

Chapter 10

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Peter staggered happily down the drive and let himself in.

‘Dottie! We did it, hun. We bloody did it.’ He ambled into the kitchen and hugged her.

‘That’s for my clever husband,’ she said, kissing him. ‘Celebrating already, eh?’ She gave an exaggerated sniff.

‘Yes, but not with you, my pet, not with you. Now what’s for dins and I’ll retrieve the appropriate from down below, so you can join in the celebrations.’

As he filled the glasses with an experimental merlot from the Hunter Valley, he said, ‘You know, pet, a funny thing happened. A bloody funny thing. We missed the bus, see, and so I raced off to what I thought was a taxi. It wasn’t, but it wouldn’t have mattered ’cos I fell arse over tit anyway. No, no, not hurt at all. Do you know,’ he looked owlishly at her and repeated, ‘do you know, I could’ve sworn for a minute there that it was Jackie in that car. Bloody Jackie, eh? Couldn’t’ve been though. She shot through like a packet of salts. Nah, wassen Jackie. Looked too old.’

Dorothy listened to her husband with mixed feelings. Was he trying to tell her something? Now and again he did keep bringing up her name, inconsequentially, as though it didn’t matter. Dorothy thought it mattered all right. Look at him now, plastered out of his mind. Thirty years! Was there no end to his old obsession? Not that she felt any qualms about her own security. Since The Entrance they had been as close as they’d ever been. They’d had their differences, the most recent over Mary’s crisis. The shock of that had receded now Mary had picked herself up and gone back to her job but to neither Bob nor Sean. Dorothy had to concede that Peter’s philosophy had been ‘for the best’. Whatever that might turn out to be. Yes, she didn’t doubt his loyalty now. She just felt so sorry that he was still obsessed and that it was

hurting him. A warm gush of love and pity came over her, as she watched him hold his glass to the light, sniff it, and mumble, ‘sweaty saddles, be buggered.’

He got up from the table, feeling physically and mentally complete. A little too complete, physically, as he stumbled against his chair. But that, he decided, was his reward for a job well done. Bloody well done. Now for his reward. He was into his Beethoven phase. One thing about the old Jackie – *odd about that old moo in the car* – she’d given him an insight into music that now, in his autumnal years, was a source of immense pleasure. The rich and complex sound waves that flowed from his speakers drew him into an inward search, seeking a complementary mental harmony.

He’d once read an essay by Aldous Huxley called ‘Music at Night’ that had sent him scampering to the record shop to buy the stimulus for that essay: Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis*. Huxley had described his feelings on hearing, late at night, the *Benedictus*: Blessed is He that Cometh. Peter’s feelings weren’t quite the same as Huxley’s, but then they wouldn’t be, would they. According to Jackie’s thesis, you project your own theme onto it, based on your own feelings of blessedness, or whatever.

At last, after all those years of conflict, he was indeed feeling blessed. He switched off all the lights and placed the record on, catching the last of the Hosanna to get that magical transition, via the *Praeludium*. The high solo violin, hovering then descending, like a beautiful golden leaf dropping from a tree in autumn, looping in a downward spiral towards the ground. Fruition, completeness. He considered himself in that phase now, in his own life. Rich, ripe, nearing completion. The project accomplished today was a small example of that. And as usual, when completely relaxed, happy, and not to say more than a little sloshed, his emotions swelled with the music. The sequence totally transported him. Starting with the tremolo on the solo violin, the chorus whispering ‘*Benedictus, Benedictus*’, followed by the solo voices taking the

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theme higher and higher in a slow waltz. Tears were streaming down his face, his breath caught and he sobbed audibly.

Dorothy was standing just inside the door, desperately concerned. She could see his tear-stained face in the moonlight, reflected off Lake Macquarie, streaming through the window. When the music stopped, he lay back in his chair, not moving. She went up to him soundlessly and put an arm around him.

‘Peter, oh Peter,’ she whispered, ‘Can’t you have happiness with me? Not even now?’

He turned his tear-streaked face to her. The moment had gone; he was back to his drunken self. ‘Dottie, happiness... is... a fulfilled love, a fulfilled life. Thass what happiness is.’

Like I am now, he meant to add.

She misunderstood. She let him go, softly crying and mostly for him. She went into the ensuite and changed into the nightie she knew he liked. She waited for him to stumble up, clean his teeth, and fall into bed.

She clung to him. ‘Love me, Peter, love me. I can give you happiness too. Please, Peter.’

He loved her, and as he rolled over she prayed: ‘Please give him peace, God, if you have any pity at all. Give him peace.’

He laid his head on the pillow, the solo violin still whispering in his skull. *Fucking magic!*

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