

DINEY COSTELOE

*The
Sisters
of St Croix*



One

9th September 1937

Adelaide Anson-Gravetty drifted awake with the feeling that today something special was going to happen. And then she remembered. Today she was twenty-one. Today she was an adult and could decide things for herself. Today was the beginning of the rest of her life. Today, though she didn't yet know it, her life was going to be turned upside down.

She swung her legs out of bed and, crossing the room, threw back the curtains. The morning sun streamed in and her heart lifted with pleasure as she opened the window and, leaning out, looked down into the gardens of the square below. There were already plenty of people about, and she watched them going about their business as she often did, but for some reason today it was as if she were seeing them all for the first time. Footmen exercised dogs in the gardens, a newsboy sold papers from a stand at the end of the square, old Mrs Harriman had already taken her seat on her favourite bench. All was the same and yet all was different for now, today, Adelaide looked at it all through adult eyes.

There was a knock at her bedroom door and Florrie, the housemaid, came in with her morning tea.

“Oh, Miss Adelaide, you’re up already,” she said, setting down the tray and catching up Adelaide’s dressing gown from a chair. “Here, Miss Adelaide, put this on. You’ll catch your death there at the open window.”

“Don’t worry, Florrie,” Adelaide laughed. “It’s not cold, it’s a beautiful morning.”

“So it may be, miss, but you shouldn’t be leaning out the window with only your nightdress on. What would the master say?”

“He won’t know,” Adelaide said, adding conspiratorially, “if you don’t tell him.”

Florrie sniffed. She had known Miss Adelaide since she was three years old, and never once had she given her away to the master. “Come and drink your tea while it’s hot,” she instructed, “and I’ll draw your bath for you.”

“Thank you, Florrie,” Adelaide said meekly, though her eyes still gleamed with mischief.

“And may I be the first to wish you many happy returns of the day, miss,” Florrie added as she turned to leave the room.

“Thank you, Florrie.” Adelaide smiled at the maid with genuine affection. She took her cup to a chair by the window and continued to watch the comings and goings in the square below as she dutifully sipped the tea.

Twenty-one! she thought. Father can’t stand in my way now!

It wasn’t strictly true of course. Her father, Richard Anson-Gravetty, could always stand in her way while he held the purse strings, but now she was of age she could decide for herself if she wanted to get a job, and if she did she could, perhaps, support herself. She need no longer rely on him. It was a heady thought. She gave it further consideration as she lay in the bath a few moments later. She loved her father, of course she did, but he liked to make all the decisions, and

when he had there was no going against him. Quick of temper, any opposition put him in a towering rage, and she and her mother had both learned that the most comfortable way to live was to keep her father happy; to do what he required of them and to ask permission before doing anything that was the least bit out of the ordinary.

Mummy. Darling Mummy. Adelaide thought of her mother, so pretty, so timid, so...what? Irresolute? Docile? Weak? Heather Anson-Gravetty had lived all her married life in her husband's shadow, biddable, eager to please, and when she had died when Adelaide was sixteen, Richard had hardly seemed to miss her. Adelaide missed her dreadfully. She had been away at school and summoned at the last moment, had come home to find her mother lying in bed, her once-auburn hair faded and in disarray about the gaunt parchment of her face. Adelaide knew that her mother had been ill for a while, but no one had warned her how quickly Heather was wasting away. When she came into the bedroom and saw her lying, a frail waif against the white pillow, Adelaide gave a cry of distress, bitten off as her father gripped her shoulder with an iron fist. They had been together, the three of them, for the last time, but it was Adelaide, not Richard who sat holding her mother's hand. When her mother's grasp finally slackened, it was Adelaide who laid her head on the counterpane and wept. Richard simply turned and walked out of the room, leaving his grieving daughter sobbing by the bed.

Still, Adelaide thought now as she lay back in the warm water of the bath, that's Father's way. He never shows his emotions...except when he's cross of course!

In the days that followed her mother's death Adelaide had always felt that Richard wasn't so much saddened by it as angry that she had dared to die without his permission. He

seldom mentioned her and if he did it was never, it seemed to his daughter, with affection.

“It’s as if he’s put her in a cupboard and forgotten about her,” Adelaide confided to Grand’mère one day.

“That’s how he copes with the loss,” Adelaide’s grandmother replied gently. “Some people find it easier to cope by hiding the loved one away, by not thinking about them, or talking about them. Some people find that too painful.” She had smiled at her granddaughter. “I miss her, too, you know, so we can talk about her together, you and I, *hein?*”

Life from then on had not been easy for Adelaide. Although her mother had never made a stand or taken her side against her father, Adelaide had known that on occasion she had sympathised with her and had done what she could to make up for Richard’s rigid rule. After the funeral Adelaide had been sent back to school, and during the holidays she had spent most of her time staying with Grand’mère, Heather’s French mother. Richard’s parents were both still alive, but Adelaide found them less sympathetic. She had always been closer to her mother’s mother and it was she who helped Adelaide through the difficult days after Heather died. It was Grand’mère who championed Adelaide’s cause, who stood out against her son-in-law when she thought he was too harsh, who gave her the warmth and love her father seemed unable to express.

When Adelaide had wanted to go to university, Richard had been adamant that it was a waste of time and money, even though there was a place for her at King’s College, London. Adelaide had never discovered what Grand’mère had said to make him change his mind, but eventually her father had simply shrugged. “Do what you like, though why a woman would want a degree is beyond me.”

Adelaide had read French, a subject she found easy as she

was already almost bilingual. Grand'mère had always insisted on speaking to her in French, even when she was quite a little girl, and Adelaide had responded with enthusiasm. She had spoken French to her mother, too, but never when Richard was there. He had forbidden them to speak it in front of him as he spoke none and refused to be excluded from the conversation in that way.

No more college, thought Adelaide as she finally emerged from her bath and set about getting dressed. She had taken her degree earlier in the year and was now, unwillingly, a lady of leisure again. She had no mother to "bring her out", and anyway she despised the debutante scene. Adelaide was a girl of action. She wanted to be up and doing. She wanted to get out into the world and earn her own bread, to be responsible for herself.

Richard Anson-Gravetty was not at home on the morning of the day that his daughter attained her majority; he was away on business and wouldn't be back until the evening. So, when she finally made it down to the dining room, it was to breakfast alone, to open the cards from her grandparents and her cousin Andrew, in solitary state; to open the unexpected letter that waited beside her plate with no one there to see her do it.

The envelope, typewritten, was addressed to her and had a Belcaster postmark, but she had no idea from whom it came. Leaving it till last, she finally slit open the envelope and drew out the contents. It was from a firm of solicitors, Brewer, Harben and Brewer, with an office in Cathedral Road, Belcaster. She skimmed through it, but, as its significance penetrated her mind, she started to read again from the beginning.

Dear Miss Anson-Gravetty,

Allow me to congratulate you on attaining the age of major-

ity. I write in pursuance of the wishes expressed in the will of your late grandfather, Sir George Hurst. As you know he died in 1920 and left you a substantial legacy to become yours on your twenty-first birthday. As Sir George's only grandchild, you were named as the residual legatee, the money to be invested and held in trust until you came of age.

This happy day is now upon us and I respectfully suggest that you make an appointment with me to go through the terms of the will. I am sure your stepfather has a financial advisor who will take over from me now that I am no longer your trustee, but I should certainly like to meet with you and explain my stewardship to date. I hope you will be satisfied with it.

If you would write to my secretary and arrange a time convenient to yourself I shall look forward to meeting you at last.

I remain, madam, yours very sincerely,

Arthur Brewer

Adelaide stared at the letter and then looked at the envelope again to make sure it was really addressed to her. It was. She read it through yet again. Her grandfather, Sir George Hurst? She hadn't got a grandfather called George Hurst. Her grandfathers were called Gilbert Anson-Gravetty and Norman Driver. Norman Driver, Grand'mère's husband, had been dead now for ten years or more, but her other grandfather, Father's father, was alive and well and living in Winchester. So who was this George Hurst? And why did the letter refer to her father as her stepfather? None of it made any sense. Had she been adopted? Were Mummy and Daddy—she seldom called him Daddy anymore but when thinking of them together it sometimes still slipped out—were Mummy and Daddy not her real parents then?

Adelaide left the last of her breakfast and went out into the hall to telephone Grand'mère.

“Adelaide, my darling,” Grand’mère cried when she came onto the line, “many happy returns of the day!”

“Thanks, Grand’mère,” Adelaide said. She paused and then asked, “Can I come and see you? We need to talk.”

“Of course. But we shall see each other this evening at your birthday dinner.”

“I know, but I need to speak to you before that. Before Father gets home. I’ve had a letter.”

“Ah, I see.” Antoinette Driver sounded suddenly serious. “Yes, well in that case I think you’d better come round this morning and we can have a nice chat in private. I have a luncheon engagement, but that is not until 12.30.”

“Can I come now?” Adelaide asked.

“Of course. Just ask Davies to show you up as soon as you arrive.”

Within half an hour, Adelaide was knocking on the front door of her grandmother’s house just off Eaton Square.

“Good morning, Miss Adelaide.” Davies greeted her with a smile. “May I wish you many happy returns of the day.”

“Thank you, Davies,” Adelaide replied, returning his smile. “Indeed you may. Is my grandmother still upstairs?”

“Yes, miss, she is, but she said to tell you to go on up as soon as you arrived.”

Adelaide thanked him and hurried up the wide oak stairs to the old lady’s bedroom. She knocked loudly and in answer to a call to come in she opened the door. Her grandmother was sitting up in bed, a breakfast tray on a table beside her, the post opened and strewn across the bed covers.

“Adelaide, my darling, happy birthday!” Antoinette Driver held out her arms and, as always, addressed her granddaughter in French.

Adelaide crossed the room for a birthday hug and a kiss

and then drew up a chair beside the bed. Grand'mère removed her pince-nez and smiled. "So, now you are quite grown up. Feel any different?"

Adelaide shook her head. "No, not really."

"Nor I," the old lady said equably. "I haven't felt any different since the day I left the schoolroom."

"I got your birthday card," Adelaide said, not quite knowing where to begin, "and one from Granny and Grandpa. Andrew remembered, too."

"Well done, Andrew," said her grandmother, "but I think you had some other post, yes? Another letter?"

Adelaide pulled it out of her bag and handed it over. Mrs Driver replaced the pince-nez on her nose and pulling the letter from its envelope, read it slowly. Adelaide watched her face as she did so, but the old lady showed no signs of surprise or disbelief. When she had finished she handed the letter back to Adelaide.

"So..." she said and waited.

"So, what is it all about?" demanded Adelaide. "Firstly, is this letter really meant for me, and if so who on earth is George Hurst?"

"It is definitely meant for you," confirmed Mrs Driver, "and Sir George Hurst was your grandfather, your paternal grandfather."

"But..." began Adelaide.

"Your mother, my Heather, was married before. She married a man called Frederick Hurst at the very end of 1915. He was killed on the Somme in July 1916. You were born posthumously."

Adelaide stared at her. "You're saying my mother was married before...and she never told me?"

"Richard wouldn't allow her to."

“What do you mean, he wouldn’t allow her to?” demanded Adelaide.

“Darling, you know your father. People do what he says. He didn’t want her to tell you, so she didn’t.”

“But she was married to this Frederick Hurst for nine months?”

Mrs Driver sighed. “Not really, no.”

Adelaide looked shocked. “You mean I’m illegitimate?”

Mrs Driver shook her head with a laugh. “No, of course not, darling. What I meant was that they were never together as a married couple. Freddie was a friend of Uncle Johnny’s. Freddie and Heather met in London and corresponded while he was away in France.”

“Freddie, is that what he was called?” Adelaide interrupted. “I think I like that better than Frederick. So what happened?”

“Freddie came home on leave and they decided to get married.”

“Just like that?”

“Just like that,” agreed her grandmother. “We tried to persuade them to wait, but it was no use. They were difficult times, the war years; people snatched their happiness where and when they could.

“So, he had ten days’ leave over Christmas. They got married by special licence on 29th December and had a four-day honeymoon in London before he went back.” Mrs Driver gave a sad sigh. “He never came home. She never saw him again. He was killed on the first day of the Somme. You were born two and half months later.”

Silence fell between them as Adelaide struggled to take it all in. Grand’mère reached out and took her hand and together they sat thinking about what Adelaide had just heard.

“When did she marry Father? Richard, I mean.”

“Two and a half years later. We gave her all the support we could, but your mother, God rest her soul, was the sort of woman who needed a man to lean on. And anyway it would have been wrong for her to turn down another chance of happiness. Besides, she had you to consider. Richard was happy to take you on and bring you up as his child. All he asked was that it be done legally, so, when they got married he also adopted you legally and gave you his name. He said it would be better when they had more children that the family should all have the same name and grow up together with no ghosts lurking in the background.”

“But Mummy must have wanted to tell me about Freddie, when I got older I mean. Old enough to understand.”

“I think she did, but Richard asked for her promise and she gave it.”

Adelaide shook her head in confusion. “It is most peculiar,” she remarked, “to grow up thinking you are one person and suddenly discovering you are someone quite different!”

“You are you,” Grand’mère pointed out gently. “You are the same you as before. Your father was Freddie Hurst, but to all intents and purposes your father is Richard Anson-Gravetty. He is the one who’s brought you up as his own, loved you as a daughter, given you everything. It is no mean task to take on another man’s child and he has done his best. All he asked was that you should think of him as your real father...and you do, don’t you?”

“Of course, it’s just...well, just such a shock to find out that he isn’t. Especially when everyone else knew it all along.”

“Not everyone at all,” said her grandmother. “Only Norman and I, Richard’s parents and Johnny. Others may have known, but in the chaos that surrounded the end of the

war everyone was too concerned with their own affairs to remember other people's."

Adelaide was still holding the letter and now she looked at it again. "This solicitor, this Arthur Brewer, says I've been left money by my real grandfather, Sir George. He must have known about me."

"Yes, of course he did, but when he died there was no one left on that side of the family to have any claim to you."

"Was Freddie an only child then? Didn't he have any brothers or sisters?"

"There was a sister, Sarah I think she was called. She went to France to nurse the wounded. Took her maid and upped and went to nurse in a convent or some such. Anyway, the maid later came home in disgrace, but the sister stayed on and became a nun, of all things."

"A nun?" Adelaide was startled.

"Well, we are a good Catholic family, remember," said Mrs Driver, her face entirely serious.

That made Adelaide burst out laughing. "Oh, Grand'mère, how can you say such a thing? When was the last time you went to Mass?"

"Be that as it may," her grandmother answered serenely, "Freddie was brought up a Catholic and so was your mother. So were you, come to that. At least Heather won that battle!"

"So this Sarah is my aunt. Where is she now?"

"Still in her convent, I imagine," replied Mrs Driver, pushing aside the bedclothes and preparing to get up. "They don't let them out, you know."

"Grand'mère, why didn't you tell me before?" Adelaide asked softly.

Her grandmother gave her a rueful smile. "It wasn't my secret, my darling. Heather asked us to keep the promise she

had made and so, with many misgivings, we have.”

“Does Andrew know?” Adelaide was very close to her cousin, and the idea that he should have known something of this importance when she had not, would hurt.

Mrs Driver shook her head. “I don’t know for sure, but I doubt it. I imagine Johnny was sworn to secrecy too. Now shoo, I have to get up.”

“Grand’mère, what shall I do about this letter?” Adelaide asked.

“I should do what it asks you to,” was the reply. “Go and see the man and find out about your legacy. I should imagine you have become quite a wealthy woman.”

“What about Father? What do I tell him?”

“You don’t need to tell him anything. He already knows. He’s always known that it would all come out the day you were twenty-one. He’s simply been putting it off.” She looked speculatively at her granddaughter. “Why do you think he was away for your birthday morning, *hein*? He didn’t want to be there when you found out. Never forget, darling, that he loves you in his own way. He’s afraid of losing you to some ghostly father from the war. You must reassure him that he is truly your father and you are truly his daughter.” The old lady reached for her robe and went on, “And now, my darling, I really do have to get up. You may go downstairs and wait for me there if you like. Ask Davies for coffee. We can talk some more once I am ready to go out.”

The rest of her birthday passed in something of a blur. Adelaide had arranged to meet her friend Sophie for lunch, and it was all she could do not to tell her of the amazing discoveries she had made that morning. However, she knew she owed it to her father, her adoptive father that was, to talk things through with him first. The lunch was thus somewhat

difficult, as Adelaide could think of very little else.

“Addie, you’re miles away,” laughed Sophie when she had made the same remark twice and received no answer.

Adelaide smiled apologetically. “Sorry,” she said, “I was thinking about this dinner party Father is giving for me this evening. What did you say?”

“I said, shall we go shopping this afternoon? I want to buy some shoes.”

“Oh Sophie, do you mind if we don’t?” she said. “I really ought to go home. My grandparents are driving up from Winchester for this evening and I really should be at home to greet them when they arrive.” She smiled across at Sophie and added, “Andrew’s coming too. He’s going to stay the night. Do you want to come round tomorrow morning for a cup of coffee?” Adelaide was well aware how Sophie felt about her cousin and she tried to bring them together whenever she could.

Sophie looked at her affectionately. “Thanks,” she said. “I might.” And they both laughed, knowing wild horses would not keep Sophie away.

Richard Anson-Gravetty arrived home only an hour before the dinner guests were due to assemble. Adelaide knocked on his dressing-room door and when he called her in, she crossed the room and put her arms round him in an unusual gesture of affection.

“Welcome home, Daddy,” she said. “Granny and Grandpa are here and getting changed. Everything’s ready for the dinner.”

He returned her hug and then held her away from him and looked into her face. “Happy birthday, Adelaide. And congratulations!”

She looked at him quizzically. “Congratulations on what?”

“On coming of age, of course.”

“The years of discretion... when I can be told everything.”

“I imagine you have already been told, if I know anything about your grandmother.” He raised his eyebrows questioningly.

Adelaide laughed. “You’re right, of course. Today I discovered that I am lucky enough to have two fathers. But you do Grand’mère an injustice, Daddy. She kept the secret until I had learned of it from another source.”

Her father grunted. “You heard from old Brewer, I suppose.”

“I did, so of course I went to Grand’mère to find out what it was all about.”

“You didn’t think of waiting until this evening and asking me?”

Adelaide hadn’t thought of doing so, but now she prevaricated. “I didn’t think you wanted to tell me, or you’d have done it before... or let Mummy tell me,” she said. “Wasn’t that why you were away this morning?” It was after all what Grand’mère had suggested.

Richard shrugged. “Perhaps,” he said. His hands dropped from her shoulders and he turned to the mirror to knot his evening tie.

Adelaide moved towards the door where she turned and said softly, “Thank you, Daddy, for all you’ve done for me.”

“It was my duty,” he replied without turning round. “I’m your father.”

On this rather unsatisfactory note Adelaide left the room to put the finishing touches to her own evening dress.

Later that night, as she lay in bed, her birthday dinner over, she thought about the extraordinary revelations of the day. She had left her curtains open so that the light from the street lamp below gave an eerie green glow to the room. The

familiar shapes of her room were comforting as she confronted her world turned upside down. Her father wasn't her father and her mother had never told her. All of a sudden she was somebody different. It was all very well for Grand'mère to say that she was still the same person herself, but she didn't feel it. She wasn't the same person who had woken up that morning, sure of who she was and where she came from. Now she felt that part of her was made up of someone else. Parts of her, physical and mental, had been bequeathed to her by someone whom she didn't know anything about. And she wanted to know; who he was, what he was like, where he came from.

Dinner had passed off quite well. Her favourite foods had been served, a birthday cake ablaze with twenty-one candles had been brought in and the assembled family had sung "Happy Birthday" and "Twenty-One Today". Not by the slightest glance did Grand'mère, elegantly attired in a black chiffon evening dress with a corsage of tiny white roses, indicate that she and Adelaide had anything else on their minds but the birthday celebrations. No sign came from Richard that anything untoward had happened between them and to all intents and purposes the family party was a great success. He had presented her with her birthday gift in the drawing room where they had all gathered for drinks before dinner. Inside the parcel was a beautiful gold elbow bracelet, broad and heavy, chased with swirling patterns. There were gasps of admiration as she held it up to be admired before she slid it over her elbow where it nestled comfortably, fitting perfectly and drawing attention to the slender shape of her arm.

"It's really beautiful, Daddy," she said and kissed his cheek. "Thank you so much. I love it. And you've put my initials inside and the date. That makes it really special." But

she wondered as she spoke if the “A A-G 9th September 1937” was some sort of statement, a declaration that whoever had been born on 9th September 1916, she was Adelaide Anson-Gravetty now.

As she caught Grand’mère’s eye, she saw a look of approval and shot her a smile.

When her father had stood and raised his glass to propose her health, he had said, “We wish you every happiness, Adelaide. I only wish your mother were here with us tonight to see what a beautiful daughter we have. We wish you health and happiness for the rest of your days.”

Everyone had stood up and dutifully repeated, “Health and happiness!” as they clinked their glasses, but Adelaide had been touched by Richard’s words, not only was it the first time he had mentioned her mother in months, but also the nearest he had ever come to saying he was proud of her. Perhaps Grand’mère was right; perhaps he had been afraid he might lose the battle against a ghostly, heroic father about whom she might fantasise.

Everyone had stayed overnight, so there was no rush to leave as the hour got late. They sat around in the drawing room talking companionably, at ease as they always had been. No one mentioned the subject that was churning round Adelaide’s brain, though they all must have known that she knew by now.

It was strange, Adelaide thought. Was she the only one whom the revelation affected?

She had looked across at Andrew, who was chatting to Grand’mère, but there had been no chance to have a private word with him.

If he really doesn’t know I’m not Richard’s daughter, what will he say when he finds out, she wondered? I wish I could talk to him.

At last she fell asleep and didn't wake again until Florrie was tapping on the door with her early tea.

By the time she got down to breakfast, her father was about to leave the table.

"I've got something for you," he said. "Come and find me in the study when you've had your breakfast."

"Yes, of course, I won't be long," Adelaide replied. As she ate her toast she wondered what on earth it could be. After all, she'd had her present last night.

When she knocked on the study door twenty minutes later, she found her father at his desk.

He looked up as she came in. "Ah, there you are. I've looked this out for you. Your mother wanted you to have these things when you reached twenty-one."

He pointed to an envelope on the desk, but Adelaide did not pick it up. She said softly, "I know I'm not your real daughter, by blood I mean. But I *am* your daughter, you know. *You* are my father, not the man who died in 1916."

Richard looked up from what he was writing as she spoke but said nothing. Adelaide went on, "You're the one who's looked after me all these years. It was you sitting with Mummy by my bed when I came round from having my appendix out. It was you who ran in the fathers' race at my first school sports." She paused and when he continued to say nothing she added, "I just wish you'd told me, that's all."

Richard shrugged. "I thought it better not to. Your mother agreed. However, we both knew you'd learn in the end, when you came into Sir George's money."

"I still wish you'd told me yourself, not left me to discover from a complete stranger," Adelaide said. She sighed. "I suppose I must get in touch with this Mr Brewer, now."

"You must do what you think fit," Richard replied calmly.

“You’re of age now.” He turned back to what he had been writing when she’d come in, saying as he did so, “Don’t forget to take your envelope.”

It was her dismissal and Adelaide picked the envelope up. “Thank you, Father.” Quietly she turned and went out of the room; clearly he wanted no displays of affection. He felt he had done his duty by her and now she was on her own.

Adelaide took the envelope to her room, locked the door and sat down in the chair by the window. For a moment she looked down on the square. Only twenty-four hours since she had looked down on it in such hope yesterday morning, the first day of her adult life, and yet it seemed a lifetime away.

She slipped her finger under the flap of the envelope and tore it open. Inside there were two documents and another, smaller, sealed envelope. The first of the documents was her birth certificate, naming her Adelaide Sarah, daughter of Heather Hurst and Captain Frederick Charles Hurst (deceased). Born 9th September 1916 at Greyling House, Chalfont St Giles. The second was the certificate of adoption in which she, Adelaide Sarah Hurst, became the legal daughter of Richard David Anson-Gravetty, and her surname was changed to his. It was dated 12th June 1919. She had never asked which year her parents got married. Although she knew that their anniversary fell on 21st April it was never celebrated in any style and it had never dawned on her that they might not have been married until she was nearly three.

Adelaide set the two certificates aside and opened the other envelope. Inside was a letter, written in her mother’s handwriting. The sight of her mother’s neat hand made tears spring to Adelaide’s eyes. She dashed them away and started to read.

THE SISTERS OF ST CROIX

My darling Adelaide,

I know I haven't very long to live. This awful disease has got the better of me, and my time is nearly over. My only real regret is that I shan't see you grow up into the beautiful young woman I know you will be. You'll know by now that Richard is my second husband and not your natural father, though he has been as real a father to you as is in his nature. He made me promise not to tell you about Freddie. I know that he was always jealous of the place Freddie might hold in my heart, though he had no need to be, and he was afraid that Freddie might usurp his place with you as well. He also hoped to have children of his own and he thought it would be easier, for you and them, if it were assumed that he was your natural father.

When Freddie was killed, I was on my own. Even with the help of my parents, life was a struggle. I was still very young, with you to consider, and when Richard finally asked me to marry him it was a chance of security for us both and I took it. He is a kind man and even though he doesn't show his emotions, he loves us both. We've both learned to love him too, haven't we, and thanks to him we've had happy and contented lives.

Freddie was a wonderful man; honourable and courageous. He had a wonderful smile, which I've seen on your face on many an occasion, and a really infectious laugh, just like yours. You are like him in so many ways, not just in looks, which indeed you are, but mannerisms and character, too.

However, when I look back now I realise I hardly knew him as a husband. We had a whirlwind romance and then three days of married life and that was all. To me he was a figure of great romance, straight from a young girl's dreams. Handsome and debonair, he swept me off my feet... a brave soldier off to do his bit for King and country. I loved him and he loved me, don't ever doubt that, but we never had our own home, never delved deeper into each other than our few days together allowed. Richard is my true husband and believe me when I say that despite all the outward signs to the contrary, Richard is a vulnerable man.

On your twenty-first birthday you will come into the money put in trust for you by your grandfather, Freddie's father, Sir George Hurst. Then you will have to be told about Freddie, but if you feel the need to find out more about him, please be gentle about it. Remember, even though Freddie gave you life, it is Richard who has watched over you as you have lived it. Look after him for me.

God bless you, my darling.

With my love, Mummy

The writing blurred in front of her eyes as Adelaide read. Sitting with the letter in her lap, Adelaide thought about her mother.

Dearest Mummy. She knew she was dying and she wrote to me, even though she knew that I wouldn't read the letter for another five years.

Adelaide wondered briefly if Richard had read the letter before giving it to her and then chided herself for such an uncharitable thought. It was not in Richard's nature to do such a dishonourable thing.

Adelaide considered what to do for several days before she finally put in a call to trunks and spoke to Mr Arthur Brewer in Belcaster.

"My dear Miss Anson-Gravetty," said the voice over the crackling line. "I would be delighted to meet you on Thursday. Will you catch the 10.30 train from Paddington and perhaps you would take luncheon with me after we have concluded our business?"

Adelaide took a taxi from the station to the offices of Brewer, Harben and Brewer and was greeted by a lady of middle years, smartly dressed in a grey suit over a pale blue twin set.

"How do you do, Miss Anson-Gravetty. I am Miss

Davenport, Mr Brewer's secretary. He is expecting you and asked me to show you straight up." She led the way up some narrow stairs to a room on the first floor. With a brief knock she opened the door and ushered Adelaide in.

"Miss Anson-Gravetty, Mr Brewer."

An elderly man rose from behind the desk at which he had been sitting and came forward to meet her, his hand outstretched.

"Miss Anson-Gravetty," he beamed, "how delightful to meet you at last!"

Adelaide shook his hand and was shown to a comfortable seat in front of a smouldering fire. Having asked Miss Davenport to bring coffee, Mr Brewer took a chair opposite her.

"I like to have a fire, even though the days aren't that cold yet," he said. "When you get to my age, you know, you feel the cold so much more." He looked across at her. "May I ask you something, Miss Anson-Gravetty? Did you know about your inheritance before I wrote to you?"

"No, Mr Brewer. It came as a complete shock," Adelaide replied. "I didn't know until I received your letter that my father wasn't my father, if you see what I mean. I knew nothing of Freddie Hurst."

"Ah," Mr Brewer sucked his breath in through his teeth. "I was afraid that might be the case. I had hoped that Mr Anson-Gravetty might have told you himself before the letter arrived. It certainly must have come as a shock."

"That's putting it mildly," Adelaide agreed. "I had no idea that he wasn't my real father."

"It was his wish that we didn't communicate directly with you and as he is, was, your legal guardian, we had to respect his wishes. However, now you are twenty-one you are responsible for your own affairs."

“I see,” said Adelaide. “And what are those affairs?”

“Well, apart from a few small bequests, your late grandfather, Sir George Hurst, made you his sole beneficiary. I must tell you, Miss Anson-Gravetty, that you are an extremely rich young woman. The capital has been invested in trust for you and all the accruing interest has been reinvested. It amounts to a tidy sum.”

Adelaide stared at him. “How much?” she asked him softly.

“Well, let me see now,” Mr Brewer reached for a file on his desk and opened it. He pulled out a sheet of figures. “At the last evaluation your portfolio was worth some £75,000.” He glanced at her face and saw the colour had drained from her cheeks. “My dear Miss Anson-Gravetty, are you all right?”

“How much?” whispered Adelaide.

“As I said,” Mr Brewer went on, “you are an extremely rich young woman. The money is now yours to do with as you wish. At present it is invested fairly conservatively, and I suggest, if I may, that you leave things as they are until you’ve had the benefit of some professional advice.”

“Yes, yes, of course. Sorry, Mr Brewer, but I can’t quite take all this in.” Adelaide smiled at him weakly. “Sorry.”

“Don’t worry, my dear, we can sort out all the paperwork and then you can take everything with you. I expect you want to discuss things with your father, hmm?”

“Before we do any of that,” Adelaide said, “may I see the actual will?”

Mr Brewer delved in the file again and producing a document, passed it over to her.

Adelaide read it slowly, trying to take in the meaning through all the legal jargon. There was a small bequest of £200 to his housekeeper, a Mrs Norton, and another to the

head gardener of £100, and £50 to every person in his employ at the time of his death.

The village green of Charlton Ambrose, where the Hursts lived, was part of The Manor estate, and this plus another parcel of land beyond it was left to the Parish Council to be used for the benefit of the village.

The residue of my estate is left to my granddaughter, Adelaide Sarah Hurst (now Anson-Gravetty) to be held in trust until she attain the age of twenty-one years, when it shall pass to her absolutely. My trustees, the partners in Messrs Brewer, Harben and Brewer, shall administer the trust in any way they see fit during her minority, including the sale of any property, real or otherwise that I own at the time of my death.

Adelaide looked up at Mr Brewer. "I don't see any mention of his daughter, Sarah, I think she was called. Why didn't he leave any money to her? Surely she was entitled to half, even if I had Freddie's half."

"I believe Sir George did have a daughter called Sarah, but as you say there is no mention of her in the will. It was my father who drew it up. He may know why. He knew Sir George quite well of course, our firm has been his family's lawyers for three generations."

"I see," said Adelaide. But she didn't. Why would Sir George have neglected to provide for his only daughter? "It doesn't sound fair," she said, shaking her head. "There's so much money there, she should have had some of it."

"I'm sure there was a good reason," Mr Brewer said gently. "Sir George knew what he was doing." When Adelaide made no comment, he went on, "I hope you will find our stewardship satisfactory. We have been in contact with your stepfather on occasion over the years, but once The Manor at Charlton

Ambrose had been sold, he left us to manage everything.

“I’m sure you won’t want to take all these documents back with you on the train,” Mr Brewer said when he had been through them with her. “I’ll have them all delivered to you, or your solicitor in London. Our man Dickens will bring everything up by the end of the week. Would that suit you?”

“I haven’t got a solicitor,” Adelaide said. “I think it would be far better if you continued to handle everything for me. You know exactly what there is. All I would like at present is a regular income if that’s possible.”

Mr Brewer looked delighted and assured her that it was.

On the way home on the train Adelaide tried to imagine having seventy-five thousand pounds. The sum was astronomical.

Father knows that I’ve an inheritance, she thought, but does he know the extent of it, I wonder?

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