

## Chapter Twenty-five

### *A New Home and Catastrophe*

Mrs Mottram's letter to Ruth left her daughter under no illusion as to where she now stood. Mrs Mottram went to great lengths to describe how she had consulted her brother and the Curate, and said that they were as one with her in their opposition to what Ruth proposed. Even now, at this late stage, she appealed to her daughter to change her mind and avoid making what they considered would be the greatest mistake of her life. In the letter she conceded with some regret that her brother had informed her that such was the law that there was nothing that she, her mother, could do to stop her daughter making such a dreadful error. Mr Clauncy had gone further and said that Ruth was no longer worthy to be described as her daughter and that she should wash her hands of her. Those were the very words that he had used. The letter contained no expressions of encouragement, no blessing, no good wishes for the future and no declaration of a mother's love for her daughter. It was a cold, dismal response which greatly saddened Ruth and which Mrs Mottram ended with her regret at having lost one of her daughters.

Of course, thought Ruth, her mother had no way of knowing the arguments that were arrayed against her in favour of the marriage. Nonetheless, in Ruth's view both her mother and her uncle should have had more faith in her judgement and ability to choose her future husband. Mr Clauncy's views counted for nothing, but Ruth clung to the hope that in time her mother would be won around even if for the present she was to remain estranged.

And apart from the contents of this letter, Ruth's sole regret was that she would leave the company of Mrs Tucker and the two teachers though she would not miss her rooms in the Winter, nor the prospect of looking down into the graveyard. "You must and visit us often," said Mrs Tucker on a number of occasions. "You will have no excuse not to, seeing as you will still be coming to work but a few paces away." Of course she would, Ruth promised. She noted, but dismissed, a cautionary element of disapproval in her husband-to-be's reaction when she mentioned it to him. It signified little as she was fully prepared to give up her so-called freedom that she enjoyed outside of her work. She had no doubt that she would much rather spend that time with him. And, she jokingly assured him, she was pleased not to be facing the prospect of another cold Winter.

As it was, Matthew decided that she should travel to and from the office in a specially chartered cab. Ruth had hoped it might turn out to be Joe as she would have liked to learn more about Mr Biskit and his carts, but it turned out that she was to be driven back and forth by a surly man called Ned who had as few words as he had teeth. Nevertheless, she wrote three light-hearted short stories about a genial carter called Toby Musket which Mr Braithwaite accepted without much enthusiasm, declaring that it was not her genre to produce such material. Ruth paid him no heed and wondered whether Mrs Biskit ever read them and, if she did, whether she recognised her husband there in the central character. Despite the disappointment over cabmen, she was pleased to be placed in a situation where she had less to fear from Signor Calaceli although she noted that her engagement to Matthew appeared to signal a significant reduction in the attention he paid her. It was almost as if it had the desired effect that Matthew had intended. When she came to look out on the graveyard for the last time she felt a sense of disappointment and loss. On an impulse she opened the window and let the card from her unknown admirer flutter down. Caught in the breeze it came to land in the very spot on which he had stood and left his footprints on New Year's Day. Whoever he was, this was his sole link to her, and now that was broken.

She tried to suppress her indignation at her mother's response with her sadness, but there were times before the Wedding when it ran out of control and she would say, to her uncle's image, "how dare she criticise the man I love?" or "what right has she, above all people, to visit the sins of the father on the son?" She would remind her uncle that it was all

gossip and that nothing had ever been proved about his wife's death. People did die. They died in Sutton Minety as much as they died anywhere else, as a visit to the churchyard there would verify. Had it not been for the vendetta that Mr Clauncy had conducted against the doctor it all would have been forgotten years ago, and she now would not be at odds with her mother. If she were only to meet Matthew, if she were only to come and talk to Mrs Tucker, or the two spinster teachers, she would realise how unjust was her judgement upon him and her daughter, but no matter how much Ruth hoped that something of this kind would happen, she knew in her heart that nothing would.

She would have these moments of passion and outrage, then they would subside in the comfort of a kaleidoscope of memories of happier days at Meadowview Cottage and thoughts of her future as Mrs Matthew Fayrbrother. It was so hard to believe that all this had happened in only twelve months. It now seemed a lifetime since she and Victoria had walked out on that day. There were moments when nostalgia had the better of her and she wondered if she and her family were having to pay too high a price for her future happiness, but somehow she sustained herself through these periods of depressions and self-recrimination, and emerged resolute. In any case, there was nothing that she could alter. The paradox remained, and her uncle's image reminded her of it, how that one letter had been the start of so much pain, worry and suffering in her family, yet it had secured for her as much as she could ever have hoped for!

The wedding was as simple and straightforward as the Church and Statutory authorities would permit, a private ceremony conducted in the church that Ruth had attended every Sunday since she arrived in London, the church outside which she had met Matthew, a fact she could not help dwelling upon as she arrived, nervously expectant silently praying that he would be there, waiting. Ruth would have felt completely deserted had Roger not offered to come and give her away and proceeded to do so in a fairly disdainful way, but that was Roger! She felt acutely sad as she walked up the aisle on her brother-in-law's arm, hoping still that at any moment a cab would deliver her mother and uncle to the door, but none did. Mrs Tucker and her remaining two ladies, together with Mr Braithwaite, Mr Sunbury and, perhaps against her better judgment, Mr Spruce formed the small congregation who came to witness the happy event.

They repaired to a small reception at Mrs Tucker's at which Roger appeared pleased to be button-holed by the City Editor and displeased by some of the questions he was asked. Her cousin was politely cool towards Matthew, but she had taken the trouble to explain to her new husband that this might be the case and he was not put out by it. In any case, it was not a day on which to be put out about anything and she would not even allow herself to feel annoyed when Roger suddenly broke away from Mr Spruce and declared that he was leaving as he liked to spend as much time as possible at his wife's side, or close by. "They must be very close," Matthew said to her. "I hope that our bond remains as secure as theirs."

"If only Victoria could have been here," Ruth said. "Or my mother."

"It probably would have been very awkward if your mother had come," he replied. "If she thinks that badly of me at best it would have been frosty, at worst it could have been stormy. She was right to stay away. It is for the better."

"I suppose you are right," she said, reluctantly.

"You see, my father has not come. Nothing I think would drag him from his glass of port. And just suppose what it would have been like had they both come. There would have been no telling where matters would end!"

Ruth had to inform all who asked that there was not going to be a honeymoon, at least not immediately. To those from work she explained it was due to the commitment her husband was under to his practice, not having a partner or a locum arranged. To her female companions she added the fact that her work presently did not allow her to take leave to travel, but that this suited them both. But they would travel to Italy, she thought, as soon as circumstances permitted it. Messrs Braithwaite and Sunbury were unanimous in thinking that she should take a holiday and said it was something they had been saying for quite some time. Ruth laughed and said that it was not necessary and she could not imagine what had led them to such a conclusion. Mr Sunbury did not matters rest, but told the bridegroom that he

considered that Miss Mottram had been under some stress for some time and that a holiday was warranted, It would also open up her horizons. It could only be beneficial.

Late that afternoon Ruth joined her husband in Ned's cab and saw her new house for the very first time. Her very first task was to supervise the positioning of the writing desk and she lost no time in unpacking and placing her uncle's image in its customary place. Her examination of the house showed that it matched Matthew's description, except it was larger than she imagined, and her impressions were favourable. It did not command the views of the Park that could be enjoyed from Victoria's bedroom, nor the open fields and woodland of Sutton Minety, but that mattered little to her. When her husband apologetically asked her what she thought of it, she told him it mattered little. She had no ambition to live in a mansion or own a mansion, and certainly she had no intention of having to run a mansion. He agreed that they were both professional people with occupations which would occupy them for most of the day, but he did insist that she took charge of the household accounts and the servants. Here she had good fortune as she found what she thought must be the very best cook/housekeeper and maid, both of whom came in daily, in the whole of London which greatly eased any concern she had in that respect.

It became clear to her that Matthew had something on his mind when they sat down to their first dinner together. "There is one matter of delicacy that we have not discussed," he said as soon as the maid had left.

"Matthew?" she said.

"It concerns a family and what intentions or aspirations you have towards raising one."

"I am sorry?"

"I will be brutally blunt," he said. "I suggest that we do not start one yet. As you said earlier, we are both professional people with duties and responsibilities to discharge. I do not think that children could be easily accommodated into our lives at the present time."

"I would like to have children," Ruth said. "I have thought about this and I think that I would have to allocate a specific time of the day for writing and be firm about it."

"There would also be the costs of engaging a good nanny and a wet nurse," he added. "I am not saying that we should never have children. We are both young and we could afford to wait a number of years. It will allow me to build up my practice and it will allow you to become fully established. Children, even if they are locked in the nursery all day, can be a distraction with their ailments and other demands. All I am suggesting, no, all I am insisting upon is that we do not start right away."

"Very well, Matthew," said Ruth. In a way she was relieved that her thoughts were not far removed from his, but she felt he had dealt with the matter very unsympathetically. Perhaps he found it a difficult matter to discuss, yet he was a doctor! There was just an unanswered thought in her mind that grandchildren might soften her mother's attitude, but not if she saw them as just another generation of little Doctor Fayrbrothers! "We will wait," she agreed.

She went alone to her bed that night in any case as Matthew was called out by an anxious midwife to a difficult confinement and did not return until the small hours of the morning.

The first casualty of Ruth's new life was the small sum that she set aside and sent to her mother. She tried not to be swayed by Mrs Mottram's stance over the marriage and justified her decision to cease the payments on the grounds that maintaining a household was more expensive than living in rooms, there being the payments for the furniture, the servants and the food to be found as well as the ground rent. But she knew that her action was open to misinterpretation and that it would only serve to reinforce the breach. She did promise herself that she would send any funds that turned out to be spare, but she found in the first few weeks that there was always a greater demand on her pocket than her fees could satisfy, and she often had to recourse to her husband.

She did draft a short letter to her mother explaining that there was a large cost to setting up even a relatively modest house in London and that she could no longer for the present send sums to her, but when she read it again it seemed so trite and harsh that she put it

aside and never sent it. She had no doubt that it would only be greeted with scorn and derision if it had been sent.

In those early weeks of their marriage, Ruth's life settled into a new routine. Apart from the unavoidable duties relating to the running of the house, the main differences between her married life and that before were the cab that took her to and from the office, along the Strand and across Waterloo Bridge, and the pleasure of seeing Matthew, briefly in the morning, and for a little longer amount of time in the evening, but every day instead of only on Sundays. He told her that the demands upon him were great, but that he was building up and consolidating the practice, and that the day would come when he could advertise for a partner who would ease the load. On more than one occasion, Ruth, not having forgotten what she had seen in Stepney, did suggest that she should accompany him and write an article on ill health in London, especially amongst the poorer families, but he discouraged the idea and she did not press him too severely.

It contented her, to be living in the same house as the man she adored and to be able to write at the same time. It appeared that Signor Calaceli had abandoned his attempts to contact her or threaten her, and the news of Victoria was consistently good and encouraging. Apart from a better understanding with her mother, what more could she wish for or reasonably ask for? She followed the three stories about Toby Musket with a further two in a similar, light hearted, spirit, much to Mr Braithwaite's dismay which caused a minor falling out with his partner. He need not have been over-concerned because there were days that Ruth could not explain, days when despite all the gifts that had been bestowed upon her, she felt ill in her body and in her mind. She could not explain the cause of these sudden reversals of mood, but when so possessed she wrote in altogether a much darker, deeper, vein, which pleased her publisher no end. Perhaps it was worry over the rift with her mother and uncle. Perhaps it was a deep rooted fear, perhaps even a belief, that her marriage, her writing, her sister's recovery, all these good things, would and could not last.

Mrs Mottram did come to London for the funeral, grim, black in appearance, black in spirit, accompanied by her brother who was nothing but grave and dignified. They eschewed the independent offers from both Roger and Ruth to call at their houses and travel with the cortege, but went straight to the service where they stood together, apart from the other mourners. Ruth watched her mother throughout, but she never once turned her head to acknowledge her presence. It was almost as if she did not know or had never met either her surviving daughter or, for that matter, either of her sons-in-law.

It was not until after the small coffin had been lowered into the ground and the service was complete that she turned and confronted her daughter. "Now I have lost both daughters," she said, bitterly.

"Oh, Mother!" protested Ruth. "You should not say that!" She might have said more, but Mr Lancaster took her arm and gently led her away.

"I do not think it will pay you to talk to my sister at the present," he said. "She is in such distress that I cannot find the words to describe it. This has come as the most terrible shock to her and to me, and we are not in the least satisfied with what has happened. Worst of all, neither she nor I can understand the part you have played in all this, Ruth."

"I am not at all sure I understand exactly what you mean or imply, Uncle," she said, quite sharply. "I have played no part in anything and I am as distressed as anyone."

"This is neither the time nor the place to discuss this issue, with your sister not yet cold in her grave," said Mr Lancaster, "but I can tell you this. I am no longer prepared to stand by and leave the question of the inheritance undecided. I shall make an application to the Courts as soon as practicable. I cannot any longer be absolutely sure that Justice will be served by my action but at least my conscience will then be clear which is more than can be said for some. Had I acted earlier, your poor, innocent, sister might still have been alive."

"How can you possibly say such a thing?" hissed Ruth. "It is preposterous! You wrong me and Roger by doing so. I can only assume that you are inferring that someone had a hand in Victoria's death. There are matters that I cannot tell you of today which might lead someone to such a suspicion, but they would be wrong. She died of natural causes!"

“There are those who think otherwise,” said the solicitor.

“Well, they are mistaken to do so! I received regular bulletins from her doctor.”

“Yes,” said her uncle, “and you told, who?” Ruth did not answer but, tight-lipped, turned away and crossed to where Matthew was talking to Roger.

“May we leave now?” she said desperately. “We have finished here,”

“What did your uncle say?” he asked as they walked towards where the cab was waiting.

“Oh, nothing,” she said, trying to sound casual.

“But that nothing has angered you?”

“That is because this dreadful event has now placed me irretrievably beyond the pale. My mother will no longer as much as talk to me and my uncle is hinting at all manner of accusations. Well, I knew that there was a risk of this when I said I would marry you. Poor Victoria has now put the issue beyond question.”

“Are you beginning to regret your decision?”

“No,” said Ruth, looking back for the last time at the grave where her mother, head lowered, still stood. She wondered if this might be the very last time that ever she would see her. “I am not regretful of anything. I do not regret marrying you. I do not even regret complying with Victoria’s wish that I should not tell Mother. I feel that I have acted correctly in every respect and I feel it is wickedly unjust of her and my uncle to reproach me. Well, that is that. It is all over and finished. Let us leave here.”

As she sat back in the cab, Ruth’s thoughts were of casting off the old and putting on the new. She might never see or communicate with her mother again. Contact with her uncle might be unavoidable if the case went to the courts, but she would not wish to be represented and had nothing to contest. The only other remaining connection with him was the Mottram necklace stored in his safe. It could stay there. But once home, once back in her room and sat at her writing desk, pen poised, some of the anger and resentment gave way to sorrow and regret. Although she remained convinced that she had acted correctly, matters might have turned out better had she told her mother about Victoria’s illness. Yet she had been getting better and stronger! There was no warning of what was about to happen and no time to write. Matthew said that it could sometimes turn out that way. A vital organ suddenly failed and death followed rapidly. She sat and went over the events, examining each part at a time, but she could not conclude other than that her sister would still have died what ever or when ever she had told their mother.

Her uncle’s threat to apply to Chancery bothered her, not so much for the reference but as to what his motives were. Surely he could not believe that she thought she had something to gain from Victoria’s death? Surely he could not believe that of her? Did he have Roger in mind when he spoke of Justice not being served, but surely now, whatever the outcome, the inheritance should pass to her cousin in equity? Whatever the position, she still felt instinctively that the reference would do more harm than good, but she was no longer in a position to influence in the slightest what her uncle did. Matters would have to take their course.

In the next two days she wrote three, sad, wistful, short stories which fully restored her in Mr Braithwaite’s eyes. They were exactly what his readers liked, he told her, causing her to wonder for the first time what kind of people bought *The Etna*, but she did not mention this. Instead she told him that the stories expressed just how she felt and that his readers and his publications were profiting from her misery. She was, it seemed, doomed to wear black for the rest of her life, and whereas other writers might write blue or green, or court danger with red, or be brilliant with yellow, she would write nothing but black. Mr Braithwaite was less pleased when the next published chapter of the current novel suddenly descended into tragedy with the unexpected death of one of the principal heroines. “Cannot you write her back in some way?” he said. “Or just blind her?”

“She is not an Esther,” said Ruth, defiantly.

“Well, have her run down by a carriage and crippled like Tiny Tim. Your public will not be pleased to read of her death.”

“People are dying of every hour of the day,” she said, bluntly. “It is about time that the cold, harsh, reality of life shed its light on fiction, at least on mine.”

“Can we have your assurance that you will not indulge in any further assassinations of the main characters?” he asked anxiously.

“None is presently within my contemplation,” she said, flatly.

“It is only grief and anger!” she told her uncle’s image. “It is an anger that I feel deep inside me, an anger which goes almost to the core and one which I have no recourse other than to vent it on the characters who populate my writing. It is unfortunate as they have done nothing to deserve their fate. Their only crime, if it can be called that, is to be in the wrong story at the wrong time. But there is no-one else upon whom I can spend my fury. I could try to purge myself by being at odds with Matthew, but he is attentive, caring and loving and works so hard and such long hours that it would be most unjust to burden him. I cannot fairly take it out on the servants. It is none of Ethel’s fault and she would only burst into tears as she is more than prone to do at the least stern look let alone a stern word. And Cook is an absolute gem. As for my mother and uncle, who might by their unreasonable attitude warrant my attention, they are safely beyond my range. So who else is there left at my command apart from my characters?”

Slowly the slightest of slivers of optimism crept back into her writing as the storm that had enveloped her upon her sister’s death began to clear. Ruth described it as a first blood-red ray cutting through a black sky when all thought of the sun had been abandoned. It was a small glimmer of hope which might well have grown to become one of the brightest stars in her firmament had it not been absolutely eclipsed by the events that occurred a few evenings later.

It had been one of those days on which she had not felt well. What had started out as fatigue and a feeling of nausea became a persistent headache and shortly after dinner Ruth apologised to her husband, kissed him on the cheek, and announced that she was retiring early. She confessed that she had not really been feeling at her best for several days, perhaps even since the funeral. He offered to examine her, for that was what doctors were for and what doctors did, but Ruth smiled and said that she would not want to trouble him and she would see how she felt in the morning. If she was any worse, well, then perhaps he should see if there was anything amiss and whether something should be prescribed.

Ruth left her husband sat in the drawing room and went out into the hallway. At the bottom of the stairs she paused, looking down the darkened corridor towards the kitchen, and decided that she would take a warm drink up with her. Taking a candle from the hallway she went out to the where the stove was still alight and filled a kettle. It had not even reached the boil when she heard the front door bell ring.

For a moment she hesitated. Ethel and Cook had gone home. It was probably someone come for the doctor and perhaps she could let Matthew go to open it. There was always the possibility that it was Signor Calaceli or someone sent by him. She heard the drawing room door open and Matthew going to the door. Then it was a man’s voice, a strange voice with a note of urgency and desperation, yet a familiar voice.

“We have got to talk!” said the visitor.

“I thought we agreed that you would never come here!” said Matthew in a low hiss, just audible in the kitchen. “What about the risk? We are fortunate this evening as Ruth has just retired with a headache. If you had come a minute earlier she would have seen you!”

On hearing this Ruth, feeling alarmed although she did not fully understand why, edged her way around the kitchen table to stand behind the kitchen door.

“Ruth has a headache? So, they have started already, have they? I don’t care much whether she sees me or not!”

“But the risk!” hissed Matthew. “Think of what is at stake!”

“To hell with the risk! To hell with them all, all the Mottrams and Lancasters! We are in dire trouble. That ass Lancaster has made good his threat and lodged an application in Chancery concerning the Mottram estate. That is the one thing we did not want. Once the news is out we are finished!”

“You had better come into the drawing room,” said Matthew. “At least we can discuss this in a semblance of comfort.”

Ruth gasped. The visitor was none other than her cousin and brother-in-law. She had no doubt of it, but what was he doing there, coming to see her husband, talking as if they knew each other and perhaps had done for some time? Once she had heard the drawing room door click shut, she softly climbed the steps to the hall and went into the dining room. When she came close to the room divider, she could hear every word just as clearly as if she had been in the room with the two men. Perhaps she had a slight feeling of guilt, a slightly uncomfortable feeling of being there, eavesdropping on her husband and cousin instead of going in, as any proper hostess would do, and bidding him welcome, but what she heard in the next couple of minutes fully vindicated her action.

“We are both finished, ruined,” said Roger, coming so close to the partition that Ruth stepped back a pace. “I am ruined. You are ruined, except you could try and get by in your wife’s income, whilst she still has one, that is. You could even, on your wife’s behalf, wait for the outcome of the court case, if you can bear to wait that long.”

“Live off Ruth’s income? Do you really think for one moment that I would want to become dependent upon her income? Become beholden to that? God knows, I spend enough of the day trying my level best to avoid her!”

“Just at present she is the least of our worries. We have a solution as far as Ruth is concerned and whilst she remains in ignorance she poses no threat. Just you make sure that things remain that way. But there is no solution to this other crisis unless we now find the Will. If we don’t do that we might as well all go down to the river and throw ourselves in, your much un-beloved wife as well!”

“Find the Will? How are we now, suddenly, going to find the Will? I don’t believe that it ever existed! We only have their word for it, this Lancaster and that other fellow. They are in conspiracy against us. God, I cannot believe that we are finished, not just like this, not after all we have been through and done.”

“How do you think how I feel?” snapped Roger. “Two killings and we have nothing but potential ruination to show for it. The only consolation, and much good it will afford either of us, is that we appear to have got away with it. I don’t think that anything gave me greater satisfaction than to see Victoria’s coffin lowered into the ground and the earth replaced over her, though it was the loss of a pretty little thing.”

“The World is full of pretty little things,” said Matthew. “Something I am missing out on.”

“And likely still to do so if we don’t find a solution. I am sure Lancaster has his suspicions. You don’t think he will seek an exhumation.”

“He is wasting his time with your wife if his does. Providing my instructions were carried out to the letter, all that will be revealed is that she died of natural causes, as will be the same with Ruth once the treatment is complete.”

“The instructions were carried out to the letter!”

“Good. At least we now know that the inheritance, or a good part of it, must come to one of us through our respective wives. That is what we planned for. We are not completely finished.”

“We do not have the time!” shrieked Roger.

“Won’t the City accept the situation as it is?”

“The money won’t be there! It’s a matter of confidence, and nothing will shake confidence like this news when it gets out.”

“What is to be done, then?” asked Matthew.

Ruth drew back, confused and scared. Perhaps the boldest of her characters would have gone in and confronted them, but her instinct was to leave the house that very minute. But that would be foolish if she left exactly as she was. And any moment Matthew might emerge and come out into the kitchen and discover her! She decided she would slip upstairs and pretend to go to bed. Once Roger had gone and she was sure that Matthew was asleep, she would gather together a few belongings and slip out of the house. Where she would then go was not yet of importance. She would not feel safe until she reached the street.

She was half way up the stairs when she heard her husband say, loudly, “what was that? Did you hear something?” She was not certain whether it was her he heard on the stairs, perhaps an imperceptible creak underfoot, or something else, but she then heard his footsteps crossing to the door. Without another moment’s thought she gathered up her skirts and dashed up the remaining stairs and into her room, locking the door behind her. The room looked eerie in the light of the two candles but she could pick out the face of her uncle’s image, seemingly paler than usual this evening, and his eyes staring at her from his place on the writing desk.

“How could he?” she said to herself, clenching her teeth and squeezing her hands into the tightest of grips. “How could he!” She turned upon her uncle. “This is all your fault!” she cried. “This is all your doing! What did you do with the Will, Uncle? What?”

In her fear and anger, she struck the top of the desk with her clenched fists using all the force she could muster, dislodging the painting which fell to the floor. At the same moment something hard struck her knee, and something else, soft, fell at her feet. Paying no heed to the noises on the stairs, or her husband calling her name, she slowly knelt down and picked it up. It was a small, neat, bundle of papers, tied with a green ribbon. The door handle was rattled and Matthew called out for her to let him in as she read the words, scripted, in the best copper-plate hand, “Last Will and Testament”.

“Break it down!” shouted Roger. Ruth was oblivious to them. She stood and went closer to one of the candles, pulling the ribbon untied as she did. It was the Will, and a copy of it. After all this time she had found the Will! She looked back at the desk where a slim, vertical, drawer had burst open. That had been why her uncle had gone to the library that day! It had been there, and she had taken it everywhere with her, for all that time!

Her whole body was trembling and she started to weep as she gently opened it up. What she then read filled her with confusion, guilt and unimaginable horror. It was as if she had made the most awful, far reaching, discovery in History. The strength seemed to gush from her body. The documents fell at her side as she struggled to reach the bed. The room had become darker and was spinning. The candles were fluttering and going out. Something huge and overwhelming was descending and about to smother her. The very last sound she heard was of the wood splintering as the door gave way, after which there was nothing.