

Harmful Inheritance

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JOHN T. PETERS



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CHAPTER ONE



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

rectifying past apartheid wrongs called Black Economic Empowerment.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I tried the door but found it securely locked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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