

The RMS Story

Part 1

He heard the clock strike. Oh no! 5 o'clock already.

He was going to miss the train. He couldn't miss the train. This was what he'd been waiting for, for a very long time. He'd received the call from Roger completely out of the blue. He hadn't seen or heard from him for a least 10 years. Roger had said that he and few others from the group that used to hang around together after they had all finished at university, had decided to have what he called a Mid-life Adventure. He and six others had agreed to meet up at an old Cottage in Copston Magna which belonged to Simon's parents and wondered if he would like to join them. He nearly snatched Roger's hand off. He was so bored with life just now - Job was boring, girl friend was boring, what was happening to the promised glorious future he had anticipated after leaving uni with a decent degree. He didn't even ask Roger what they intended to do but he said he would explain everything when we all met up.

Bring old clothes and strong shoes was all that Roger had said and be at the cottage for 7 o'clock on Friday evening.

Right! Bag packed. Cash and cards in his wallet in the back pocket. Mobile in his jacket pocket. Ready.

He quickly made his way to the station and was just in time to catch the 5.30pm train to Copston Magna. It was due to arrive at 6.35 pm and the walk from the station to the cottage which was a few miles out of the village would take the final 25 minutes.

As he looked out of the window, watching the countryside flash by he tried to recall the members of the group he used to hang around with and wonder which ones would be there but mostly his thoughts were full of what possible mid-life adventure Roger had planned.

The train arrived on time, he jumped out onto the platform and started to make his way to the cottage.

He started to get a bit nervous as he walked up the pathway to the door and was shaking with excitement or was it fear, as he rang the bell.

What had he let himself in for?

Part 2

After what seemed like hours waiting at the door, it suddenly opened.

“Ben!, welcome you are just in time”, Simon exclaimed as he slapped him on the back and drew him inside. “Come on in and join the rest”.

Inside the gloomy cottage familiar faces smiled at him. Simon had always been one of the more affluent members of the group and was dressed in clothes that could only have come from a bespoke tailor. The cottage was quite old but immaculately furnished and ordained with brass objects and thick curtains. A mug of coffee appeared from somewhere and was placed in his hand.

Three others apart from Simon were there, lounging in comfortable chairs. Andy who had a first in history and was now a solicitor beckoned him to the sofa. “This venture sounds very intriguing, any idea what it's about?”.

“None whatsoever”, Ben replied, “but any change to the routine could be fun right at this moment!”.

Just at that moment there was a loud knock on the front door and the hum of conversation diminished to a murmur. Simon leapt to his feet and went to open the door. Nobody in the room could see who had arrived but from the muted greeting it was obvious that there was more than one person. The door closed with a thump and two young men were ushered in. John had been a particular friend of Ben's during their years at Uni and was looking fit and well. He was accompanied by Julian an exuberant character who, as always, wore bright colours and just a touch too many rings and accessories.

After greetings were exchanged between all those present Roger tapped the side of his mug with a spoon until people stopped talking and addressed the gathering.

“As some of you already know, I have recently received a somewhat strange bequest in the form of a legacy....”

Part 3

"However before I can address the legacy, let me welcome you to this lovely cottage and thank you for coming this week end. Looking around you'll notice there isn't the eight of us I indicated in my invite" As they gazed around the room Roger continued "Sebastian and Toby Greenaway will be joining us in the morning"

Ignoring the raised eyebrows and rolling eyes Roger continues "I can see you remember them and the awful pranks they got up to as identical twins" Nods of agreement all round.

The bequest was from Simon's Grandad Henry, we were very close. The friendship developed over time by the many hours spent together on the banks of the river Avon, enjoying our love of fishing. He told me during those times there was always something that deeply worried him about one of Simon's uni friends, but he didn't know which one. This had always puzzled me until i got this request from Henry's will."

Andy cried out "Get on with it!" Ignoring the outburst Roger continued. "apparently when we were at uni the twins joined Simon at his parents home in Rugby for the Easter holidays. Whilst there Henry saw one of the twins steal his daughter's diamond bracelet from her bedroom. Of course he was unable to tell if it was Seb or Toby. Knowing one would blame the other when confronted and the fear of causing friction amongst uni friends, Henry decided to keep it to himself."

"This is all well and good" declared Julian "but where does the mid life adventure come in?"

Roger explained "Well that brings me back to the legacy I mentioned. Henry bequested that I find out who stole the bracelet, so that he may rest in peace."

So who could help me better than my friends from the University of Warwick, I'm sorry about my little ruse but i'm glad you're here and I'm sure we'll have an interesting week-end."

Part 4

"So before Toby and Seth arrive we need to work out how we are going to solve the mystery" Roger continued. He obviously had a plan and started to issue instructions to get Toby and Seth as drunk as possible and to encourage them to talk about old times throughout the weekend in the hope that one or other of them would reveal what had really happened at Simon's parents' home.

But Ben was not really listening and certainly not joining in the excited discussion. Something was wrong here he thought. His job and his life had become boring but he was in fact a Chief Detective Inspector in the local Police force and had reached that exalted rank as a result of his work in solving a number of perplexing murder mysteries in recent years. Basically he realised his life had become boring simply because he had not had a decent mystery to grapple with for some time. And all his instincts told him that the mystery about the theft of the bracelet that Roger had described was not the real mystery here.

If the facts had been as Roger had summarised them why had Simon's Grandfather taken no action? Surely the theft of a diamond bracelet would have been too significant to simply dismiss? And surely the daughter (presumably Simon's mother?) would have missed it and therefore surely the police and insurance investigators would have been involved? What had been the outcome of the investigation? But the real mystery was why these historic events were being revived after so many years and why in these unusual circumstances?

His experience in investigations had taught Ben not to become too involved in events; it was better to sit back and observe developments and to take a detached view. And his experience told him now a number of things. Firstly Roger was acting. He was delivering some sort of prepared script rather than acting entirely naturally. Secondly Simon was finding it

difficult to conceal an amused smirk; whatever was going on he was in on it, maybe orchestrating it. Thirdly Andy the solicitor, and the brainiest of all of them, was not joining in the discussion but was very difficult to read. Either he was also in on things or his instincts were also aroused. Fourthly John and Julian were joining in the discussion with Roger in a very innocent way; surely they had no prior knowledge of whatever was going on. And fifthly why had Roger not called for Ben to make any contribution to the discussion? After all they all knew him to be a policeman?

Ben could not wait to get away and ring the station. He could pull a few strings and find out just what the police had known at the time about the theft which would surely help him to see things more clearly.

Part 5

Not that he had much chance to get away with Roger involved, drawing the extrovert Julian into the conversation with his undisguised theatrical leanings. This conversation was uncomfortable and not getting him any further clarity and it was clear that the only information he was going to get was from his other old friends in the room so he better have his detective instincts on high alert.

Firstly the confusion Simon and Roger were introducing over the use of ‘request, behest, legacy and bequest’. It only needed an inquest to complete the confusion! So to open the issue Ben excused himself from the increasingly uncomfortable conversation with Roger and Julian to connect up with Andy. His legal employment and experience would certainly reveal more of what was intended by the will.

“How are you doing Andy? Good to see you again after so many years”. The conversation meandered on for a while taking in family and skiing trips and the like before coming home to the issue in hand.

“So” said Ben in as casual a style as he could muster, “did you hear or see what was in Henry’s will?”

Andy took a moment, weighing up what to say and making sure he was not about to say something he later regretted but opted in the end to say that he had not seen the will and only heard from Roger what had been requested but that it all seemed to raise more questions than answers to him as well. It seemed like there was a meeting of hearts, a team formation, an understanding that could perhaps reveal the truth of this strange affair. Not a lot was said but they both knew instinctively that they were on the same side. Not a moment too soon though as Simon joined the pair to arrange accommodation details. What would the following day reveal as Sebastian and Toby were to arrive?

The following morning was dull and overcast but the anticipation was palpable.

Part 6

Ben awoke to the smell of bacon and eggs wafting throughout the cottage. Although described as a country cottage, Simon’s parents’ country retreat was early 20th century Arts and Craft pile, with seven bedrooms and three bathrooms upstairs, a large kitchen, pantry, parlour, study, hall and drawing room downstairs. It sat in an acre and a half of well-tended gardens with a stable block and garage, a gravel drive lead to the main village road. Despite his misgivings at the weekend’s bizarre beginning, Ben felt it was clearly time to make a move, so he got up, shaved, showered, dressed and made his way downstairs. As he reached the parlour, Roger was carrying in the last rack of toast to the dining table and shouted out “breakfast is served”. One by one the others appeared, bleary eyed, but were soon invigorated as they tucked-in to their hearty breakfast. It was several minutes later when Andy, wiping egg yolk from his chin, asked, “Where’s Julian?” Pushing back his chair, Simon said, “Probably suffering from last night, I’ll get him” and he bounded up the back staircase. The sound of breakfast and conversation was broken by Simon shouting, “I cannot wake him. He’s not moving. Ben get up here!” Ben rushed for the stairs, and everyone followed to see what had happened to Julian. He lay in bed, motionless, his face contorted, his rings and jewellery on his bedside table. John had been an army medic in a previous career and pushed his way forward to check Julian’s vital signs. He put two fingers on the carotid artery. Nothing. John placed his face next to Julian’s mouth checking for a breath. Nothing. “I’m afraid he’s gone” was his response, “I think he may have been poisoned”. The room was silent. Then after a few seconds, Andy looked around and said “hang on, where’s Roger? “They

looked at each other, assuming that he had come upstairs with them. But Roger wasn't in there. Ben took control, "Right" he exclaimed, "you stay with the body John, and don't touch anything. The rest of us, we'll find Roger". They hurried back downstairs. As they reached the hall, there was a knock at the door. It was Sebastian and Toby, just off the early train. Both were looking sweaty and flustered, and Seb was complaining bitterly that they had to walk from the railway station as they could not get a signal to phone for a taxi. Simultaneously everyone checked their phones to discover no bars. Little did they know that Copstan Magna was in the 2% of Britain that had no mobile phone cover. Simon welcomed the twins to house, whilst explaining Julian's demise. At that moment, Roger appeared from the study. "I tried to call for an ambulance for poor Julian, but the phone line is dead". Ben rounded on him and asked, "How did you know Julian would need an ambulance Roger?" Toby said it's not an ambulance we need. We need the police". Ben reminded them "I am the police. No one move..... "

Part 7

... Having uttered these hackneyed words, I realised that confrontation without knowledge would be futile. There were so many questions to be asked; about the Legacy, about the alleged theft of the jewellery, and now about the possible cause of death of Julian.

I apologised for sounding like an episode from an old Ealing film, and merely said that, since we appeared to have no 'phone signals, that Roger, who presumably knew the area, could inform the local doctor that we have had a sudden death, and request he calls to ascertain the cause thereof. Roger went reluctantly and we awaited his return. In the meantime I wanted to make a list of possible list of questions that needed to be asked –

To Roger – what was in the Legacy document, since although Andy said that he was not shown the details, it would appear that we only have Roger's word regarding the witness of the theft by Simon's grandad, and also my original question as to how he knew that Julian needed a doctor.

To John (who travelled here with Julian) - does he have any ideas about why he should have killed himself, or been a victim of murder.

To Simon – why did he think that his grandfather had asked Roger to carry out the investigation and not himself.

When I can eventually make a telephone call I need to contact the Station to see if there was any "cover-up" of the bracelet robbery.

However, in the midst of these musings, Roger arrived back with the local quack to examine the corpse, as Julian staggered down the stairs

Part 8

By now, breakfast long forgotten, all the guests were gathered in the hall, all looking aghast as Julian, looking pale and confused reach the bottom of the stairs.

"Thank Heavens, you're alright" exclaimed Simon, "what happened to you?"

Ben and Andy rushed forward to assist Julian, as he moved forward somewhat falteringly.

"I really don't know" he replied, slurring his words. "I had that last drink before retiring to bed and that's all I can recall until now."

The Doctor stood watching what was happening wondering if he had entered into an Agatha Christie play. "Give me room to examine the patient, please" he tried to make himself heard above the hubbub.

He sat Julian down on a sofa in the lounge and started making some basic checks whilst asking him some simple questions. Ben felt that now was the time to quietly advise him that he was a policeman. The Doctor confirmed to him that, in his brief examination, Julian would appear to have been drugged but he couldn't say how or when or even if it was self-induced. As he was perfectly normal over dinner Ben deduced that it must have been during the drinks later the previous evening.

The Doctor having another urgent call to make made his exit saying that he would see Julian again the following day.

Now, along with the other questions Ben needed to ask himself about his fellow guests was why John, the ex-army medic had pronounced Julian dead? Perhaps to avoid anyone else checking for signs of life.

Ben recalled that John and Julian had arrived together so was this a ploy hatched up between themselves. Julian would drug himself and John would tell everybody that he had died? Or did someone administer the drug to Julian to actually try to kill him but failed? But then why would John not recognise that he was still alive?

Ben decided that he needed to take somebody into his confidence and there was only one person in this group who he could now trust, Andy, who he summoned discreetly into the kitchen whilst the others were still gathered around Julian bombarding him with questions much to his annoyance.

Ben explained the situation to Andy who seemed both relieved and excited that he had been taken into the policeman's confidence.

"I need to solve a lot of the queries that are bouncing around in my mind" Ben said to Andy. "We have at least two problems to answer, what was Julian's poisoning all about and then the original purpose of the gathering.....to find who stole the diamond bracelet."

"Let's consider the possibilities one by one. First of all, Simon" Ben suggested, knowing that this may not be either easy or quick. However, the others were still discussing the Julian situation between themselves so at least they did have some time to ponder over things.

"He certainly doesn't need the money so why would he steal the bracelet from his own family? Yes, he went off the rails a bit when he was younger so that's probably why his Grandad Henry told Roger about the alleged theft rather than Simon himself." Ben continued.

Andy nodded in agreement and then said "So what about our host, Roger"

Part 9

'We don't know that much about what Roger did since uni – and right now he's not giving much away' Ben mused, 'There's something a bit too controlled about him. Yes, Henry told him about the bracelet and, yes, he was up to something in the study. That might just be a bit of a smokescreen, or something a bit more sinister. But no he doesn't seem to have a motive.'

'As for Julian and the overdose – there's something a bit too theatrical about it and the timing. Just a bit too – well, convenient. Could there have been a bit of a lover's tiff, John and Julian have been close but it was tense between them last night. And Roger was watching them very closely. One of them must have brought the drug with him – but then I wouldn't put it past Julian to make a grand gesture in front of the audience and particularly John.' Ben's thoughts drifted into silence.

'But' said Andy, 'Roger seemed to be in the know with that line about calling an ambulance. Was there some kind of triangle here, all designed to create a bit of a distraction.' He gazed out of the window.

'There's another thing', said Ben, slowly. 'After Roger came out of the study during all the drama over Julian, I slipped in to check it out. The rug was turned back and a floorboard lifted. There was a small package half out of sight. And wrapped in an old Coventry Post was a diamond bracelet. Roger must have been in the act of taking the bracelet when the alarm went up'

Andy was leaning against the desk and staring at his feet, silent for a moment, 'So he would have known it was there. The paper is a bit of a clue, it went out of print while we were at uni. But . . . maybe there's another explanation – what if he was putting it under the floorboard? Then dashed out of the study leaving it open for you to find. Probably guessed you'd be snooping around, and that would be a neat way to point a finger. At the culprit or the fall guy'

Now it was Ben's turn to be silent – he wondered if he was losing the plot. A lot of speculation not much evidence.

Something flickered in his memory – there had several cases of shoplifting from jewellers in the city. He'd taken an interest as he was revising for his criminology paper. He pulled the paper from his pocket and pressed it on the table – the headline read 'Necklace theft – twins acquitted. Anonymous tip-off'

'You don't think . . .' said Ben but he never finished.

There was the sound of crashing furniture and shouting. A voice yelled 'You think you'll get away with this, I've been covering up for you for years.

'With what I know, you wouldn't dare', came the second voice followed by thump and loud cry.

The door flew open and a bloodied figure staggered in . . .

Part 10

Simon fell into the room shouting “Get this lunatic off me” and as he wiped the blood from his nose Roger stormed in after him.

“Eh ! What's this all about,” said Ben coming between the two of them.

“Are you going to tell them or shall I,” Roger shouted.

The silence was filled with the others making their way into the room.

“What's going on?” they asked.

Roger calmed down and started to explain.

“The story I told you was only half true. Yes, Grandad Henry asked me to get the thief to admit stealing the bracelet but the thief was Simon. His mother had refused to buy him a car for his birthday so to spite her, Simon stole her favourite bracelet . Henry had seen Simon do it and was waiting to see what he was going to do before telling, but things moved too fast; the Police were called and before too long the insurance money was paid out. He didn't want Simon to have a police record so kept quiet. But now he wanted Simon to take responsibility for his crime.

I thought if we all got together and tried to blame the twins, Simon would feel guilty and confess but how wrong was I? I asked John and Julian if they would help.

On the first night I noticed Simon creeping into the study and moving the carpet before lifting a floorboard. He didn't see me watching. So I needed to have a look. I assumed that Simon had not sold the bracelet for fear of being caught, so had just hidden it away not really needing the money.

To create some time and a space I asked Julian to pretend to be drugged but as I passed the message onto John telling him that Julian had something 'wrong with his head', he thought I said 'pretend that Julian is Dead'. So announced him dead on inspection.

Julian realised he couldn't keep that up so arranged a resurrection. “

“Yes I think that was one of my better performances,” interspersed Julian in a theatrical voice.

“The Doctor was a friend from the village who I had convinced we were playing a Murder Mystery Game and asked him to play this small part telling him what to say.

With all the fuss going on upstairs I was able to search the Study where I found the bracelet but left it uncovered in my haste to get back to you all.

“I'll tell everybody about your affair, snarled Simon to Roger.

“You're too late.” replied Roger. “ It's been over a while now and my wife is fully aware of it.

”Well it's over to you now, Ben. What do we do now?

“We'll need to report it and see what the Police and Insurance Company want to do about it”.said Ben “
But I think I stick to murder in future it's not so messy”