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Murder

Written by Sarah Pinborough

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SARAH
PINBOROUGH
Murder

JF

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For my mum, who taught me how to read
and gave me her love of a good story.

PART ONE

PROLOGUE

Extract from letter from James Harrington
to Edward Kane, dated 1887:

. . . and I have just returned from their funerals. I suppose it is a blessing that they are to lie at rest together and neither one must continue living without the other (as I truly believe, as I told you in Venice, that my parents did love each other) but my heart is heavy with grief, and although I am almost recovered from the poisoning that took them from me, I continue to feel plagued by the black cloud that has hung over me since my return from Poland.

I wish you were here. I have never made friends overly easily, and those few I have tended towards are of a serious sort – there is not a fellow among them I feel I could bare my soul to without judgement. Your lively spirit and positive attitude would be a tonic to me in my present predicament.

In my previous letter I mentioned that I had been ill in Poland but there was much that I omitted – perhaps because I wished to forget most of the experience myself; I blamed the fevers I had suffered for addling my brain somewhat. However, since my return to London I have begun to believe – and God help me in this – that there may be some truth in the madness. Or perhaps it is I who am mad. I have tried several times to write down what really occurred, about what the villagers and my poor dead guide Josep believed had infected me, but

SARAH PINBOROUGH

each time I have thrown the paper onto the fire. It is enough that I am plagued with doubts without driving you away with tales of monsters and legends that have no place in this modern world.

And yet I am still gripped by terror.

The night my mother and father fell so fatally ill, we had eaten a jar of mushroom preserves I had brought back with me from my travels. I heard myself tell the doctor as much as soon as I was well enough to speak, and there was an empty jar and the remnants of food to evidence this – and yet now I am recovered, I cannot remember ever buying the mushrooms, or eating the dinner, although I must have done both. This is not because of the effects of the poisonous mushrooms; I have been suffering periods where my memories are vague, as if sometimes I am living in a fugue state, where my desires and emotions are not entirely my own. I fought with my father that night – I have a memory of the anger, but not of why we argued. One day I found myself walking through a slum part of London, with no recollection of getting there other than vague dream-like memories that felt at once to be mine and not mine.

I had a similar experience in Paris, but that time, when I regained my senses, I had blood on my clothes. These moments are at their worst when the recurring fever is with me.

I fear, reading this back, that it must appear nonsensical. You probably think that my grief has left me ‘touched’ – and believe me when I say most earnestly that I hope this is indeed the case. The madness I could live with, but I fear the dreams I can’t help but think are real. And there is something almost worse: a constant weight on my back, as if there is something just behind me I cannot quite see.

I can picture your smile of disbelief from here, and in many ways that image is a comfort. Of course I am simply a victim of illness. There can be no more to it than that. I shall throw myself into running my

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father's business, as I need a distraction from these dark thoughts, and that will certainly provide a worthy one.

I must hope that you received my first letter as I have had no reply from you – you may well, of course, still be on your travels or at the Palazzo Barbaro in Venice, where I last saw you, but as I doubt that your family business commitments would have allowed you to stay in Europe for so long, I must presume my letter was lost rather than that you have forgotten our friendship. I shall continue to write, and I hope that one day you can visit me in London, and that by then these miseries which plague me will be long forgotten.

*Your dear friend,
James Harrington.*

The Singleton Argus
Saturday, June 27, 1896

JACK THE RIPPER

Carl Feigenbaum, who was executed in the electric chair at New York, has left a confession with his lawyer, from which it seems possible that he may be no other than Jack the Ripper. The account of the lawyer, which has been given to the Press, reads:—"I have a statement to make which may throw some light on this case [the murder for which the man was executed]. Now that Feigenbaum is dead and nothing more can be done for him in this world, I want to say as his counsel that I am absolutely certain of his guilt in this case, and I feel morally certain that he is the man who committed many, if not all, of the Whitechapel murders. Here are my reasons; and on this statement I pledge my honor:—When Feigenbaum was in the Tombs awaiting his trial, I saw him several times. The evidence in his case seemed so clear that I cast about for a theory of insanity. Certain actions denoted a decided mental weakness somewhere. When I asked him point blank, 'Did you kill Mrs Hoffman?' he made this reply: 'I have for years suffered from a singular disease, which induces an all-absorbing passion; this passion manifests itself in a desire to kill and mutilate the woman who falls in my way. At such times I am unable to control myself'. On my next visit to the Tombs I asked him whether he had not been in London at various times during the whole period covered by the Whitechapel murders. 'Yes, I was,' he answered. I asked him whether he could not explain some of these cases on the theory which he had suggested to me, and he simply looked to me in reply.' The statement, which is a long one, proves conclusively that Feigenbaum was more or less insane, but the evidence of his identity with the notorious Whitechapel criminal is not satisfactory.

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14 October, 1896

Dear Boss,

You will be surprised to find
that this comes from yours
as of old Jack-the Ripper. Ha Ha
If my old friend Mr. Warren is dead
you can read it. you might
remember me if you try and
think a little Ha Ha. The last job
was a bad one and no mistake nearly
buckled, and meant it to
be best of the lot & what curse it,
Ha Ha Im alive yet and you'll
soon find it out. I mean to go
on again when I get the chance
wont it be nice dear old Boss to
have the good old times once
again. you never caught me
and you never will. Ha Ha
You police are a smart lot, the lot
of you could nt catch one man
Where have I been Dear Boss
you d like to know. abroad, if
you would like to know, and
just come back, ready to go on
with my work and stop when
you catch me. Well good bye
Boss wish me luck. Winters coming
"The Jewes are people that are
blamed for nothing" Ha Ha
have you heard this before

Yours truly

Jack the Ripper

SARAH PINBOROUGH

Chief Inspector Henry Moore's report to
Chief Constable Melville Macnaghten.

18 Oct 1896

I beg to report having carefully perused all the old 'Jack the Ripper' letters and fail to find any similarity of handwriting in any of them, with the exception of the two well remembered communications which were sent to the 'Central News' office; one a letter, dated 25th September 1888, and the other a postcard, bearing the postmark 1st October 1888 . . .

On comparing the handwriting of the present letter with handwriting of that document, I find many similarities in the formation of letters. For instance the y's, t's and w's are very much the same. Then there are several words which appear in both documents; viz:- Dear Boss; ha ha (although in the present letter the capital H is used instead of the small one); and in speaking of the murders he describes them as his 'work' or the last 'job'; and if I get a (or the) chance; then there are the words 'yours truly' and 'the Ripper' (the latter on postcard) that are very much alike. Besides there are the finger smears.

Considering the lapse of time, it would be interesting to know how the present writer was able to use the words 'The Jews are people that are blamed for nothing'; as it will be remembered that they are practically the same words that were written in chalk, undoubtedly by the murderer, on the wall at Goulston Str., Whitechapel, on the night of 30th September 1888, after the murders of Mrs Stride and Mrs Eddowes [Eddowes]; and the word Jews was spelt on that occasion precisely as it is now.

Although these similarities strangely exist between the documents, I am of the opinion that the present writer is not the original correspondent who prepared the letters to the Central News; as if it had been I should have thought he would have again addressed it to the same Press Agency; and not to Commercial Street Police Station.

In conclusion I beg to observe that I do not attach any importance to this communication.

London. November, 1896

Dr Bond

By the time the brandy arrived, I was feeling pleasantly full. The warmth of the restaurant was a far cry from the bitter cold outside, and as Andrews passed the cigars around the room had quietened; it was late in the evening and many of the tables that had been full on our arrival were now being cleared away by brisk waiters.

‘And so the letter was nothing?’ I said. It was not unusual for Andrews and me to dine out together, but tonight Henry Moore had brought the three of us together and I knew it was not just for the pleasure of our company.

‘Just another to add to the hundreds of others,’ he said behind a small haze of smoke. ‘They’re all worthless. Whoever our man was, he’s either dead or fled.’

He looked well. Unlike Andrews, who had retired from the police force a year or so after that bloody summer, Henry Moore had gone from strength to strength, being promoted to the rank of Chief Inspector after taking over the ‘Ripper’ case from Inspector Abberline. He retained his sense of earthy hardiness, and although he must surely feel the same frustration that plagued Andrews that their man had never been caught, he was a pragmatist. He would be disappointed, but he would not suffer as Andrews did.

‘These are fine cigars.’ The smoke was sweet and strong. ‘Are we celebrating something?’

‘Celebration might be too strong a word,’ Moore said, ‘but it’s certainly the end of an era. We are no longer actively investigating the Ripper case. We’ve done all we can. We’re not going to catch the bastard now. It’s time to move on.’

His words came as no real surprise to me, and in my heart I was glad of the news. It was the final door closing on a chapter of history I had done my best to make peace with and forget. Perhaps now that the decision was made, Andrews too would be able to let it go. He had become a close friend since his retirement from the police force. He was thinner than I, and although nearly ten years younger, he looked far older than a man yet in his forties should. He still mused on Jack’s handiwork over our games of chess or backgammon, as if hoping one day to remember some small snippet of information that would lead to an arrest.

‘Perhaps it is,’ Andrews said before sniffing his brandy. ‘But I wish to God we had got him.’

‘It’s a wide world,’ I said. ‘It’s possible that some policeman somewhere caught him.’

‘Then I shall imagine it’s so. For my own peace.’

We sat in comfortable silence for a moment as we sipped our drinks and smoked our cigars and reflected on those deeds that seemed at once a while ago and yesterday, as memories often did.

‘It’s not as if there isn’t enough crime in London to keep me busy,’ Moore said after a moment, his eyes twinkling. ‘There are days I envy you, Walter, in your decision to change professions. Look at you now: the gentleman investigator, Sherlock Holmes himself.’

We all laughed at that. Andrews had indeed moved into private investigations since leaving the Force, but the reality of

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the job was a far more mundane affair than that presented in fiction, and it involved very little working alongside the police.

‘Who knows,’ Moore continued, smiling, ‘perhaps it will soon be time for me to move on too. I’m starting to feel like the old dog trying to herd eager pups.’

‘Retirement?’ Andrews said. ‘I’m certainly contemplating it – but you don’t strike me as the sort.’

‘You see me dying on the job? Driven to an early grave by paperwork, maybe.’ He let out a gruff laugh. ‘I’ll see a few more years on the Force, I’m sure, but then – who knows? I imagine – and in many ways I hope, because I’m too tired to chase another bloody lunatic like that one – I’ve already worked on the case I shall be defined by. We all have.’

It was unlike Moore to be so reflective, but he had a point. London hadn’t seen six weeks like Jack’s before, and it was unlikely to again. We had played our parts in that, even if the man himself had never been brought to justice.

‘Jack, and the torso man,’ Andrews said. ‘I hope we were wrong and they were one and the same – that way we failed to catch only one man.’

My grip tightened on my brandy glass. We rarely talked of the torso murders. For Andrews they had always been secondary to Jack’s, and I was glad of that. For the first few years after those terrible events my sleep had suffered. I kept the memories locked away in my soul and I weaned myself from the laudanum, but often my days were wrecked with tiredness. I had not seen either the priest or Aaron Kosminski since that fateful night in Harrington’s warehouse. I had slowly managed to convince myself that the drugs had induced a kind of madness in us, but still I felt an awful sense of dread when walking the streets of London.

But for the past eighteen months or so that too had lifted and the whole affair had begun to feel like a terrible dream. I had no doubt that Harrington was the killer, and so I felt no overwhelming guilt over his death, but neither did I like any reminder of those events for fear that once again my anxieties and insomnia would return.

‘It’s possible,’ Moore agreed, but I sensed more for Andrews’ benefit than because he truly thought so.

‘We should dwell less on the past,’ I said. ‘If the case is no longer active, then perhaps we too should let it rest. And ourselves as well.’

‘I’ll drink to that,’ Moore said and signalled the waiter for more brandy.

It was late when I returned home to Westminster, but I had the pleasant buzz of having spent an evening with friends and before bed I went to my study to write a few more notes on my paper on the nature and treatment of hunting injuries. I wanted to push any dregs of thoughts of Jack and the torso killer to one side with practical work and I found it was not too difficult in the comfort of my own home. The sense of being haunted had truly left me, and although I had moments of fear that it would return, with every day that passed I relaxed a little more and allowed myself to feel content in my life. There would be no more opium. There would be no more madness. The priest and Kosminski were merely figures from a dream. They were not tangible, and as such, they could no longer affect me. Justice was done – even if it had been a crude version that I could never share with Andrews and Moore – and I refused to feel guilt for my part in it. It was far kinder for Juliana than any trial would have

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been, and I had no doubt whatsoever the outcome would have been the same.

Finally, I turned out the lamps and climbed the stairs to the bed I no longer dreaded. Yes, I thought as I slipped into an easy sleep, *life was good at last.*

Colney Hatch Lunatic Asylum. March, 1891

Aaron Kosminski

Medical Report on Admission:

He goes about the streets and picks up bits of bread from the gutter and eats them. He drinks water from a standpipe and refuses food at the hands of others, he is very dirty and will not be washed.

Patient believes he is guided and controlled by an instinct that informs his mind.

London. Christmas, 1896

Dr Bond

I stayed at Juliana's on Christmas Eve, and after little James had been put to bed I helped her with the last of the present-wrapping and then we filled the stocking that hung from the edge of the mantelpiece before sipping sherry and allowing the enjoyment of the festive season to seep into us.

'The calm before the storm.' She smiled, raising her glass to me. 'Merry Christmas, Thomas.'

'And a Merry Christmas to you too, Juliana.'

We sat back, enjoying the silence in that particular way that two people who had grown used to each other's company could do. I was glad to see her looking healthier and more content. Her happiness made me happy, and even with the secret that I kept buried, I still dared to hope that one day she might consider me more than just a friend. Although I was now a man in my fifties and she not quite reached thirty, still I wanted to look after her. Even without my impossible feelings of love for her, I knew I owed her that.

She had stopped wearing widow's weeds – reluctantly, but with a pragmatism that I was beginning to see was a part of her core – a few years earlier, but her grief still clung to her, almost as corporeal as the monster my madness had convinced me was attached to Harrington's back. Nothing in that time had been easy for her: her husband's bloated body had been dragged from the river a few days after his death and

she, insisting on seeing him even though both her father and I strongly advised against it, had been heart-broken at the sight. Her pregnancy continued to make her sick, and her labour had been long and difficult – for a while, though we never told her, there were times when we feared we would lose both her and the child. And after that, she never regained the full bloom of health: though her red hair was still beautiful, it had lost its lustre, and her face had thinned. Much as I tried to encourage her back out into the fresh air, even suggesting she join me at the hunt as she had been used to, she always declined, and for the first year or so of little James' life, she was little more than a ghost of her former self. Once she left her sickbed she moved and talked and walked, but her heart had gone in the river with her dead husband, and I rather felt that if her sickly child were to die too, it would be only a matter of days before she threw herself into the water as well.

But little James did not die, and Juliana slowly came back to us – perhaps not with the *joie de vivre* that had been so much a part of her before, but she was still a young woman and I hoped that Time, Mother Nature's healer, would rectify that. The young were resilient, and Juliana was an exceptional woman. I knew I was right in my decision: that it would be better she had to bear only the grief of a husband robbed and murdered rather than the truth of what James Harrington had become: a brutal murderer of women and the killer of his own unborn child.

Juliana remained in the Chelsea house only until both she and the boy had recovered enough from the trauma of his birth, then her parents and I encouraged her to sell the property and move, though I confess it was not difficult – she needed no persuasion from us, for that house held few happy

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memories for her. Selfishly, I too was happy that I would no longer have to visit that street, for not only had Harrington's parents died so horribly there, but the ghost of Elizabeth Jackson lingered too, every time my gaze fell on the nearby house where she had been employed.

When Juliana moved into the new house in Barnes, the dark clouds I had carried with me everywhere began to lift. And as Juliana recovered, so did I.

Now, as the fire died down, her pale face was beautiful, lit by the glowing embers. When she had married James Harrington she had been a girl, but now she had grown into a woman and her face bore the marks of her suffering. I found that made her more perfect, if that were even possible.

'I think I shall go to bed,' she said at last, rising. 'Thank you for coming tonight, Thomas. It's been good to have some time alone before our guests arrive tomorrow.' She leaned over my chair and kissed me softly on my cheek. 'You are always so very kind to me. Sometimes I wonder what I would do without you.'

'You will never have to do without me,' I answered, 'that I can promise you.'

She smiled again, a wistful expression that made me hope one day to see her eyes twinkle with good humour as they had before. And although I dared not think it too often, perhaps she would one day start to love me as I loved her . . .

'I think I might read for a while,' I said. 'Sleep well. And Merry Christmas.'

As I watched her leave the room, her skirts swishing as she walked, I thought I had never known such a woman, and never would again. I didn't read, but instead lost myself in the remains of the fire until it had burnt down to a pale glow. As

the air turned chilly, I too retired to my bedroom, seeking a good night's sleep before the Christmas festivities. Thankfully, that was no longer an idle wish.

The mood in the morning was as fine as in any house in London, and once Charles Hebbert, Juliana's father, had arrived we left the cook preparing our feast and went to church before strolling back along the riverside to Juliana's house on The Terrace. It had been a mild month, and for all the slight crispness to the air it could as easily have been a March day as a December one. Juliana relaxed her normal over-protectiveness a little and she let James run ahead of us slightly, although she watched carefully as he peered over the bank to the river a few feet below us.

'He's starting to look just like his father,' Charles said, adding with a smile, 'and he seems well.'

From under his hat, blond curls sprang around the child's face and for once his pale cheeks were glowing from both excitement and the fresh air.

'He's got Mother's eyes,' Juliana said, and squeezed her father's arm. Mary Hebbert had been taken from them two summers before, the victim of a sudden fever. It was a swift death as her heart gave out, and although they had both grieved deeply, that had gradually transformed into fond remembrances rather than bouts of anguish. 'And he is gentle, like her.'

'And clever like his own mother,' Charles added, his eyes twinkling. 'A fine combination.'

I did not join in with their talk of the boy, for whatever I said would sound stilted and awkward. Instead, I hung back a few paces and let them continue. I had never been able

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to bond with little James. The similarities with his father and the memories he engendered in Juliana comforted her, but for me they were darker triggers. James had his father's weak chest, and he had nearly killed Juliana arriving into this world; even throughout her pregnancy he had made her terribly ill, and I could not help but wonder if some of his father's wickedness had passed into his unborn son. More than anything I loathed the child's fascination with the river. Juliana refused to let him on the water, despite their waterfront property – I wondered how she could bear to look out at the Thames, knowing that her husband had been pulled out of it, but I supposed in some way it allowed her to feel closer to him. For my own part I still could not look upon the river without a mild sense of dread.

'He's nearly six. He should be in school,' I heard Charles say, 'and mixing with boys his own age. It would be good for his chest to spend more time playing sports, and good for him to be around others.'

'I prefer to school him myself,' Juliana said, her tone abrupt, 'until I know he is completely well.'

Charles, to his credit, did not push her. It was Christmas Day and not the time to broach her controlling parenting.

'Look, Mother! Look!' The boy was pointing out to a flurry of gulls wheeling and diving into the water.

'Don't lean over too far!' Juliana hurried forward, and Charles and I followed.

'But look!'

As their beaks nipped eagerly, the volume of gulls made the water foam and churn, but at their centre I could just make out a dark hunk of something being tugged this way and that.

‘It’s a dead thing!’ James squealed excitedly. ‘They’re eating a dead thing!’

We turned away from the water after that.

Walter Andrews arrived in time for Christmas dinner, laden with parcels and a bottle of fine port, and by the time we had all eaten our fill and little James was playing with his new toys we were truly a festive gathering. Crackers had been pulled and nuts had been cracked, and then Juliana played the piano and we sang carols. Outside, as if in a fine salute to the day, the temperature dropped and the first snowflakes of the winter began to fall. I could not have wished for a more perfect Christmas.

‘Say goodnight to Uncle Thomas and Inspector Andrews,’ Juliana said, ushering the sleepy child towards us. ‘And thank them for their presents.’

‘Just Mr Andrews these days,’ Walter said, ruffling the boy’s angelic curls. ‘Good night, young Master James.’

‘Thank you for the cricket bat,’ the boy murmured.

‘We shall have you at the crease come summer.’ Andrews winked at him.

Little James turned to me and came in closer to where I sat so he could wrap his thin arms around me in a hug.

‘Merry Christmas, Uncle Thomas,’ he said. I returned the embrace, but I felt stiff and awkward. I tried to like the boy, I truly did. It was not that he was an unpleasant child – that was not the case. He was quieter than most boys of his age, and somewhat reserved and clingy with his mother, but he was not spiteful, nor mean. It was merely that he was the child of a monster, conceived at the height of his father’s murdering madness, and I could not help but wonder whether the sins of

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his father somehow lurked in his soul. And when those wide blue eyes were fixed on me, studious and sombre, I found I could not help but believe it.

‘Thank you for my books. And my train.’ He kept his arms round my neck and kissed my cheek, and knowing that Juliana was watching with fondness I patted his back and forced a smile, though I could not bring myself to return the kiss.

‘You’re very welcome, young man,’ I said instead. He pulled back and stared at me for a moment, then returned to his mother’s side.

‘I shall come and read you one of those new stories with your mother,’ Charles said as he got up from his seat. ‘How would you like that?’

‘Thank you, Grandfather,’ he said politely as Charles swept him up in his arms and groaned as if the slight boy was far too much weight. He pretended to stagger slightly under the load and little James laughed, a gentle giggle, and I felt a moment of sadness at my inability to like him.

‘Goodnight, Uncle Thomas,’ he said again.

‘We’ll be down shortly,’ Juliana said and smiled at me. ‘Now come along, both of you.’

When we were alone, Andrews poured me another glass of port and then added some coal to the fire before we went to the window and looked out at the snow and the gaslights flickering in the houses along the curved street. I thought of all the families who had decorated their trees and opened their presents and I hoped they had enjoyed as happy a day as we had.

‘The boy is very fond of you,’ Andrews said. ‘I think he wanted you to read his story to him rather than Charles.’

‘Oh, I think not.’ I was surprised by his words – the child was as awkward with me as I was with him, and I had presumed that was apparent to all.

‘You’re the closest person to a father he has.’ Andrews sipped his port. In a house further up someone drew the curtains closed. Christmas was coming to an end for another year, which made me think of the speed of my own passing years; the Yule season would be here again quickly enough.

‘You’re not getting any younger,’ Andrews said, as if reading my mind. ‘When are you going to pull yourself together and propose to her?’

Heat burned in my cheeks. It was true that I often talked of Juliana to Walter during our dinners, but I had never mentioned my feelings for her. I thought I had spoken like a guardian would, rather than a man in love.

‘Oh come on, Thomas.’

I busied myself with closing the drapes rather than face the gentle humour in his eyes. ‘It’s clear that you are both very fond of each other.’

‘I’m nearly thirty years older than her,’ I said, hoping my tone was indignant, but when I heard my oft-thought words spoken aloud I felt some shame that I had ever even considered that she might think of me and marriage. It was ridiculous. ‘I’m older than Charles,’ I added.

‘Age is irrelevant in these matters.’ He sat by the fire, where the flames were crackling merrily. ‘And Juliana is wise beyond her years. Her illness and her grief have matured her.’

I wished he would be quiet, but at the same time I found some hope in his words. If a man like Walter Andrews didn’t find the idea entirely preposterous, then perhaps I would one

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day find the bravery to say out loud the words I had so often voiced silently.

‘You’ve helped her through all of it – and her affection for you is obvious. You were close friends before poor Harrington’s murder, and you have been resolutely by her side since. If she were to marry again, who else would she choose?’

‘She still grieves for her husband,’ I said softly. I did not think of the headless baby’s corpse in Harrington’s trunk. I did not think of the glass in my hand gouging his throat.

‘She grieves less with each month that passes. Life is short, Thomas. Harrington is gone, Charles’ Mary is gone. My own Amy is gone. If you have the opportunity for happiness then you should at the very least try to take it.’

‘Perhaps I shall,’ I said. ‘Perhaps I shall.’ I smiled at him. ‘You should have just written that down as a Christmas gift for me and saved yourself the cost of those expensive riding boots.’

‘You’re right,’ he declared, reaching once again for the port bottle. ‘I shall return them tomorrow.’

‘Ah, but you did not write it down.’ I held my glass out to him. ‘The boots remain mine.’

By the time Juliana and Charles returned we were laughing, and soon Juliana was too. It was a good sound, and there had not been enough of it in recent years. Perhaps things were changing for all of us. I looked at her and felt my fierce love tighten my heart. *Maybe this year*, I thought. *Let Christmas be over and the new year start properly.* Maybe then I’d ask her.