

Aunty Mary

Two middle aged women stood at the garden gate, staring at the house. It was tall and thin with a steep gable roof and dark ivy clinging to the walls. The front garden was a mass of knee high grass and overgrown shrubs intertwined with brambles.

“Oh dear, it’s worse than I thought,” said Kirsty.

“Poor Aunty Mary, stuck in there through the Scottish winters,” said Fiona.

“I wish we’d visited more often.”

“I know but we did keep telling her to move nearer to us.”

The sisters made their way up the path and stepping carefully around the brambles climbed the three steps to the front door and let themselves in.

Fiona reached for the hall light switch.

“Oh no, the electric’s been cut off already, I thought they said it would still be on.”

“We’d better move fast then, it’ll be getting dark soon.”

“Let’s do the front room first.”

Kirsty opened the door and they found themselves in a large room furnished with two dusty patterned sofas, a bookcase full of paperbacks, a bureau and an old fashioned box TV. On a coffee table was a pile of Country Life magazines. A faded, black and white wedding photo stood on top of the bookcase alongside another one in colour of a half smiling middle aged couple posing with golf clubs.

“Oh dear, she didn’t do much de-cluttering did she. The house clearance is going to cost a fortune.”

“Don’t talk about house clearance yet, there might be some family stuff we want to keep. Shall we start with the desk?”

They pulled down the lid of the bureau. Fiona whistled “Blimey, this is going to take us ages to go through.”

Inside were several large bundles of letters bound with elastic bands as well as a block of writing paper, numerous pens of assorted colours, boxes of paper clips and various other stationery items.

“Loads of these are bank statements. Let’s look at this one.” Kirsty opened one of the envelopes stamped with the Lloyds Bank logo.

“It’s from 1995! Do you think Aunty Mary has kept all her bank statements for the last 30 years?”

“Probably. There must be a lot more somewhere.”

Kirsty groaned.

“Let’s look in the drawers, there might be something more interesting”

Fiona opened the top drawer and pulled out two bundles of photos tied up with string.

“This is more like it. These look pretty old, shall we have a look through?”

The sisters brushed the dust off one of the sofas, sat down and began thumbing through the photos.

“I don’t know who some of these people are,” said Kirsty. “Suppose they must be uncles, aunts, cousins maybe?”

“What about this one?” said Fiona showing her sister a black and white photo of a happy looking young couple, the ones in the wedding photo. The woman was looking down at a chubby baby in her arms.

“That’s Aunty Mary and Uncle Ken but who is the baby? Dad was always a bit funny about why they didn’t have kids wasn’t he?”

“Perhaps it’s a friend’s baby....but seems a bit unlikely.”

“Let’s keep going and see if we can find anything else.”

An hour later the living room floor was piled with stacks of photos, bundles of letters and sundry files and folders.

“Hey this looks important, it’s tied up with ribbon.”

Fiona untied the ribbon that was fastened around a grey cardboard folder and took out the document on the top.

“Looks like a birth certificate but I can hardly make out what’s on it, it’s too dark. Have you got your phone there?”

“Sure, just let me switch the torch on.”

The sisters peered at the birth certificate by the feeble light of the torch.

“OK, so it’s Aunty Mary’s birth certificate and I think this one underneath is Uncle Ken’s”. She took it out. “Yes it is and under that is their marriage certificate. What’s this one?”

She pulled out the piece of paper and shone the torch on it reading out loud “Robert Kinross, born 20th November 1963, father Kenneth Kinross, mother Mary Kinross.” The sisters looked at each other wide eyed.

“So they did have a child but what happened to him?”

“Maybe they put him up for adoption?”

“Why on earth would they do that?”

“Well I don’t know. Let’s finish looking in this folder then we should probably call it a day.”

Fiona took out the next document and held it under the torch light.

Neither sister spoke as they read: ‘Robert Kinross, died 14th May 1965, aged 18 months.’

Inspired by the lyric:

“It’s the family secret, just let it be,

I know the secret to her misery.”

From a song by Alannah Myles