

# WHO'S THE DADDY

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Father and Daughter Stories



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## *Atlas Holds the World Aloft*

Mark Czanik

They were in the deep end at the swimming pool, taking it in turns to dive for a ten-pence piece, when Leonard first noticed his daughter looking at another man. He was fourteen or fifteen, and sitting at the edge of the pool with his legs dangling over the side. From what he could make out, he had a thin doleful face, long muscular arms, and an Adonis stomach. Not that boys that age ever had to do anything in particular to achieve such a physique, Leonard consoled himself. He appeared to be alone, which struck him as unusual at the time, especially at the deep end of the pool where teenage boys tended to congregate in predatory packs. Of course, there had been other objects of desire before, but these had been mainly blue-eyed film-stars, and other artfully contrived symbols of the unattainable and Leonard had never taken these crushes seriously. He often pandered to them, in fact, going out of his way to seek out films featuring these improbable creatures and bring them to her. They weren't exactly real, after all.

Once or twice of late, he had also found himself listening in on the odd telephone call. One in particular, in which he overheard his daughter's best friend waxing lyrical to Immie about fit boys at their school, and discussing the pros and cons of various lip types – thin, thick, or medium-thick – had put him in a bad temper for days, even if he had detected no special interest on Immie's part.

This boy, however, or rather this look his daughter was giving him, was different. It was just the slightest unguarded look, but its meaning was unmistakable. For a moment, so lost was she in her admiration for this well-toned body that she simply forgot the game they were playing and stared. The next thing he knew the boy had stood up and dived, slicing into the blue water with barely a ripple.

Once he had gone, Leonard and his daughter tried to continue with their game. However, the coin was nowhere to be found. Though they each took turns with the goggles to go down in search of it, both repeatedly came up empty-handed. He took the opportunity to do a few more quick lengths. This was actually the reason he came to the pool nowadays, and why for the past six months or so he had preferred to come alone. Often on a Sunday morning he was up and out of the house early, and liked to think of himself busily increasing his tally, following the black line while wife and daughter were still sound asleep in bed. He enjoyed goading his body on, each week doing a little more than the week before. Sometimes, if he found the right rhythm, he could do sixty or seventy lengths with barely a pause. Last week he had managed eighty-three, a new personal best. Not bad for a forty-two year old, even if the ground on his way back to the changing room afterwards had had all the consistency of a waterbed.

Leonard slipped under the rope into the swimming lane and set off doing a calm and steady breaststroke. He wouldn't be beating any records today with Immie around, but it was important to keep up the habit. He was lucky so far too; normally if he didn't arrive early he could soon

find himself treading water behind a pod of pink, overfed whales, but both lanes were completely clear this morning. Immie gamely followed him for a couple of lengths, then managed a third on her back, but gave up when he began a fourth, and slipped under the rope to the main pool.

She was still wearing his goggles. Typically, she'd forgotten (or more likely, lost) her own, and he was forced to share. He wished she'd take more care of things. His swimming went all to pot without goggles. The chlorine got in his eyes, and he ended up doing a slow and over-careful breaststroke with his head poking prissily above water, blue waves lapping dangerously at his neck. Apparently, you could get prescription goggles now. He ought to get himself a pair. Not that he could afford them, but at least it might teach Immie to start taking more care of her own. Leonard was short-sighted, which meant he couldn't see much without his glasses; only when people were close up could he make them out with any kind of clarity. However, in the pool, at least, this state of half blindness was not without its compensations. He didn't have to bear too close a witness to his body's disintegration for a start: his mudslide of a belly, his budding breasts. What cruel irony that just as his daughter was developing breasts, he had begun sprouting his own.

Then there were the incidental pleasures. The women he passed in these narrow swimming lanes were not all the size of pink overfed whales. Far from it. Though their features remained indistinct, some were young, voluptuous, lithe and lovely sea creatures that sent little involuntary frissons of pleasure through his body whenever they passed in their skin-tight costumes. Sometimes he would touch them mid-

stroke with his outstretched arm. It might be a wrist, or a fingertip, or the slippery hook of an ankle, or the outside of a thigh, maybe. He couldn't always say whose fault it was. Perhaps it was only female spatial awareness that sent these girls veering too close to him, or his own carelessness was to blame. Either way these moments went on happening, and Leonard did little to prevent them.

After his seventh length, Immie tried to stop him by reaching under the rope and grabbing his wrist, but he shook her off, determined to continue. 'Sorry, do I know you?' he blurted out. He knew she'd wouldn't mind. Not really. Even so, when he returned and found her still waiting in the same spot, he stopped just long enough to lean over the rope and give her a quick peck on the cheek. She shrank back, blushing, and then he was on his way again. As he did so he noticed one of the lifeguards – a girl, he thought, – seemed to be giving him a bit of a look. He knew that look; he remembered it from the days he used to take Immie into the family changing rooms at the pool when she was little. You couldn't go near a child these days without falling under suspicion, especially if you were a man. Teachers weren't allowed to sit toddlers on their knees, parents were forbidden to take cameras to their own children's nativity plays. It was a kind of mass hysteria.

Yet Leonard and Immie had always been close. They could practically read each other's thoughts sometimes, although this was no surprise, really, given the amount of time they had spent together over the years. When his wife had gone back to work six months after Immie was born, he had been the one to stay at home. He couldn't pretend it hadn't been difficult at times; there had been many

moments of not-so-quiet desperation. But his reward was a bond of trust and intimacy with his daughter of which most fathers could only dream. When she was younger, when people used to ask Immie what kind of man she would like to marry when she grew up, she would often say someone like her Daddy. (He couldn't help noticing that some of the film stars she'd been attracted to over the years had borne something of a resemblance to himself – if you forgot the blue eyes, that is.) Only last week they had been walking through the streets of his hometown. He'd had his arm around her, as he often did when they were out walking, and, perhaps aware she was on unfamiliar territory, was absently stroking the little furrow between her shoulder blades. 'You two look like an item,' his sister had said. Naturally, they could be embarrassed by remarks such as this, especially now his daughter was thirteen and approaching womanhood, as if some aspect of their relationship had been declared unclean; but still there was a kind of truth in it. In many ways he was closer to his daughter than he was to his own wife. They'd spent more time together. If people insisted on jumping to conclusions, well, let them, it wasn't his problem.

He was just starting on his twelfth length, on the trail of a particularly languorous and hypnotic siren in a blue one-piece up ahead, when he caught sight of Adonis Boy coming up fast on his right. Leonard put on a burst of speed, doubling up his stroke. Like most boys, the kid was doing front crawl, producing more testosterone-fuelled spray in his wake than a school of mackerel. Front crawl was a faster stroke than breaststroke, of course, but Leonard could hardly change his stroke now; not without drawing

undue attention to himself. He managed to fend him off for about two thirds of the way, but the boy beat him by a good two or three metres. Just to rub it in, he then performed a fancy little Olympic flip and passed him on his way back, giving Leonard's elbow a nasty bash as he did so. Leonard could have sworn he saw the boy smirk.

He didn't go after him. Let him find someone else to play his *Marathon Man* games. Leonard doubted he could manage eighty-three consecutive lengths without stopping anyway. Sure enough, after a couple more lengths the boy dipped under the rope and disappeared into the blur.

Leonard stopped for a while. He had a bad feeling about that boy. As a father, you developed an instinct for these things. Vaguely, he looked around for Immie, screwing up his eyes in an effort to focus. Already the main pool was crowded, and the noise levels had risen to playground pitch. What he was looking for was a pink bikini, speckled with white polka dots, a girl with chestnut plaits. He gave up. It was like trying to recognise a face through frosted glass. Still, no need to panic. She'd probably bumped into a few of her friends and was gossiping in the jacuzzi, like the last time. He knew what the main topic of conversation would be: boys. Hopefully, it was all still in their heads, and not really happening. He knew a lot more about girls now, that was for sure; more than he wanted to he sometimes felt.

He decided to do a few more lengths. If she wanted him, she knew where to find him. Both lanes were filling up now, and the going was slow. Luckily for Leonard, though, three very well proportioned females in an array of eye-catching candy-coloured costumes were soon in blissful pursuit of him, and he found himself the solitary alpha-male. He had

just made contact with the second of these temptresses – a girl with long powerful legs and a sensuously assured breaststroke – when he caught sight of his daughter standing by the ropes in the shallow end. She was obviously in some distress. His first thought was something along the lines of Adonis Boy having hurt or taken advantage of her in some way, and already in his head Leonard was heroically grabbing him by the shoulders and hurling him about the pool while everyone, including the lifeguards, looked on approvingly. As she grew closer, though, he realised she wasn't wearing the goggles anymore.

'They just came off,' she said on the edge of tears.

'What do you mean, "they just came off!"'

He cursed under his breath, and waded off in the direction from which she'd come. He searched the shallow end, the deep end. He opened his eyes and searched underwater. When he couldn't find them, he came back to Immie and made her show him precisely where she'd lost them, yet there was still no sign. The two of them went over to the lifeguard's tower, where Leonard began asking him if he could see a pair of goggles from up there – a difficult enough proposition in the first place, when you can barely see or hear the person you're talking to. However, before he could answer, someone was tapping him on the shoulder. He span around to find Adonis Boy standing there, holding out a pair of blue goggles.

'Are you looking for these?' he asked, in a surprisingly adult voice. Close up, he had startlingly clear blue eyes. Superman blue, Immie would have said.

Leonard said he was, and the boy handed them over.

'Thanks,' he said.

The boy nodded sullenly and swam off. But not, Leonard was convinced, without a quick Clintonesque glance in the vicinity of Immie's bikini top.

He turned to his daughter. 'I'm keeping these from now on! You can't be trusted!'

In his swimming lane again, he pulled on the goggles and surged forward, ignoring the breaststroking girls as they went by. Was it his paranoid imagination or had something passed between Immie and that boy? Some unspoken sign or exchange of pheromones? Despite himself, he found himself wondering if Adonis Boy had thin, middle, or medium-thick lips, and trying to recall which his daughter had said she preferred.

By the time he reached the other end of the pool, the goggles were steaming up, his eyes were stinging from the chlorine, he'd lost count of how many lengths he'd done, and he was wretched with remorse. He remembered a favourite game he and his daughter used to play here. He would pretend to be the Iron Man, and carry her out to the deep end. Deeper and deeper they'd go, and the deeper they went the higher he'd have to hold her to keep her above water. 'Come with me, Hogarth,' he'd say, 'come with me, and I will take you out to sea.' He'd damaged his back in his early-thirties, and ever since had been unable to carry her far without paying for it the next day. But the water helped him take her weight, made him feel as if he could carry her for miles. Deeper and deeper they'd go until he was entirely submerged, holding her clear of the water with his raised arms, like Atlas holding the world aloft.

Only Immie didn't like to play that game anymore. Now she was a big girl, she didn't like him carrying her

underwater while she remained safe and sound above.

He went in search of her again. He had to apologise. What did it matter if she looked at boys? What did it matter if she talked to them? She was allowed to talk to boys, wasn't she? What kind of tyrannical father was he? Did he want to end up like one of those ridiculous Shakespearian dads, doddering old, overprotective tragic fools who forbade their daughters to marry their heart's true desire, threatened to banish them to nunneries if they disobeyed?

This time he had no trouble finding her. Her pink bikini. Chestnut plaits. She was clinging to the ladder at the deep end with her back to him, watching the boys dive. They were putting on quite a show, whooping and hollering as they bombed and torpedoed the water. Adonis Boy was there, of course, a picture of comparative tranquillity sitting on the edge of the pool, reminding Leonard for a second of the boy in one of Seurat's paintings, though he couldn't remember the name. He swallowed the lump in his throat. She was with someone now. A girl. He didn't recognise the girl, but then he didn't recognise a lot of Immie's friends these days. Very quietly, by incremental, almost daily changes, he felt he was being nudged to the edges of her life.

What made him do what he did next was a puzzle for Leonard in the days to come: some urge to ingratiate himself, perhaps, to be included in their game; a mischievous desire to please her; or simply a fatherly need to make his presence felt. But before he knew what he was doing he had dived deep, swum underneath them, kicked up from the bottom, and come up between the two girls like a giant jack-in-a-box.

He pushed the goggles onto his forehead.

'Hello!' he said chirpily, slipping an arm around his daughter's waist, and giving her a wicked watermelon grin.

But oh, hideous apparition, his daughter she was not. Some stranger it was he had never set eyes on before. A girl of no more than eleven or twelve with an oddly misshaped mouth. More freckles than a pear. True, she was wearing a pink bikini and her hair was in plaits, but really that was where the resemblance ended. The girl pulled away from him with such a look of horror on her face that Leonard couldn't help feeling just a little bit hurt.

A lifeguard was standing over him, looking down ominously.

'Oh, I do apologise,' Leonard said to the girls, and ducked under the water again.

She found him clinging to the side. She hung onto him and propped her chin on his shoulder.

'I'm bored,' she said.

'Never mind.'

'All you do is lengths.'

'Do you want to play diving again?'

'We've got nothing to dive for, remember.'

For a second, he considered slipping off his wedding ring and using that, but quickly dismissed the idea.

'Shall we get out now?' she asked.

'In a minute.'

She began playing with his hair. When she was little she'd spent hours grooming him at home, tying his hair up with tortuous clips and bands, exposing his receding hairline while he sat on the sofa. He'd always enjoyed it, so long as he was careful not to look in the mirror afterwards.

'Do you know what the secret of eternal youth is?' he asked her, as she rooted around up there.

'No, what?'

'Immaturity and self-delusion.'

'And a good hair dye,' she said, plucking a grey hair and holding it in front of his eyes.

He laughed and pushed her away.

'Can we get a film on our way home?'

Leonard said they could. Meanwhile, they floated there in the water a little longer, not saying anything, resting their arms against the side and kicking their legs leisurely, as if riding an invisible paddleboat together, and waiting for their number to be called. Then they climbed out of the pool, and disappeared into separate changing rooms.

*The Diary*  
Celeste Robichaud

The dusty, aged, leather book just sat there and begged to be read. Avril had never been much into dusty, old books but rather enjoyed stories of modern romance. She had never had any romance for herself since she was only fourteen. Her dad was strict and insisted that she didn't date until she was sixteen. While all her friends were off on dates with boys Avril spent Saturday nights alone reading teen romance novels. Her mom nagged her almost every weekend to get out and enjoy life but Avril didn't see the sense. All her friends were out with boys and what else was there to do on a Saturday without your friends or without boys.

That Saturday the book in her father's study seemed to beckon her and seemed to call out to her. The cover was a faded, reddish brown and smelled of dusty, aged leather and old, broken bindings. Her father would have been angry if he found her in his study but all she wanted was a stamp to mail a letter back home to the east coast. When her family moved west to take advantage of the boom she had left her best friend Sally behind. She hadn't yet found the stamps when she was distracted by the old book that sat straightly on the desk set in the middle of her father's desk. His desk was always impeccable and she wondered if he ever actually did any work in there. It always looked as though nothing

had ever moved. Everything sat in perpendicular lines as if to promote the utmost orderliness. Her father certainly seemed to spend enough time in there yet everything sat there glued in place. Avril often wondered if he just escaped to his study to get away from the family quarrels; an excuse to escape from a family that he no longer knew.

Avril looked up towards the door and then looked around as if to see if she was about to be discovered. When she was certain that she was alone she flipped open the front cover of the book with her index finger. In the middle of the page there was a two-line exclamation of property, 'The Diary of Emma Stevens'. Emma Stevens was her grandmother who had passed on the year before. Avril had suspected that their move west had something to do with her death but she had never really been sure. Avril thought that perhaps her father couldn't bare to drive past her empty home every day after she had passed on. In the years that lead up to her death the two of them had been on bad terms, but Avril's father had never told her why. It was one of those family secrets that a person just knew not to ask about, like an unwritten rule.

Avril looked up again to see if she had been busted in her father's study. It wasn't as if she was there to snoop but it wasn't as if she had been invited either. She sat down in her father's brown leather, oversized chair and sank into it. After squirming slightly to get comfortable she flipped to the second page of the diary which was dated December 21, 1948:

*I don't know how I'll bare being separated from John over Christmas break. His family insisted*

*on having him home for the holidays in California. I of all people understand family obligations but that doesn't ease the pain of our unwelcomed departure. I'll sit at Christmas dinner and laugh as if to express happiness towards my own obligations which are more like a prison to me than a freedom that I'll enjoy later. It's for my own good, my parents tell me. I'll be off to college in the fall not to learn or to expand my mind but to find a doctor or lawyer for a husband. It seems dishonest to me, a manipulation, to go off to college to find a husband under the pretense of expanding my own vastness of knowledge. I'll be enrolled in some female pursuit such as English Literature or Art History. It would be useful later to impress my husband's doctor and lawyer and financier friends at boring cocktail parties and awards ceremonies where they can all stand around and pat themselves on the backs for their own accomplishments.*

Avril made it to the bottom of the first page and realised that perhaps her grandmother had been more like her than she thought. She too was imprisoned by her own obligations and the mold that her parents had made for her and had forced her into. She wanted to read more but feared being caught by her father who would be stern in his punishment if he found her there as she snooped. For several long seconds she thought about how she could read the diary further without being discovered. Then she

remembered that her father would be away on business the following week. Perhaps then she would sneak in and read the diary in secret. She hoped that he would leave the diary behind. Quickly, she closed the diary and opened the middle drawer of her father's desk where he kept his stamps. She took one stamp and affixed it to her envelope.

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Over that weekend, anticipation filled her. She couldn't believe it. Dad had her grandmother's diary. She couldn't help but wonder what fantastic secrets that it contained. Every young girl had secrets that she spilled only to her diary or perhaps to her best friend. Avril wondered what her grandmother's secrets had been. She never thought of her grandmother as one that would or could feel the same way that she did. It seemed impossible. As a young woman herself, Avril couldn't picture her grandmother – who she had only known in her fifties – as an adolescent.

When Monday arrived, Avril counted the minutes until the school bell rang and she could rush home to her father's study. She had really started to look resentfully towards her father's study since that had always been the place that took him away from her and her mother. Avril raced home once the bell rang, running the entire way. She wasn't athletic and wasn't in shape but there were times when it was necessary to run. Panting and out of breathe she ran up the front stairs to her house and unlocked the door and almost threw herself through it as she yelled, 'Mom, are you home?'

'Yes, I'm in the kitchen,' she answered back but without enthusiasm.

Her mom rarely displayed much enthusiasm towards anything. Avril suspected that it was because her mom was as lonely as she had been, although it seemed that her mom had been lonely for a lot longer than her. Avril dropped her school bag in the entry way and flung off her shoes. Anxiously, she poked her head into the kitchen, 'How long do I have before dinner?'

'About an hour, why?' her mom asked.

'I have some homework to get done before dinner.'

'What? You never do your homework before dinner.'

'Maybe I'm turning over a new leaf.'

Her mom raised an eyebrow suspiciously and shrugged as Avril ran out of the kitchen and upstairs to her father's study. She hoped that the diary was still there. The door to the study was closed as it always was, whether her father was in there or not. Slowly and quietly she turned the knob and let herself in, and closed the door as slowly and quietly as she had opened it. She looked over and found that the diary was still there. Suddenly, she wondered why her father had left such a secretive item out in plain view to begin with.

Avril smiled widely and ran to the desk, sitting once again in the oversized, leather chair. She skimmed through the first couple of pages to see if anything immediately jumped out at her. A couple of weeks into the journal she got to an entry dated January 12, 1949.

*I'm not sure what to do. I suspect that I might be pregnant and I know that John will be going away to college in the fall on a transfer. He's decided to go to a different college than I. He's*

*been so distant since Christmas break and now I suspect that I may be pregnant. I'm afraid to tell him as I know he won't be pleased. Less pleased will be my father. I worry that he may kill John. I doubt that he will want me to marry John since he's not the ambitious man that father wants for me. I'm not sure that I want to marry John either. I love him dearly but I'm not sure that I love him enough to marry him. I'm terrified and unsure of what to do. I can't even go to Dr. Harris to be sure because he knows my father and I'm certain that he would tell him.*

Avril was enthralled and engulfed. Perhaps too enthralled. The door to the study creaked open, 'Avril!!' her mother demanded, 'what are you doing in here?'

'I was just looking for a red pen, Mom. I need it to do my homework,' Avril lied.

'How can you do your homework without this?' she asked with an eyebrow cocked and held up Avri's school bag which had been hidden behind her back when she entered the study.

'I know. I forgot it by the door. I was going to come downstairs to get it as soon as I got a red pen.'

Avril's mom walked towards the desk with heavy, angry click clacks of her heeled shoes. 'What on earth are you snooping through?'

'Nothing,' Avril offered blankly, unwilling or unable to admit that she had been snooping through her grandmother's diary.

Her mom snatched the book out of her hand and sat the book bag down on the floor. She thumbed through the book herself as if seeing the book for the first time with an intent look of interest on her face. After she skimmed over several pages she closed the book and looked up at Avril disapprovingly. She looked as if to be searching for some answers herself. 'Look, I'm not going to tell your father that you were in here snooping around because we both know that he'd be angry. We'll let this go for the time being but if I catch you in here again, I'll have to tell him something. Do we have an understanding?'

'Yes, I'm sorry. I honestly didn't mean any harm,' Avril offered sheepishly, in the knowledge that she had been in the wrong.

'Go on then to your room and do your homework before dinner.'

Avril slid out from behind the large oak desk with the perpendicular items perched on top of it and walked past her mother as she left a hurried breeze behind. She picked up her book bag on the way out of the study and sulked to her room where she dropped herself onto her bed. Avril felt that she had long since outgrown the princess style of her room but hadn't as of then convinced her parents to change it. She flung her legs up onto the bed and rested her hands behind her head and fell into thought. She wished that she had been able to read more of the diary to know for sure. From what she read, it seemed as though her father may have been illegitimate. As least, that was what they called it then. Ever since she could remember, it was no big deal to have children out of marriage. She wondered further if Grandpa hadn't really been her father's biological father.

Then she wondered if her father knew. Maybe that was why they hadn't spoken.

Avril stood up quickly and started to pace, her thoughts quickened. Then she sat again, hastily on the bed. 'What a conundrum!' she thought. Perhaps it was best that she hadn't read it. She realized then that it hadn't been any of her business to take the liberty of reading her grandmother's diary. She sulked further in her own guilt. Suddenly, she felt guilty and rotten and wondered if she should confess her crime to her father even though her mother had vowed to keep it a secret. She hadn't meant any harm. Her intent was only to possibly recapture a piece of her grandmother. It was then that she realized how much she really missed her. It had been a long while since she had really missed her grandmother. Avril thought that she had gotten over her death. Her eyes fogged and misted and a tear rolled down her cheek. She sat in the middle of her bed and hugged her knees to her chest. Her face fell into her knees and she cried for several minutes. She missed her grandma who had left too soon for Avril's liking and she missed her father even though he was still alive. Not only did she miss him, she was angry at him for not always being there when she needed him or even just to be with.

She looked out the window with tear-streamed cheeks. The pink, laced curtains let in a warm spring sunshine that allowed the heat of the sunshine to fall upon her face to dry her tears. For several minutes she sat and stared out the window, lost in her own thoughts. The clouds flowed by lazily and she was captured by their imagination. Her thoughts seemed to flow just as the clouds did although hers weren't quite as lazy. They were more intentional but they flowed just the same.

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As the week past her thoughts remained on her grandmother's diary and the few contents that she had read. She wanted to know more but was afraid to ask. It was Friday morning when her father returned home and the days in-between were agony for Avril. She had never been one for talk or to ask for anything as if she were afraid or unworthy to ask for anything. Deperately, she wanted to know more, needed to know more about her grandmother. Oddly, she hadn't started to realize it until she began to read the intimate secrets contained within the walls of her diary. Avril wondered if her grandmother had ever even intended to have anyone read her diary or if the secrets were meant to die with her.

On that Friday afternoon she entered the front door quietly as if attempting to sneak in unnoticed although she wasn't sure why. Her mother was in her usual home for that time of day, which was in the kitchen preparing dinner. Avril crept into the kitchen to scope out the waters. 'Hey Mom.'

'Hey Avril. How was your day?'

'Fine. Is Dad home?'

'Yes, he just got home from his flight.'

'Where is he?'

'In his study, as usual, where else?' she answered with a smile on her face as if to poke her dry sense of humour into the conversation.

Avril smiled back and turned to go up the stairs to the second story of the house. She walked slowly still unsure of the words that she would use to approach her father. As she

approached his study her heart began to pound, her palms began to sweat and her thoughts drug through her mind like a lazy fog. Once at the door to the study she stood and stared blankly in the hope that she would suddenly, out of the blue, find the right words. She had rehearsed the words all day in her head but hadn't found anything that sounded just right. Then she sucked up all her courage and knocked meekly.

'Yes, come in,' an uncharacteristically soft voice spoke from behind the door.

Avril opened the door slowly and stepped into the study, took two steps further and then stopped in the middle of the room; in no man's land. She felt suddenly vulnerable and her father looked up from the desk, looking more tired than he ever had. He looked suddenly older; older than he had when he had left on the Sunday afternoon on his business trip. The week looked as though it had aged him a decade. Her father sat silently at his desk but he looked up at her with gloomy eyes, exhausted and dark.

'Daddy, I wanted to talk to you about something.'

'Certainly, dear. Why don't we go sit on the couch?'

Avril nodded silently; slightly shocked. He had barely ever even invited her into his study much less to sit on the couch with him to talk. Normally, he was anxious to get her out so that he could work in the peace of aloneness. She followed him to the green, leather couch and they both sat down. Her father's joints almost creaked with age and fatigue and when they sat down the odour of leather wafted into her nostrils which made her breathe in deeply. Leather had always been a soothing smell to her. It reminded her of more carefree days when she would ride horses in the youth

equestrian club.

‘What did you want to talk about, my dear?’ her father asked as he put his hand on her knee and patted it tenderly.

‘Well, I have a confession to make.’

‘A confession?? Uh-oh,’ he said almost trying to alleviate the situation with light humour.

‘Daddy, this is serious,’ Avril admitted.

‘I’m sorry. Go on with your confession then.’

‘Well, I came into your study the other day to look for a stamp,’ Avril paused slightly in anticipation of the lecture about not going into his study but her anticipation was met with only silence.

She continued, ‘I saw an old, red, leather bound book on your desk and I was curious.’

‘So you read it?’ he asked.

‘Yes, I did but only a little bit. I know I shouldn’t have snooped and I’m sorry.’

‘Well, at least you had the courage to come to me and confess.’

Avril looked down at her hands which were folded in her lap. Her hands trembled some and she could feel the tears that wanted to escape from her eyes but she held them back. Her father sighed deeply, ‘I did actually want to talk to you about that. You see...’ he took a pause of his own; he himself searched for words.

Avril had never known him to search for words before that. He had always outwardly exuded confidence and never seemed at a loss for words. He took a deep breath in and continued, ‘You see, that was your grandmother’s diary. I found it among her things when she got sick. I regretted reading it myself at first but it really did turn out for the

best. You see, your grandfather wasn't my biological father although he loved me as much as any biological father could have. Maybe more. This past week I haven't been on a business trip. I actually went back home to search for the man that she talked about in that diary; the man that was my biological father. I had never known about him until after your grandmother got sick and I admit to having been curious about who he was and why your grandmother loved him so much.'

'Did you find him?'

'Well, sort of, see he passed away several years ago. I found out quite a few details about him from your grandmother before she died. I did find his son who was nice enough to meet with me while I was there. He showed me some pictures and some old letters that he had kept from your grandmother. I had dinner with him and his wife and their two kids. I'm sorry that I hadn't met him but that's how life is sometimes.'

'I'm sorry Dad.'

Her father wrapped his arm around her and they sat silently for a long time. Avril didn't know just how long they sat there but she didn't have the words to tell him how she felt so she just sat silently. She wondered if he felt the same way. Perhaps she would ask him someday but not just then. Avril was satisfied that he had shared at all.

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That night as she prepared for bed she wondered about her grandmother's life. In her life and her time they had so fewer freedoms as women yet seemed to have so much more

to offer as women and wives and mothers and daughters. She wondered what it would have been like to live then, to experience what she had. From that day forward she appreciated her grandmother more and not just the woman behind the smile; behind the wrinkles. Avril learned to appreciate the sacrifices that her grandmother made so that her generation could have more and could be more than the generation before. It was that day that Avril began to see the world through a different light and through the eyes of a young adult. Suddenly, she knew that adulthood loomed just at the reach of her fingertips. She was leaving childhood behind. She yawned more from emotional exhaustion than physical fatigue.

She pulled back the pink, laced comforter that matched her princess curtains and underneath was the faded, red leather diary. It smelled of the soothing leather but also smelled of dust. Underneath the diary was a newer version of the red, leather bound book. She opened the newer book and could hear and feel the binding creak and crack under its own newness. Inscribed on the inside cover was:

*Some family traditions are best carried on. Here is your own diary to fill with your own thoughts and feelings. May you grace the pages with more laughter and joy than tears and sadness. May you find more love than heartbreak and give more than you receive and be joyful in that promise of giving.*

*Love, Dad*

*Together*  
Tim Sanders

For reasons still to be explained, a motley collection of past undergraduates has been invited by Professor James Ellmore, the President of All Saints, to spend a weekend at the venerable Cambridge college on the pretext of attending a free-ranging discussion about global warming. More probably – as Max, an experienced reader of such stories knows only too well – they are about to be lured into a world of homicidal mayhem. It is the summer vacation and the college is empty of students. The President, his new and very beautiful wife Amanda, and Rogers, the decrepit porter who mans the college gate and vets every entrant, appear to be the only people around when the alumni arrive, although (Max reasons) there must be a few catering staff and other college functionaries lurking behind the scenes, for a slap-up dinner in the Hall on the first evening has been promised. Sir Tristram Pettigrew, a top civil servant in the Foreign Office, is the first to arrive, followed by Dirk Ambrose, who sounds to Max like some sort of international gun-runner. The handsome geologist, Brian Roberts, shares a taxi from the station with prim Miss Pettigrew, a spinster of indeterminate age, who informs Brian that she never actually graduated from the university, having been rusticated for a misdemeanour yet to be revealed. Last of all, thank God, comes Angela Hesketh, a physiotherapist attached to Addenbrookes Hospital: short-

skirted, be-nyloned and well-endowed. Good! A bit of totty! At least there should be some sex to go with the inevitable murders.

Max dropped the open book, cover-up, onto the proud mound of his bare stomach and surveyed the view between the pale twin towers of his hairy legs with a growing sense of contentment. Most of the sunbeds fringing the pool were already covered with the hotel's green towels and assorted sun bathers, each bed angled to catch the fierce rays of the early afternoon sun. The beds he'd grabbed for himself and Erica that morning, however, were in the shade of a stone pine, a short distance from the end of the pool and facing towards the back steps of the hotel, down which white-coated waiters trotted with trays of beer and brightly-coloured cocktails. To the left of the pool was a small, well-tended garden, packed with flowering oleander and hibiscus, and to the right the deep aquamarine stripe of the sea abutting a flawless pale blue sky.

This was the life! No paperwork. No bitching and moaning. No tiresome commute. He really needed a break this year. In fact, he deserved it. He owed it to himself. It'd been pretty bloody after all, what with the divorce going all nasty and the business taking up so much of his time. Still, the decree nisi had eventually arrived after Margaret had seen to it that she'd got all her demands, pauperizing him in the process, and now that he'd at last secured the Carrington contract, the business was set to make a lot of profit for at least the next two or three years. Should be a breeze from now on. Definitely the right time for a break! Bill had looked a bit surprised when he'd announced that he was going to the Gulf of Naples for a week – neither of

them had been on vacation since they'd set up the business four years ago. Janice had almost fallen off her typing chair. 'Really?' she'd said, sensing raw material for gossip, 'Going away on your own can be a bit lonely, Mr. Dunphy.'

'Oh, don't you worry about me, Janice,' he'd replied, mischievously, 'I'll be taking someone with me. I'm a free man now, remember.' No doubt the whole office would be buzzing with speculation. Well, let them. As long as the business didn't suffer. Someone had once told him that if you're managing things well, a business would run even better when you went away on vacation. At least for the first week or so – after that, rudderless, it would start to fall apart. Well, this time Bill would have to be the rudder for a change. The responsibility would do him good. Any problems, he knew how to get hold of him.

He reached his left arm out along the sun bed to retrieve his cellphone and nestled the comforting warm lozenge in his hand. Through his legs he could see the slim form of Erica in her orange bikini steadily working her way up and down the pool, executing a lazy but efficient crawl. He'd not realised that she was such a good swimmer. Wonder where she learnt that? She reached the end nearest him and stood up, laughing and waving, her long black hair flattened and matted by the water. How young she was! And how pretty she'd become!

A shadow fell over him. It was the tall, rather austere English woman he'd seen having breakfast on her own on the hotel terrace that morning.

'You look well settled in,' she announced in a plummy, Home Counties voice, 'How do you like Sorrento?'

Max hitched himself up onto an elbow. 'We only got here last night, but it seems OK. It has to be, given the cost of this place.'

'Only OK!' countered Miss Plumvoice, 'I think it's the nearest place to paradise on earth. What does your friend think – she seems to be enjoying herself?'

'Erica. She's going to love it. After all, this is the first time she's been on holiday with just her father, and I'm as soft as grease so far as she's concerned.'

'Oh, I see. She's your daughter.'

What the fuck did she mean by that? No, you stupid cow, she's my pet nymphet. Lo-li-ta. 'Yes. I whisked her out of school in the last week of term so that we could have a holiday together. Margaret, my ex, was highly supportive. Lots of stuff about "quality time" and "father/daughter bonding". To be honest I've been so busy, she's sort of grown up behind my back.'

'How old is she?'

Max thought for a moment. 'Er, thirteen, fourteen. Around that. No, her birthday's in September, so she must be nearly fourteen.'

'Gosh, she looks much more grown up than that. Well, I hope you two have a good time. I'm Heather Stephenson, by the way.'

'Max Dunphy. And that's Erica.'

'How lovely! We have the same name.'

What on earth is she talking about? This one's a complete crackpot. Best avoided. 'Well, I'm sure we'll keep running into each other around the hotel, Heather. There's not much else around here except old churches and scenery.'

She stared at him for a short while, before making a

small, wristy wave of her hand and wandering off.

Nosey bitch!

He signalled to a passing waiter for another beer and picked up his book again. He fancied himself as an astute reader of detective fiction, priding himself on his ability to detect the murderer before he or she was eventually exposed. But this time he also had to work out who the victim or victims might be. Page seventeen, and everyone was still alive! He liked books with the murder up front. And gruesome. Annihilated by a rampant combined harvester on page one – that sort of thing. Perhaps it would be Miss Pettigrew, done in while still harbouring her undergraduate secret. He hoped it wouldn't be Angela, she was far too tasty to be bumped off prematurely.

The beer arrived, fizzy and cold.

'Do you want an ice cream, darling?'

'No thanks, Dad. I'm fine.'

'Well, I think you should come out now. You've been in there long enough.'

He sipped his beer slowly, trying to get back into his book. He found himself surreptitiously watching two girls, obviously Italian, who were sitting on the edge of the pool, dangling their feet in the water and chatting to their boyfriends. He raised his book even further up so that he could watch them for longer without it becoming too obvious to them or, for that matter, to Erica, who had finished swimming and was showering herself on the terrace. Both girls were very tasty, but the tall one in the little yellow bikini was a stunner! Her nakedness was only compromised by a strip of silky fabric hammocking her breasts and a tiny little thong, tied in bows at each hip. She

had an even, coffee-coloured tan and long brown hair, which she tossed across her face every time she turned to laugh throatily at one or another of the boys. Wow, he could do with some of that!

Enough! She was far too young for him. And definitely unavailable.

Rogers discovers Professor Ellmore floating face down in the Cam, a priceless diamond ring stolen many years ago from the Fitzwilliam Museum clenched in his right hand. Damn! He hadn't seen that coming. The splashing of the swimmers in the pool and the tinkle of cutlery and glass on the terrace blended softly together in the thick, hot air. Even the Italian voices, interrupted by peals of laughter, were soothing.

He couldn't lie around any longer. With an air of resolution that surprises himself, he springs up from the sun bed and saunters down to the pool. He executes a splashless swallow dive into the deep end and swims the length of the pool underwater, his strong arms sweeping the water behind him. He emerges at the shallow end, shaking the water from his thick black hair and muscular torso with a single, violent shake of his upper body. The girl in the yellow bikini is clearly impressed – she stands at the edge of the pool like a goddess and smiles at him with her big, red mouth. Fortunately, her three friends, Erica and, indeed, the rest of the hotel clientele, have evaporated. He hauls himself athletically up the aluminium ladder to the edge of the pool. As he approaches her, she reaches behind her back and pulls at the bow to the top of her bikini. Her breasts tumble out like two newly-hatched brown eggs. She presses her long body up against him and, as he reaches to pull the loose

ends of the two bows at her hips, their mouths meet. Her tongue is like a moist, floundering fish, searching....

‘Dad.’

He opened his eyes. Erica was on the sun bed next to him, covered in a hotel towel, her knees drawn up under her chin.

‘Yes, sweetie.’

‘I don’t feel that well. I think I’ll go back to the room and have a lie down.’

‘OK honey. I’ll be along soon.’

‘See you later.’

‘See you later.’

He watched her as she walked back along the side of the pool, across the terrace and up the steps to the hotel. She was just a kid, really, wrapped up like that in a towel with her wet hair and bare feet. Oh, God! He hoped she wasn’t coming down with anything. He shouldn’t have pressed the dinner on her last night. She’d picked her way through her plate of clams and mussels unenthusiastically, almost dutifully. If she’s well enough, he’d take her into town for a pizza tonight. She’d really like that. He wished that Margaret was here. She’d know how to handle any problems like this. In any case, she would never have let the kid spend so much time in the sun without a hat. Nor, for that matter, should he spend any more time out here. The sun had really broiled his bald patch.

The next day was much the same: relentlessly hot. Erica had declined dinner the evening before and had slept soundly from eight o’clock until breakfast time. She’d nibbled a bread roll at breakfast and was now sitting on the sun bed next to him, still in her T-shirt and shorts, reading a

book. Max was beginning to wonder whether bringing her with him had been such a good idea. After all, she hadn't been great company so far and she might cramp his style if an opportunity in the form of the opposite sex reared its ugly head. Why did she have to be so grumpy? When he'd asked her if she wanted an ice-cream she'd just shook her head and carried on reading. Not even a 'No thanks, Dad.' He stole a look at the cover of the book she was reading, 'The Catcher In The Rye.' What on earth was that about? It sounded American – something to do with baseball perhaps? Was it the book of that film with Kevin Costner in it – the one where a baseball diamond mysteriously appears in the middle of a cornfield? But, surely, that would be 'The Catcher In The Corn'? Why couldn't she read Harry Potter, like all the other kids of her age? At least that was English.

'Good book, poppet?'

'Yes, Dad.' Yawn. 'Wicked.'

He gave up.

No sooner had Erica got up from her sun bed and loped off to the hotel garden to lie in one of the hammocks than Heather Stephenson, as if on cue, loomed into view.

'Good morning, Max!' she called cheerily as she approached. 'Another lovely day in Bella Italia!'

Oh God, it's 'Max' already! 'Morning, Heather. Another scorcher. Yes, all's well with the world – except Erica's a bit off colour.'

'I noticed. I always feel it's such a shame for young girls when the time of the month hits them while they're on holiday. It does spoil things for them.'

Although she continued rabbiting on, Max wasn't listening. What a stupid, ignorant idiot he was! How could

he have been so blind? Why hadn't Margaret warned him about this? Why hadn't Erica said something? He thought he was taking a child on holiday with him, and she'd turned out to be...to be what? Some sort of woman! He just wasn't equipped to handle this sort of thing. Didn't she need, well, bathroom things? Would she have to ask him to go and buy them? Oh, God! A son would have been so much more simple!

He became conscious that Heather was still babbling on: '...at seven o'clock in that little church on the main piazza. Just a medley of concerti – Vivaldi, Corelli, Scarlatti, that sort of thing. Played by a local amateur quartet. Strictly for the tourists, I suppose, but it's in a lovely setting. Should I get tickets for the three of us?'

'What? Er, no thanks. It's not really my cup of tea. I'm more of a Springsteen type myself. I never really got the hang of scraping strings.'

Later that morning he wandered tentatively over to the hotel garden, where he found Erica still reading in her hammock.

'Hi. How's it going, young lady?'

'Fine. I'm feeling a bit better.'

'Good. Look, Erica, if you want me to get you anything from the town, just let me know.'

'Like what?'

'Well, toiletries, women's stuff, anything.'

Erica smiled up at her father. 'It's OK, Dad. I've got all I need. These things are pretty predictable, you know. Anyway, it's just about finished and, as I say, I'm feeling much better.'

'Thank goodness for that. For a time I thought *I* was the problem.'

‘You’re not always at the centre of events, Dad. By the way, why did you turn down Mrs. Stephenson’s invitation to the concert this evening?’

For a moment, he was taken aback. ‘How did you know about that? Did she tell you?’

‘I spotted her talking to you and asked her what you were talking about. I like her – she’s really interesting. She knows a lot about this place and she’s a person with soul.’

‘But you don’t want to go to some over-decorated church to listen to ancient music for over two hours, do you?’

‘Why not? I love Vivaldi. And all those Italian composers come to life when their music is played in a setting like that.’

‘But I thought you were into Kylie Minogue, James Blunt – that sort of thing.’

‘Yeah, right. Two or three years ago perhaps.’

Later that afternoon, Inspector Samson arrives at All Saints College with his trusty assistant, Donaldson. Predictably, he requests that the alumni assemble in the college Hall. But Dirk is missing! Always a bad sign, thought Max. They find him hanging from the rafters of the college chapel. It looks like suicide – there is even a note. But neither Max nor Inspector Samson are convinced.

His concentration was interrupted by the increasingly noisy horseplay between the three young couples at the far end of the pool. He saw the girl in the yellow bikini and her friend in the water, splashing about. The boys were jumping into the pool off the side, causing huge waves of water to slurp over the edges. The three girls were shrieking with hysterical delight every time the boys threw water over

them. Really! He'd have to have a word about them at reception. The brochure had clearly stated that this place was 'a haven of tranquillity.' Amazing how such a haven could be destroyed by a few hyperactive boys and their three floozies.

Three? There'd only been two yesterday. He studied the new girl as she resurfaced from a lengthy ducking, screaming with laughter. No doubt about it – it was Erica. He watched as one of the boys, slim and tanned in very brief blue bathing trunks, threw her into the air and caught her in his arms as she came down. Oh, well. It all looked like good clean fun. At least she was starting to enjoy herself and he was well positioned to ensure that there would be no hanky panky. He wasn't going to let any Italian gigolo take advantage of his daughter. No sir.

Suddenly, the boy in the blue trunks was standing over him, dripping pool water on Max's hot body and grinning at him with dazzling white teeth.

'*Buon giorno, Signore.*'

Impossibly handsome. He hated him. 'Hello.'

'I would most respectfully crave your permission to be allowed to take your daughter Erica for *una passeggiata* this evening.'

'No.'

The boy looked a little put out.

'I am a good boy. If you wish, I will get my mother to testify for my excellent reputation.'

'I said no! Do you know how old my daughter is?'

The boy looked blankly at him.

'She's not yet fourteen. She's only a child, and she's in no position to go out with a man of what? Eighteen, nineteen?'

The boy backed away, then turned and walked back to his friends. There was a hurried consultation between them. They dried themselves off with their towels while chattering amicably to Erica, who waved goodbye to them as they went up the hotel steps. She came over to her father. From the firm set of her jaw (how she looks like her mother!) he knew he was in trouble.

‘What did you say to Stefano, Dad?’

‘I just told him how old you were and that there was no way I was going to let him get his grubby Italian mitts on you.’

She burst into tears. ‘Why is it every time I start to enjoy myself, you put a stop to it?’ she lamented. ‘Can’t you see, I don’t want to spend all day being your sweet little girl, trotting around after you, eating ice-creams and drinking fizzy drinks? You’re really boring, Dad – lying on a sun bed all day, reading cheap novels and ogling the girls. You’re so...you’re so...phoney!’ And, clearly satisfied that she’d found the right word, she stamped away.

By tea time, they had managed to patch things up a little. Max sat on the end of her bed and apologised. He explained that he knew he hadn’t been much of a father to her. In fact, he’d been happy to leave her upbringing to her mother, who had been strict but fair, while he had concentrated on developing the family business. For her part, she accepted that she hadn’t been the best of companions over the holiday, and that she’d try to do more with him. The peace agreement was sealed by both parties agreeing to go into town together that evening for the concert and a pizza.

The little church was hot and crowded when they took

their seats at the back of the nave. After a brief introduction in both Italian and English from the local priest, the quartet swung gamely into the first concerto. It all sounded the same to Max, who was beginning to think about the topping he was going to have on his pizza. After a while, however, the music increased in tempo and became highly charged. He recognised the return of a pretty melody he'd noticed earlier on, but now it was executed fortissimo and with urgency by the four musicians. Then each musician played the haunting melody in turn before they began to weave in and out of it, like birds calling and answering. As they played on, the music began to rise above their heads and spread across the white plaster ceiling of the nave. He looked over at Erica. Her eyes were shining. He found that he'd got a lump in his throat, and tried hard to think of something ordinary to make it go away. What would Bruce Springsteen think of this concert? Now, how did those lines in 'Born to Run' go? But the music was welling up to a crescendo and the melody had returned again, this time triumphant and affirmative. Erica had taken hold of his hand. He clenched his teeth together as hard as he could, in a vain attempt to stop himself from weeping.

After the final movement of the last concerto in the programme, the quartet was treated to rapturous applause. Three times the audience insisted the musicians return from the little anteroom where they appeared to have sought refuge, and three times they obliged, looking sweaty and tired, but happy. On the third occasion they played a small piece as an encore, which, it seemed to Max, everyone but he clearly recognised. It sounded to him like the theme tune from a well-known TV panel game, but he couldn't be sure.

Then it was over and, with much shuffling of feet and scraping of chair legs, the audience began to file out through the door at the end of the church. Max spotted Heather Stephenson among the crowd behind him. Damn! From the surprised expression on her face, she'd definitely seen them. He shepherded Erica down the church steps into the piazza.

'Hurry up, honey. I'm sure all this lot are heading for the local pizza parlour and we don't want to be last. I'm ravenous.' But Erica had spotted her poolside friends coming out the church and was waving gaily to them. As far as Max could make out, they were not waving back.

Their final few days were uneventful. Despite its increasingly intricate plot, Max continued to read his book, punctuating his regular snoozes with dips in the pool. Erica was less in evidence, taking a bus down to the town on her own for lengthy shopping expeditions and even going with Heather on a full day's excursion to Pompeii. Max said he'd pass on that. It was just too hot.

On their last full day, Max's cell phone started warbling. First Janice, then Bill, then even Ernest Carrington himself. The last delivery had been a day late and there were some returns to be credited. Time to go home.

At Naples Capodichino airport he paid off the taxi and they lugged their bags into the departure hall. It was chaotic. A mass of anxious travellers milled around, staring vacantly at the electronic notice boards or aimlessly trundling their luggage about. Eventually, he found the right desk number for their flight and they joined the back of what looked like the longest queue in the building. Christ, they should have flown Club! This place was a

nightmare. He tapped his inside jacket pocket to make sure he could feel all the necessary documents. It seemed a bit light. Reaching inside the pocket, he pulled out the airline tickets, but no passports! A terrible sinking feeling hit his stomach.

‘Oh, God! Oh God!’ he muttered, starting to frisk all his pockets at once.

‘What’s the matter, Dad?’

‘I’ve lost the bloody passports. I put them in the inside pocket of my jacket last night, to make sure I didn’t lose them – and now they’ve gone! Vanished! Somebody’s stolen them! I’ve been pickpocketed. It was that bloody taxi driver. Or the concierge at the hotel – I never did like the look of him.’ He found himself sweating profusely and becoming increasingly agitated. The confounded heat and noise didn’t help. Jesus, he wished he’d never come on this wretched holiday! Now he’d have to go down into Naples and find the consulate. It could take days to get another flight. Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!

Meanwhile, Erica was thinking. ‘But you weren’t wearing that jacket last night?’ she said. ‘You were wearing the mustard coloured one with the single vent at the back – the one which Mum always said made your backside look big.’

He stared at her for some time, before the import of her words penetrated his feverish brain. Then he dropped his case flat onto the floor and unzipped it. The mustard coloured jacket with the single vent was on the top, the bulge under the lapel testifying to the happy presence of their passports.

As they made their way to passport control, Erica

suddenly broke away from his side and dashed back towards the entrance of the departure hall. In the doorway stood Stefano Bluetrunks, grinning broadly. Erica ran up to him and not only threw her arms around his neck, but jumped up at him, wrapping her legs around his waist and kissing him furiously. Max decided to pretend that he hadn't seen this little pantomime, but as he looked self-consciously down at his luggage, a terrible thought crossed his mind. Perhaps his daughter was no longer a virgin. He tried to expel the thought from his mind. Surely, only tarts and ignorant girls lost their virginity at fourteen. After all it was illegal! Then he remembered Stephanie Walters, the vicar's daughter who had been fourteen when he was sixteen. She had been a nice girl, but she had certainly been no virgin at fourteen. In fact, Martin Pikestaff had once told him....But Erica was back at his side, flushed and radiant. Father and daughter, both slightly embarrassed, passed through passport control.

Max finished his book just as the plane reached cruising height. There appeared to have been two murderers – Rogers, the college porter, has done away with the President who, it turns out, has killed his first wife in order to marry Amanda, now revealed as Rogers' daughter, and Brian Roberts has murdered Dirk and faked his suicide, because Dirk has found out about Angela Hesketh's theft of the Fitzwilliam diamond when she was an undergraduate. Dirk, who is secretly in love with Angela, has also learned of her torrid relationship with Brian. Sir Tristram has infiltrated himself into the reunion party to make sure that Britain's interests in Africa are protected. So the two of them – Brian and Angela – have been in cahoots with each

other all along! There has been a lot of stuff about Africa and diamond mines and international arms trading which Max found rather incoherent. As he suspected, Miss Pettigrew is simply a decoy, sent down all those years ago for smoking pot during an economics lecture. At least he'd got her right.

He looked over at Erica, her head deep in a book, her dark hair falling over her face. What was she reading? 'The Secret History' by Donna Tart. Well, a bit of history never came amiss – better than a murder story. Not sure about the author though – sounded like some sort of hooker. God, she looked more like her mother every day! Something about the curve of her neck and the slight beetling of her brow when she was concentrating on reading. She reminded him so much of Margaret when he'd first met her. And she'd obviously got her mother's temperament – intensely passionate under that rather cool exterior. He suddenly felt very proud of her, and that wretched lump in the throat came back again.

*'We've gotta get out while we're young/'cause tramps like us, baby, we were born to run.'*

He pressed the button on his armrest, ignoring the mutterings from the row behind as the back of his seat inclined. The hum of the plane's engines relaxed him and he loosened his tie.

Then he sees her, a few rows up on the other side of the aisle. At first, it is just a flash of nylon, encasing a long shapely leg, that catches his eye. She turns her lovely face back down the aisle to gaze at him. Angela Hesketh! And what is she doing? She seems to be signalling to him, smiling and indicating with her blonde head towards the

front of the plane. In a minute or so, he will uncouple his seat belt and amble nonchalantly up the aisle to the toilets. Once inside, he will stand in the cramped space and wait until he hears her long fingernails tapping urgently on the door. He will quietly open the door and let her in...

## *Authors*

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