and reflecting on the evening, Jess acknowledged to herself that she was becoming very attracted to Shaw.

He had said nothing about the death at the Red Lion, other than that it was being treated as a suspicious death, and that the investigation was ongoing. She assumed he wasn't in the habit of dining with suspects in a murder investigation, and so felt she likely was not therefore a suspect.

Jess thought of Jackson. Whenever she met a man she found attractive and interesting, she always found herself comparing him to Jackson. How did Shaw stack up in that league? Jackson was a hard act to follow. He was why she had not married again. It had been so long since she had seen him that she sometimes entertained doubts of what she had felt was his love for her. Maybe he had been merely kind to her out of what she had felt was his unassailable security. If that was the case, she was nonetheless very grateful for his kindness. It had helped her to heal from her history of no love, and no kindness. She reminded herself that Jackson was married, had a family, and was no doubt living happily ever after in some salubrious and intellectual community attached to some university somewhere.

She could see that she and Shaw would get along very well. He was easy going, accepting, intelligent, had a good sense of humour, and clearly a deep respect and admiration for her. He would be kind, considerate, patient. Money would not be a

problem. He was no doubt well enough off, and she had her own wealth to bring to any union.

A life in the valley with a good partner was a possible future for her. An appealing prospect but one which she had to acknowledge was not enough for her anymore. Like most things we long for, and finally acquire, it would, she felt, prove empty, an ending, a kind of regression, not a beginning. As well, she had concerns about filling his dead wife's shoes. Shaw and his wife had clearly been very happy together. It would take him longer than 3 years to get over his tragic loss. It might be better for him to stay with his grief until it softened to treasured memories than to try and cut that short out of an expectation that Jess would somehow assuage it. She knew she could not do that. It could end in bitterness for him, and worse, it could deepen his grief. He could see his attraction to her as a betrayal of his wife, and be forever on his own thereafter. No, it was too soon. She could be kind, and clear, and a friend, and stay in touch, and maybe see him again, if she ever came back to the valley. She had no expectations of him visiting her in Canada. At least, she hoped he would not and, on realizing that, she felt further confirmed that it was not her path to be with him. It was just a holiday attraction, all mixed in with the deaths at the pub, nostalgia for her roots – not her real life but a time-out space, a regression to a past that had little to do with her present or her future.

She knew he would be disappointed, but their relationship had not progressed beyond dinner and cocktails and, though she knew it could, very quickly, he had no reason so far to regret their connection, or feel led on, or let down. There was lots of room for her to withdraw, gently, leaving them both intact and with pleasant memories.

She wondered if she was destined for aloneness. It was a prospect that did not alarm her. Indeed, she was beginning to wonder if she actually preferred it, and that was why she kept

walking away from men like Shaw. Of course, Jackson was always in her thoughts, but she was safe from him. He was still married as far as she knew.

Maybe Symes had done more damage than she had yet to fully comprehend. Or maybe the damage had been done before she met Symes, and Symes was the inevitable outcome. She had long since moved from blaming to responsibility, and an effort to understand, with liberal lacings of forgiveness and compassion, for herself and everyone else involved.

What was that song about the human lot not being a happy one?

Time for bed.

Thirty-Eight

Shaw studied the reports from forensics and pathology. There was evidence that Louise had been in a fight, and that the head injury from her fall was likely following on a blow received in that fight, but that head injury, and the other injuries suffered in the fight had not killed her. What had killed her was a heart attack. And the heart attack was likely the result of the massive amount of alcohol in her blood stream at the time of her death.

There was nothing to directly link Symes to the injuries Louise sustained before the heart attack. The pub was covered in both their fingerprints and footprints. In any event, even if a connection could be established between Louise's injuries and Symes, it could be defended on the basis that everyone knew they were always having fights, and she could have sustained some or all of those injuries at any time before the night of her death.

Symes' denied causing the injuries, and his suggestion that it could have been an intruder was plausible. Nevertheless,

Shaw's instinct was something he had learned to rely on, and that instinct told him that Symes was involved in Louise's death. The same instinct told him that Symes had been involved in the death of Dolores Winters. Again, there was no proof, and no witnesses. There had been responses from the outreach to the general public, along the lines of Dolores was alive and well, and living in Gibraltar, but nothing of any help so far.

He would have Symes back at the Station for further questioning in due course.

He needed a break, something had to break.

Thirty-Nine

David hadn't been back in the area long before he heard about Dolores Winters being found, and that the Police were asking for anyone who might have seen anything to come forward. He was in the pub near his girlfriend's place when one of the locals talked about the VW Golf, how it had been parked in the layby near where the path over the crags started, and that it had been there for several days.

He called Shaw, and arranged to meet with him at the police station in Foxhill.

David explained to Shaw that he had been travelling in North Yorkshire and Lancashire, following up on prospects for new business, and had only just heard about Dolores Winters. It had been the description of the car that had triggered his memory. He knew Dolores of course. He knew that she had been hanging around Symes, but he particularly knew her car; he had helped her with it on one of her visits to the pub when it wouldn't start when she wanted to leave.

He remembered that on the night Louise had died, the VW had

been parked up against the wall, on the road, not far from the entrance to the pub car park. He hadn't thought anything of it at the time. He didn't know if the driver was sitting in the car. It had been too dark to see. But he recognized the car. It wasn't unusual for a customer to leave their car at or about the pub overnight if they felt they were not safe to drive home. Some lived close enough to walk home, or they would call a taxi, or a friend would drive them.

Shaw thanked David for the information. And then advised he had some information for David. He told David that he had met his mother, and that she was staying at the George in Highgate. "Up to you," he said, "whether you see her or not. I've seen her. I think she's lovely. But I understand you have a difficult history. Now, I'll go and get my sergeant and have him take your statement."

David mumbled his thanks, and as Shaw left the interview room, he turned to see him seemingly gazing at the floor, his head down, back bent, and arms limp. Shaw briefly felt sorry for the young man, but, feeling sure that if David should pluck up the courage to meet his mother, he would be well pleased, he turned and went about his search for Townley.

Shaw then left the police station to walk, and think. Dolores must have seen something, something that incriminated Symes, and had tried to use that to get him to marry her, and so Symes had pushed her off the top of the crags. He thought of Jess, and cringed at the thought of the impact it would have on her to know that Symes was a murderer, and also to know that it was because of her son's evidence that his father was potentially in danger of being convicted. It was still circumstantial though.

He walked for over an hour. On his return, he had Townley contact Symes to set up a time for him to come into the station to further help the police with their inquiries.

Forty

Jess had been out for a long evening walk over part of the moors, and was feeling windswept, free, and quite joyous when she returned to her hotel. She headed straight for the elevator with plans for a shower and an early night. However, as she traversed the lobby, the receptionist called out to her and she made her way over to the front desk. Apparently, a young man had been to the hotel wanting to see her. The receptionist held out a business card. "I told him you were just out for a walk, and probably wouldn't be long, but he wouldn't wait. He left this for you," she said. Jess took the card, glanced at it, smiled, thanked the receptionist, and continued on her way to her room. It was her son's business card. Her immediate reaction was that she would leave it to David to try to contact her again. If she changed her mind, she had his card. She acknowledged to herself that it was a strange reaction, and one she didn't fully understand, but she was comfortable with it.

Forty-One

Two days later, Mr. Periwinkle contacted Jess to advise that the investigation into Jacob Symes had firmly established that the Symes she knew, and her son, were the surviving male heirs of the Cudworth family. On the basis of that information, he had contacted the solicitor for the current owner of Nether Hall. That solicitor had been most cooperative, and he had since had a telephone conversation with the current owner, a Josh Benedict, an American, and very wealthy in his own right.

Mr. Periwinkle advised that the outcome of his contact with Josh Benedict had been most favourable. It seemed that Josh Benedict had been more interested and excited about reconnecting with long lost family members than in hanging

onto Nether Hall and its estate. The estate, for him, had been something of a headache to manage from his home in San Francisco. He had considered moving to England when he had first heard of the inheritance, intrigued at finding his roots, and hoping for a feeling of "coming home". It had not worked out for him. He had come to accept that he would never feel at home in England, or be accepted in England. His west coast attitudes and dress were seen as peculiar, occasionally entertaining, but altogether somewhat weird. After all the renovations had been done to Nether Hall, and it had subsequently been established on a sound business footing, he had retreated to his true home by the Pacific Ocean.

He had been resigned to selling the estate, if a buyer could be found for it. There had been some interest from foreign investors, but he had found himself resistant to selling off his heritage to someone from Asia, and, as the estate was paying for itself, he had been in no hurry, and had resolved to wait for the right situation to come along. The sudden arrival of distant family to take over was, he felt, exactly what he had been waiting for. He could hope for a continuing connection to family and the estate, which would satisfy his need for a sense of belonging, roots and history, without any of the responsibilities. He wanted to meet Jess, and her children. He wanted to be in touch with all of them, to feel he did have a family, no matter how distant.

A Zoom call was arranged. Jess had been somewhat startled to find that Mr. Periwinkle knew his way around such things as Zoom, but he did, and he had arranged a call with Josh Benedict for the following morning.

Josh was reassuringly Californian in his appearance and manner. He was never still, was physically fit, and looked quite wild with his long apparently uncontrollable hair, beard, large red frames for his eye-wear, and an infectious joyousness about him that offended all English senses of propriety. Jess liked him immediately. He was delightful and

delighted to hear that she lived in Canada, and on the west coast too, and they were laughing and talking non-stop from the get go. They each knew that all was going to be well, and that they would stay in touch, and meet whenever they could.

Symes, as a complicating ingredient in the situation, was discussed. Jess explained that it was Symes who was likely to prove to be the inheritor of the estate, and that it was her son from her marriage to Symes who would be next in line under the entail. She also explained that all it took to break the entail was a simple deed, and she hoped that Symes would execute such a deed and give up his interest in favour of his son and his daughter. She also made it clear that she had no reasonable hope that Symes would do that but that Mr. Periwinkle would be acting for her, and would keep them both advised of developments.

Jess knew it was sensible to leave it with Periwinkle now. He would follow up with Symes, and contact David. If Symes would not change the entail, David would be next in line and her daughter would have to rely on Symes and David to provide her with an income from the estate, or include her if she wanted to be involved in the running of it. If David ended the entail, maybe he and his sister would run the estate together, and still keep it in the family. Or they may decide to sell it. Jess didn't like the idea of the estate being sold off and had mixed feelings about ending the entail for that reason; the entail kept the estate together. However, she had to accept that she had no power in the situation and let it all go.

Forty-Two

Symes was nervous.

He adopted his usual arrogant defences as he swept into the police station and informed the desk sergeant that he had come

to meet with Townley and DI Shaw, and could the desk sergeant kindly inform those two gentlemen that he had arrived and was waiting, and that he was a very busy man. He then impatiently tapped his fingers on the desk while turning away to look for somewhere to sit down to read the book he had brought with him. The book was an old one from his teaching days and was, he felt, evidence of his intellectual superiority. He raised and positioned it so that the desk sergeant could readily see the title and be suitably impressed. All of this was observed with amusement by the desk sergeant who had seen many different kinds of defensive antics from folks called into the police station by the CID to help with inquiries.

Townley, after a suitable delay, went to get Symes from the waiting area and escorted him to an interview room. He turned on the tape recorder, was all politeness in asking Symes to sit, and if he would like tea or coffee and, finally, if Symes was sure he was comfortable being questioned without his solicitor being present. Symes was surprised. He had persuaded himself that this was just a routine meeting, a step in procedure. That he was being questioned, and may need a solicitor, sounded a lot less friendly. It hadn't occurred to him to get a solicitor.

"Should I have a solicitor with me?" he asked Townley.

"If you feel you have anything to worry about, certainly." responded Townley. "I would recommend it, but its entirely up to you. It is your right to have a solicitor present."

Townley then left Symes to think about that while he got the coffee Symes had requested. Symes thought over his options. If he asked for a solicitor, it would be like an acknowledgement of guilt. He knew the Police had nothing but circumstantial evidence. He decided his best course was to play the innocent.

When Townley returned, Symes said "I don't feel I need a solicitor to be present. I have nothing to worry about. I have

done nothing wrong." Townley noted for the tape that Symes had refused the opportunity to have his solicitor present.

After a further suitable delay, Shaw entered the interview room.

"Well, Symes, we meet again."

"So it would seem inspector, so it would seem. How can I help you? I can't stay long by the way, I have a pub to run, as you know."

"We have some new information, and I need to ask you what you think about it."

"Good, OK. You've found the intruder, right? Right?" No response. "Fire away then".

"Are you sure you do not want to have a solicitor present?"

"Well, I don't feel I do right now. But you're making me nervous asking me if I want one. I mean, what is this?"

"Its procedure. Dolores may have been murdered. You are entitled to have a solicitor present if you want one."

"Well, they cost money, so I guess I'll wait to hear what you have to say first."

"Very well then. I'll proceed."

Shaw placed the file he was carrying on the table, sat down, and opened the file. He shuffled through the papers for a few minutes, re-sorting them, and when he felt Symes had got past his defiance, and was beginning to realize that his situation was perhaps not so secure as his arrogance had convinced him it was, he asked, "Can you tell me about your relationship with Dolores Winters?"

"I've told you already. We had an affair. Lasted a nanosecond, but the stupid bitch thought it was true love and for life. I

had a helluva time getting rid of her." Symes realized he shouldn't have said that. "Well, that doesn't sound quite right, in all the circumstances, I see that, but you understand, it was just a fling, nothing serious, not for me, and she was hanging on like a limpet, like I was her saviour or something. I figured she would get over it in time, but she was a bloody nuisance."

"You knew she was married?"

"Yes, of course I knew she was married. I don't have flings with unmarried women. I assume that married women have more sense. They can always go back to their husbands. Its no fun at all if some single bitch takes a fancy. They always expect to get married, cause trouble, disrupt everything. Waste of time."

"Did you know that Dolores' husband was going to divorce her because of her affair with you?"

"What? What kind of a wanker is that?" demanded Symes. "What an arsehole, really." Then his eyes lit up, and laughing, said, "unless of course the wanker was a religious nut, or, better still, having it off with someone else and saw this as his way out. Yes, that would be it!"

Symes was exultant, back to his usual mocking derision, feeling more confident by the minute, and confident there was no evidence to link him with Dolores death.

"There you go," he said. "No wonder she jumped off those crags. Bastard husband of her's. What a wanker!"

"Its all worked out well for you, hasn't it Symes? Your wife dead, you get the insurance, pay off your debts. Your affair ends, no liabilities there. Free and clear. Is that how you see it?" Shaw asked.

"Its the luck of the draw. I lucked out this time. That's

all." Symes was trying to calm down, be less himself.

"We have a witness who saw Dolores' car, still outside your pub, late, on the night Louise died."

Symes laughed. "I told you she had been at the pub that night. Of course her car would be around."

"No, you don't understand me. Her car was seen outside the pub after closing time, after the time you said she had left."

Symes looked bewildered. He was thinking rapidly. Who, who could have seen her car. David maybe. He didn't know what time David came home. He had not come into the bar.

"Are you saying that you have evidence to support that Dolores was the intruder, and killed Louise?" asked Symes. "My God, I knew she was neurotic, and determined to break up my marriage, but I never thought she would go to that extreme. Is that why she jumped off the top of the crags then, assuming she jumped. Guilt and all that, and I had told her I wouldn't marry her. Is that what this is all about?"

"How did you know that Dolores was found at the bottom of the crags?" asked Shaw, "I didn't tell you that."

Symes had a momentary spasm of panic. "Well, I guess someone in the pub must have told me. Its not a secret, is it?" he asked.

Shaw sat back. He realized his feelings for Jess, and for what Symes had done to Jess, and his desire for justice for her, had given him more hope for a conviction of Symes than he knew he had sufficient evidence for. Any hopes that Symes would slip up, contradict himself, incriminate himself, evaporated. He knew how the evidence could be distorted and used to free Symes from the consequences of his actions. He looked hard at Symes, and saw someone who would never answer to the law of the land. But, Shaw knew, Symes would eventually, sooner or

later, answer to the law of a higher authority, and to the law of his inner being. He remembered his grandfather, who read the Bible each and every day, saying to him once when he was feeling dispirited in his work, that the wheels of God grind slow, but exceedingly small.

After a few moments, Shaw said to Symes, "thank you for coming in. I will consider what you have shared with us, and I will let you know if there are any further developments."

Symes left the police station, cock sure that he had once again averted disaster. But as he drove back to the pub, he felt as if dark coils were encircling his chest and mind, and were growing stronger and stronger, and he couldn't wait to get back and open a bottle of wine, and laugh at all of this, sit back in his pub, and look around, take in his property and its richness, and know that everything was fine, just fine, and he would survive it all. It will pass, he told himself, it will pass. All things do in time. It will pass. Its the luck of the draw. And, he laughed, I certainly drew lucky this time.

It was left that Dolores had committed suicide following on her husband's advice that he would divorce her, and Symes' advice that he would not marry her.

Forty-Three

Jess had not yet heard again from David, and she had continued with her resolve to not contact him. David did not know when she would be leaving England. Mr. Periwinkle would be getting in touch with David in due course, and had her contact information in Canada, should David ask for it.

She had decided that she wanted to see Symes before she left England to at least try to appeal to whatever was left of a better nature in him to give up his title to the Hall in

favour of her son, and to be satisfied with his pub. She did not want any further personal contact with Symes after she passed on her news about Nether Hall. If Symes needed to communicate with her thereafter, he would have to do it through Periwinkle.

She was flying back to Canada out of London on an early morning flight. With the hours it now took to get through the security checks at the airport, she was going to have to be at the airport at the crack of dawn to be sure to make the flight. She decided that she would see Symes at the end of the day before, and then drive to London through the night. The traffic on the motorways was horrendous during the day, and to avoid the risk of being delayed in a traffic jam, she would either have to stay in London the day before her flight, or drive through the night. She decided on driving through the night. She could sleep on the aircraft.

She checked out of her hotel, and drove to Foxend to spend the day looking around the market, and the shops there. She bought some crusty French bread, a perfect apple, a strong aged Cheddar cheese, some water, and a half bottle of a decent red wine, which she stowed in the back of the car. She also spent some time in the church in Foxend, remembering the many visits she had made to that sanctuary over the course of her years in England. The stained glass window over the altar was a particular joy; it was hard to make out if the disciples were men or women.

It was a pleasant day, sunny, warm, and Foxend was not too crowded. The day passed quickly and easily.

In the early evening, she made her way back to the spot she had found following her first visit to Symes' pub. She parked her car as far along the lane as she could, out of sight from the road. It was possible to see the pub from the top of the bank, and to watch the comings and goings in and out of the entrances at its side and back. The sun was still warm. She

settled down comfortably in the grass to enjoy the bread and wine, a kind of Eucharist for her last meal in England, at least for this trip.

She had decided that the best time to speak to Symes would be when the bar was closed. There was a risk that he would be too drunk to make any sense of what she had to tell him, but she decided she would take that risk.

Her meal finished, and some time yet to the pub's closing time, she walked for awhile along the tops, allowing the peace she always felt when she was out in the English countryside to pervade her soul and senses, and relax her. After a while, she returned to her car, and in the cooler air, found and donned her jacket. She then sat in the passenger seat, waiting, allowing her thoughts to dwell on what she had determined to do.

She expected that Symes would be difficult, that her hopes of him passing on the estate to her son now rather than on his death were remote, but she wanted to try. She also realized that he might not believe her about the estate. It would no doubt sound fantastic, and be rather a lot to take in. He may not believe it until he got the news from Periwinkle.

The planned confrontation didn't feel like the sort of thing she would normally do. Then again, she reflected, there was nothing normal about any of it. She wondered at her reasoning for approaching Symes directly. Why did she not leave it to Periwinkle and spare herself the stress? The answer was that her last meeting with Symes had been cordial, and she had felt that he was close to death. She came away from that last meeting feeling there was some hope that he had changed, and could be reasonable if asked. She was the one who had found out about the inheritance, and she was the one who was responsible for bringing great good fortune to him and her children; no one would ever have known about any of it if she hadn't done the initial investigative work, if she hadn't

listened to that inner voice, and followed those inner promptings. It was that same inner voice, and those same inner promptings that insisted on her meeting with Symes in this way, and at this time, before she left England.

She tried to push away her doubts, and relax.

The dusky evening quickly fell into night and the pub was, if anything, even more clearly seen now. Lit up inside and out, it was possible to make out the customers in the bar, and the number of cars in the illuminated car park.

Jess waited patiently She didn't expect her meeting with Symes to be a long one, and she had to leave enough time to get down the motorway to London, and out to the airport. She knew that Symes would likely serve drinks after time, but she didn't want to wait too long. A too late night at Symes' pub would leave her no option but to abandon her venture if she was to catch her flight. She wondered if that was why she had chosen this time to meet with Symes, and was unconsciously nurturing a hope that she would not have to go through with it.

At 11 p.m. the drapes were pulled across the windows, and shortly thereafter there was only one car left in the car park that she could see, and the car park lights were turned off. So be it she thought. Feeling that she was in submission to some inner imperative, she made her way down the path to the pub and its back door.

She wasn't sure if the car in the car park belonged to Symes, or to a late customer. She slipped in by the back door, and then into the kitchen. Standing just inside the kitchen door, heart pounding, she listened intently. She could hear the murmur of low voices coming from the bar, and assumed Symes did have a customer still. She waited.

Her eyes adjusted to the gloom, and she began to see the kitchen more clearly. There was a huge range top, a butcher's table in the centre, with a stand containing an assortment of

knives, several sinks and a large dishwasher, and refrigerators. Glass fronted cupboards for crockery lined the walls. For a second she considered making her way across to the butcher's table, and finding a sharp short bladed knife for use in murdering Symes. That would solve the problem beautifully she thought. He would be dead, and unable to squander her childrens' inheritance. She would be on a flight back to Canada. No one knew that she was at the pub. Her son would be free and clear in his title to the Nether Hall Estates. Symes would not be able to mar and ruin their lives any more.

She shuddered at the thought of such a deed. She felt that if she were more mature, more evolved, more forgiving, more grounded in her sense of self, she would not have entertained the thought of such a course of action. She acknowledged her thought, however, and that it would not be an entirely unjust ending.

A few minutes later she heard what she assumed was Symes' last customer pass by the kitchen door. She moved from the kitchen and into the lounge bar.

He was sitting on a bar stool, smoking a cigarette. A large glass of brandy stood on the bar before him. He did not see her.

"Good evening," she said.

Symes startled, turned to look at her and then, in amazement, asked, "what the hell are you doing here?"

At first, he seemed amused, bemused, and then, looking at the expression on her face, and her posture, his body tightened. Sensing she had come with some sort of purpose, and seeing the folder she was carrying, his first thought was that she had started some kind of legal action against him, something he had long expected but, as the years had gone by, he had dismissed as so unlikely he had stopped thinking about it. Now

she was back, carrying a folder which he assumed would contain some kind of threat, and something he was going to have to fight in court about.

He stubbed out his cigarette with a violent and vigorous action and stood, and turning to her, he angrily demanded, "what the fuck are you doing here!"

For a moment, Jess was taken aback at once again meeting the Symes she had known from years ago. She momentarily experienced the old familiar feeling of terror. At one time he had beaten her into submission, into physical and mental breakdown, and into abject misery. But she had done her work. She was strong now. Her feelings now were more along the lines of compassion and sympathy.

"I didn't seek you out Symes. It was a complete surprise to me to find you owned and operated this pub. You will remember that when I left, you were still teaching in the city."

"Well, what do you want? What have you got there?" pointing at the folder. "Bringing trouble are you?" Symes turned and picked up his brandy. "Why don't you piss off and drown yourself or something."

"I've actually brought some good news," said Jess cautiously. "I'm sorry to come at such a time, but I'll be leaving England in a few hours and this was convenient for me. I had hoped that you had changed and that we could have a reasonable discussion. However, it seems I was mistaken."

Symes turned to glare at her. "What are you talking about! We have nothing to discuss." He looked at her suspiciously, and then burst out laughing. "You're not one of those crazy nutters who believe in God are you?" He laughed. "Well, I don't need saving, changing, or redeeming, and I have nothing to be sorry about."

"I can see you have no remorse," said Jess.

Symes snorted with contempt, and turning around on his bar stool to face her, said, "who the fuck do you think you are, you silly cow? You chased me all those years ago. It was you that trapped me into that miserable marriage. You. You were responsible for what happened, not me. You deserved what you got. Have you come back for some more? Missing it are you. Liked the beatings, did you? Why else did you stay as long as you did you silly cow. Piss off."

Jess felt her heart sink. She had walked into this. She had hoped he had changed. From her last visit, she had felt she had some grounds for hope that he had come to understand himself more, and that there was a chance for peace and understanding between them. She now realized her hopes were futile, for he continued to deny the truth in his efforts to defend and justify himself. His remarks were so insulting, so arrogant, she realized he was far far away from any understanding.

She felt though that she should say something in response.

"Chased you?" she asked. "You were the one who always came and sat by me on the bus going home from school. You were the one who always came and sat by me in the library. You were the one who always asked me to dance. You were the one who asked me to marry you. So, no. No. I did not chase you. You chased me. As for staying, there was nowhere for me to go, and we had two children."

Symes exploded at this and turning on his bar stool, and standing with his arms raised, he yelled at her "Oh, for fuck's sake. Get out of here."

Jess felt Symes intended to strike her. She carefully placed the folder on the bar, and remembering her self-defence training, she stood a couple of steps back with a raised head, squared shoulders, both arms hanging loosely by her side, hands loose and ready, legs slightly apart, and firm on her

feet. She looked at Symes with a steady and objective wariness. Symes was taken by surprise at her resolute posture, and suddenly felt intimidated. He could see she was not afraid. Her face was still, her eyes clear, steady and calm, her jaw set.

In an even voice, she spoke to him. "I came here to tell you that you are in fact an heir to the Cudworth estates, and that our children, are, consequently, heirs also. I have been to a solicitor, and provided him with all the evidence, and he will be proceeding to take the necessary steps to ensure that the inheritance is claimed. I want you to pass on that inheritance directly to our children. I feel you could do that, make amends in that way, and that you owe me, and them, to do that. Will you do that?"

His heart was pounding, he felt sick. He couldn't believe what he was hearing. And from her. She wasn't here to sue him then. She had brought news of a windfall. He knew enough about her to know that she was serious, and that she would have grounds for making the statements she had just made. His mind scattered with wild thoughts of the presumed wealth from the Cudworth estates, and how his life would be transformed if what she said was true. And to hell with giving that up for his kids, he thought, to hell with that. If it was true, there was no way he was going to do that!

"You're mad," he said. "Absolutely barking. Always was, always will be."

"No, I am not mad. I realize this is a shock for you, and a lot to take in, but it is all true. I have copies of the papers here for you to look at."

Jess pointed to the folder containing copies of the paperwork which she had placed on the bar.

Symes turned and opened the folder. He tried to look at the papers, but he was unable to fully register what they said.

His mind was spinning. He sat back on his stool. Then he felt the thick black oily presence he had been pushing away from him for years closing in around him, and the pain. He turned and looked at Jess, who, he realized, was gazing at him as if he was from another planet. Then he was falling, and then he was on the floor, clutching his chest, gasping for his last breath.

Jess stood and watched, surprised and horrified. Her instinct was to see if she could help him, but that stronger inner imperative kept her from approaching him, and held her back. Over the years she had grown to trust that inner imperative, even when it seemed to be at odds with church doctrine and dogma. It had taken many years for her to accept that the powers that had prevented her return to her family all those years ago had done so for some ultimate benefit. She had been identified with her own devaluation as taught by the patriarchal church and culture for so long, that it had been impossible for her to accept that there was anything positive for her in the workings of the spirit in her situation then.

It was over very quickly. Symes was dead. She let herself out by the back door, and made her way to where she had parked her car. She felt sorry for Symes. It was a sad end for someone she had once loved. He had many opportunities to understand and amend his ways, but he had chosen to stay with what he knew, what he was comfortable with.

At that time of night, she expected she would get to the airport in good time. All she had to do was calm down, breathe deeply, slow her heart rate, and concentrate, concentrate, on the road and the traffic, and get to the airport safely. Then she remembered that she had left the folder of documents on the bar. She went back inside, and feeling some horror at the possibility that maybe Symes had not died after all, but would be standing there, at the bar, angry and ready for revenge, she gingerly made her way to where she had last seen him. He was still there, on the floor. Still dead.

She stood for a moment and looked at what remained of Symes. He looked emptied out in death, hardly any substance to him at all. All she felt was a deep sense of release, and peace. It was over. She picked up the folder, and left.

She had felt all through the day, before she had gone to Symes' pub, that she had listened to that inner voice, and had been "in the flow", in a containment of spirit. She had, she realized, assumed that such a containment would be all to the good, that it would all work out, that Symes would cooperate, that they would part friends. Her expectations had not been met. She once again wondered about the ways of the spirit. Had Symes had options, chances, chances and options that he had rejected right up to his end? She had gone along with that inner voice, and it had been her presence, her conversation with Symes, that had triggered his heart attack. Did that make her a murderess? Could she be accused of causing his death? She had not called for an ambulance, she had stood aside.

She felt a momentary panic, and talked herself down. No one knew that she had been to his pub. No one. And, in any event, she did not kill him. Yes, she had been there. Yes, in a way, her being there could have triggered that fatal stroke. But no, she did not kill him. What killed him was his own reactions, his attitude toward her, his violence toward her, his lifestyle, his drinking.

She arrived at the airport in good time and made her way to a book shop. She selected and bought a Tillich book: "The Courage to Be". She was surprised to find it an airport book shop. It was a book she was very familiar with, and one she enjoyed. She felt it would likely be helpful to her in her then circumstances. She needed something to stimulate her grey cells, and restore her to some sense of understanding.

A woman sitting next to her in the departure lounge was nervous about the flight and started up a conversation with her. It seemed she had once been on a charter flight which had

to turn back because of problems with the aircraft. The problem had been attended to while the passengers were kept on the aircraft, waiting, without air conditioning, for over 4 hours. They had eventually taken off, but the flight had been extremely tense, and everyone on board had been relieved on safely landing at their destination. The woman just wanted to talk about that, and reassure herself, and be reassured, that flying was supposedly safer than crossing the road. She was a pleasant woman, and didn't dwell on her near tragedy. The conversation soon turned to other things. Her son was in an internationally renowned orchestra, and was doing extremely well. She was flying over the ocean to listen to him play as first violin in a concert with Pavarotti. Jess said how she felt that Pavarotti was the greatest tenor she had ever heard, how she loved the way his voice soared free and clear, like a spirit released in its full strength and beauty.

As Jess rose to move closer to the boarding point, the woman noticed a dusty patch on the back of Jess's jacket, and brushed it away for her.

Forty-Four

The village, barely visible in its valley on the brightest day, was this morning completely submerged in an early morning mist. The higher parts of the surrounding hills, standing clear of the mist's embrace, were bathed in light from the early morning sun, and looked like ancient monoliths, or remote mysterious islands, waiting for an explorer. The year was on its slide down the slippery slope into fall, and the mist was grey, and cold, with that peculiarly English quality of dampness that penetrated to the very marrow of one's bones.

Mrs. Westerhill shuddered as she stepped out of her cottage front door. She turned up her collar and pulled it tighter around her neck and face. With head down, she scurried along

the short distance from her cottage to the pub, to go quickly in through its back door. She was the cleaner. It was Sunday, 9 a.m., and though she didn't have to be at work on Sundays until later than during the week, Saturday nights in that pub left a lot of work to get done before it opened again at noon. She hung her coat on the nail on the back of the door, and donned her overalls. First job was to collect all the dirty glasses left lying around by the bar staff, and put them to soak in the sink.

Mrs. Westerhill was an elderly woman, a widow, living on a widow's pension, which was meagre at best, and inadequate most of the time. Though she was coming up to her 70th birthday, she still had to work to make ends meet, and it seemed to her that the longer she worked, the worse her finances became. The price of food had almost doubled over the last ten years, and her pension certainly had not. And the rent on her cottage, though she got some help from the Council, was going up relentlessly each year, and taking more and more of her income. How she wished she had bought the place when she had the chance. But in those days, buying property was not something people like her did. She had been born in that cottage. Her parents had worked on the local squire's estate, and had rented the cottage for next to nothing. The estate was managed by agents now, and they didn't care about the likes of her. They wanted the likes of her gone so the property could be renovated and either sold for a handsome profit, or rented for three times what she paid. It was the way the whole valley was going these days.

She didn't fancy going to live with her sister in that flat she lived in on that awful council estate in the city. Dreadful place. No trees in sight, and what grass there was came in thin strips down the side of the pavement, and was more bare brown patches than grass, and covered in litter and dog shit. Dreadful, soul destroying place, in Mrs. Westerhill's view. She was determined to stay in her cottage

until she dropped dead, even if it did mean she had to keep working way past the time her bones were telling her it was time to stop.

She headed for the lounge bar, opened the door, and went in.

He was face down on the rug.

Mrs. Westerhill had no respect for her employer. In her view he was an arrogant, conceited, jumped up piece of nothing that should have stayed where he belonged, in his working class neighbourhood in that dreadful dreary mining town he came from, and with a job down the pit. In Mrs. Westerhill's opinion, he had brought nothing to her dearly beloved village except insults, arrogance, sarcasm pretending to be humour, and an attitude which had drawn around him a general tone and quality of folk the likes of which her local pub had never seen before, and her village could well do without. What locals there were left in the area never drank in his pub.

She assumed he had been utterly drunk again the night before, and had slept where he had fallen. Annoyed, she walked out and went into the public bar, and started cleaning up there. She didn't like to have to change her routine, she was in a hurry, she had the clean-up down to a fine art, she wanted to get her work done and get back home. She was to visit her sister that afternoon, and needed to get the bus at 12.30. She hoped the noise she made would rouse him, and he would remove himself. She made no effort to be quiet.

Just outside her dreary council flat, her sister had been pushed over in a scuffle with some rowdy teenagers and had broken her hip in the fall. Mrs. Westerhill had told her sister to not bother about that gang of youths that hung around outside the corner shop, next door but one to where her sister lived, but her sister wouldn't listen. Her sister had never married and was more used to standing up for herself. She had worked hard all her life, but having been denied the

education, training and encouragement that young women got these days, she had been limited to the usual women's work type jobs that had long hours and low pay. Nevertheless, she had survived and provided for herself, and had a bit put by for her old age. She had never been able to afford to buy a property though, and had ended up having to rent a council flat for the elderly when she stopped working. She just wanted to live in peace and quiet, and that gang of youths were hanging around her place every night it seemed, making their row and frightening all the residents.

They had started throwing stones at her windows, and Mrs. Westerhill's sister had gone out to tell them to stop doing that. They had just surrounded her, jeering, and pushed her down onto the concrete. She had osteoporosis, and her hip broke in the fall.

One of her neighbours, who had been watching from behind his curtains, too afraid of the youths to come to her sister's aid, had called the police, and the ambulance. The ambulance came, but not the police. As far as she knew, the police had never come. Her sister was in hospital now, and only God knew what was going to happen to her when she came out, how she was going to manage.

The pub was a mess as usual. The air stank of stale cigarette smoke. Mrs. Westerhill propped open the door, and opened the windows. The morning misty air was cold and damp, but breathable. She clattered about, moving in and out of the back kitchen, carrying glasses and dirty plates in, and buckets of hot water out, as she gradually transformed the place back to its usual looks of civility and comfort.

The son was up and about his business of cleaning the beer pipes, and sorting out the cellar. He'd get round to restocking the shelves in the bars later. A nice lad, she thought. Pity about his mother. He would have turned out a lot better, she was sure, if his mother had only been around. He

was a tall, good looking lad, and a hard worker. Mrs. Westerhill admired the way he handled his father. She could tell he heard every harsh, cynical, sneering word his father spat in his direction, but he never responded or retaliated. He generally stood in silence, with an expressionless face, looking directly and calmly at his father's moving mouth, waiting for it to stop. When it did, he would turn away and carry on quietly with his work. He never said much. His sister didn't live at the pub. She was married, had a good job in London and only visited occasionally.

It took Mrs. Westerhill a good half hour to get the public bar back into shape. She then went back into the lounge bar. She wanted to get home for 11 to get changed into something decent, and have a cup of tea and a sandwich before she caught the 12.30 bus. Symes was still lying there.

He looked a lot less frightening lying face down on the floor. She had seen him in towering rages, and he had a wicked tongue in his head. He could ravage a person with that tongue of his. He had a profound and unconcealed disdain for convention and social niceties or, as Mrs. Westerhill called them, just plain decent well-brought up good manners. He still smoldered with resentments, apparently from an aggrieved sense of betrayal of his potential. He viewed his upbringing as deficient, and his parents as less than adequate. His father had been a miner. His mother didn't work outside the home. Few women did in those days. But she had been an intelligent woman, and took out her frustrations at her own lack of opportunities for life on her husband and her son. She was vicious with her son in what she called discipline. That son's favourite sport now seemed to be to draw unsuspecting visitors sympathetically into conversation until he had enough information to understand their background and value system, and then he would endeavour to entertain his other more regular bar guests by deriding, ridiculing and mocking them. There were enough bored people in the area who were entertained by his shocking

ways, and enough among them who foolishly looked up to him because of his clever tongue, to keep a healthy bar business going.

But now he was a lonely laid out drunk. Blood will out, she thought, he was nothing but a miner's son when all was said and done.

He had been smoking. A cigarette by his right hand had burned a hole in the rug. He was wearing his old cordoroy pants. And the cravat. He wouldn't wear a tie. The cravat was his thing, his mark of defiance, his claim to dapper sophistication, and so pathetic in its working class pretension, so revealing of his desire to be a part of the very thing he railed against.

This bar too stank of stale cigarette smoke. Mrs. Westerhill drew back the drapes, and opened the windows. The clearing morning light flooded into the bar, laying bare the worn fabrics and scratched dark woods, exposing the illusions of comfort generated by the fire and low lights of the night. It felt cold and cheerless, empty of the bright, expectant, questioning faces come to be entertained at his bar, the clink of glasses, the quite murmur of conversation interrupted by bursts of his derisive laughter.

She called to him now, moving over to him, and bending to shake his shoulder.

"Symes, come on now, come on. Shall I get you some coffee? Symes."

It was when she touched his shoulder that she realized there was something seriously wrong. And now she could see his face, which had been turned away from her as she had moved about the room. He was grey. His eyes stared wide open. Mrs. Westerhill fancied she could see an expression of shock and fear in them. He was definitely dead.

Her heart raced as she stumbled back from him. She started to

shout. "Oh my God, oh my God, somebody, somebody, come quick, come quick, he's dead, he's dead, he's dead. Oh, somebody come!"

Forty-Five

Jess had endured what seemed an interminable wait before her row was called for boarding.

It had been many years since she had made the decision that she would never do the flight to England again unless she could afford a first class seat.

She had said her goodbye to the violin player's mother, and made her way to the desk, through the last passport checks, down the tunnel, into the aircraft, and to the window seat she had booked. The adjoining seat was empty. She began to entertain hopes of a flight in which she would be left in solitude, enjoying the space, without the necessity for polite exchanges with whoever would occupy the neighbouring seat.

The time for departure drew nearer, the anxiety she had been feeling for hours began to seep out of her body, and she was beginning to relax and look through the morning papers when she turned to see the steward stowing some hand luggage in the compartment above her for a late arrival. Standing behind the steward was Jackson, who was about to take up the seat beside her.

Forty-Six

Several days later, old Mrs. Dillthorpe noticed what she said was something strange up at the old village. She heard birds singing in the old church yard. She hadn't heard birds singing in the church yard before. That hadn't surprised her. There had always been a foreboding menace about the old church for

as long as she had lived in the village. People talked of dark deeds and restless spirits, and she generally avoided the place. But now, because the birds were singing, she opened the old gate and went into the yard, and then into the old church.

If you promised not to laugh at her and say she was daft, she would tell you that she had been sure that the sun was shining as she went into the yard and into the church, and that she felt there was a welcoming loving spirit in the place now, and she had not felt remotely afraid. Indeed, it was now one of her more treasured spots. She often sat on the bench just outside the church door, the bench donated by the Cudworth family, and looked at the view and listened to the birds, and she said she felt a deep sense of peace now when she was there.

The End

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