

The Filing Cabinet

Marie and her brother walked slowly towards the house that they'd for many years called home.

"At least she's pulled the curtains. I know she's in mourning but it's nearly been three months..."

Pete gave her shoulders a squeeze.

"Go easy on her, Sis; she was so dependent on the old man and now she's..." he searched the air-

"Lost?"

"Exactly – like his will: lost. Right, shall we do it?"

Marie nodded, turned the key, then shouted, "Hi Mum! We're here!"

"She won't hear you, y'know: deaf as a post, and she *won't* change the batteries."

Marie led them, past the hallstand - fishing rods and battered trilby - then gently opened the parlour door.

Geraldine Montague was in her favourite chair, book on lap, rocking slowly as she surveyed the garden.

"Coo-ee! Mum. Just us! We're here to sort out Dad's stuff."

The old woman jumped, gripped her daughter's hand, then smiled broadly.

"Lovely to see you. Shall I put kettle on?" she said; too loud.

"No, Mum," Pete said, pecking her cheek. "Later maybe. We're here to try and find Dad's will. You know, like we said we would."

His mother waved them towards the filing cabinet.

"Good luck to you. I was never allowed to look in there. 'Private!' he used to say, so I didn't dare. The key's in the vase, I think."

Marie pulled open the top drawer and stood back.

"OMG! Pete. I thought Dad was supposed to be methodical, but this..." she gestured to the mass of envelopes, binders, folders and files. "What a mess!"

"Well, we've just got to do it. The will's got be in there somewhere: we owe it to him to sort things out properly."

Emptying each drawer as they worked, they paused to read the contents, making piles and nodding silently at each other when one, or other, held a particular piece of paper over the waste-bin. One hour later they had just managed to clear the topmost drawer. The rocking of their mother's chair had stopped, gentle snoring seeming to amplify the musty silence.

The two worked on, and still the papers came.

“Remember this party?!” one would say, or “He kept all my letters from Uni!” before removing another rubber-band and moving onto the next unmarked folder. And then they saw it: *‘The Last Will and Testament of Dennis Montague: Do not open until my death!’*

Pete quickly opened the envelope and pulled out the contents – a single sheet of paper, beneath which was stapled a black and white photograph.

Their father – handsome, and casually dressed – stared out at them, proudly. Next to him, a beautiful woman draped an arm around his shoulders as she pressed her lips firmly to his neck. On her knee she dandled a tiny child.

“And who the hell is this?!” Pete shouted, involuntarily.

“What was that?!” Mrs Montague woke with a start.

“Nothing mum... Fancy a cuppa?”

Dad, it seems, was hiding more than his will in the filing cabinet...

500 words