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Old Aunt Hilda

by Sho Botham

Robert, Rubin, Rachel, Ruby and Rupert sat squashed around the oval table in the smaller of two conference rooms at Blackson, Jamieson and Quirk Solicitors, with Partner Jeremy Jamieson and his executive assistant. The reading of Hilda Boostersham's will had been postponed twice before. The first time, due to Jeremy J being doubled booked and the second time, when he was self-isolating with a mild but debilitating, case of Covid-19. The five relatives in the room was silently thinking to themselves, third time lucky.

Old Aunt Hilda had been a live-wire and more than a bit eccentric. But well-loved in the family. She had been the life and soul of the annual, family Christmas bash as long as anyone could remember. Uncle Bert had died years and years ago and Old Aunt Hilda was thought of as an old spinster even although everyone knew she had been married to Uncle Bert for decades, in the far distant past. They had met somewhere in the Far East when she was travelling. They came home married.

Jeremey J nodded to his EA to start the audio recorder and got the meeting under way.

Voices raised and spoke over other raised voices. It can't be true. We would have known. She wouldn't do that to us. The old bat, she wasn't right in the head. This is proof, she was mad.

Jeremy J sat patiently waiting for the natural pause in the consternation before, gently tapping his pen on the highly polished mahogany table. Five frightened faces turned to look at him, waiting for him to speak. Waiting to find out if their dreams were about to be dashed.

“I know,” said Jeremy J, “this has come as a shock to you all, but I had strict instructions from Hilda Boostersham, not to divulge any of this until the reading of her will. None of her sisters knew. And now that they are no longer here, the five of you are next in line for their shares from the will. But, as I read earlier, each of you will only inherit a small, token sum from your aunt or around £500. It is clear that you were all expecting to inherit much larger sums and for that I am sorry.”

A confident knock at the door, broke the concentration. Jeremy J’s executive assistant, rose from her chair and opened the door only enough to see who it was. She slid through the slim gap and left the room.

The stunned nieces and nephews were continuing to talk in overly agitated voices. Jeremy J watched in silence. He knew that what was about to happen might make matters worse. But it had to be done.

The EA opened the door and signalled to Jeremy. Taking a sip of water, he sat up straight and gave her a small but significant nod.

The door opened fully to reveal a broad smile on a woman with a shock of red hair, purple trousers and a greenish turquoise jacket. Her eccentricity seem to radiate around the room, missing no one.

“G’day, I’m Ocean, Hilda’s daughter. I gather none of you knew about me. Dad brought me up. He would’ve been your late Uncle Bert’s brother. Well, he wasn’t really your uncle as mum and him never married. Good to meet you all, at long last. Mum used to say your family’s never in your past. You carry it around with you everywhere. I’ve carried you all around with me for years and now I finally get to meet you and pick up my inheritance. Good, on ya, mum,” Ocean said as she looked upwards to the ceiling.

The five related faces sitting the table couldn’t cover up their surprise. Eccentric old Aunt Hilda had managed to put one over them even after she was gone.