

The Big Mistake and Other Stories

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The Penfriend

Trudy had argued with her parents again. She couldn't stand it¹ anymore. She was old enough to look after herself! Every time she wanted to go out it was the same old story².

They questioned her about where she was going, and whom she was going out with. She felt that her parents didn't trust her at all. Things were getting worse and worse.

Tony had invited her to a party on Saturday night. When she told her parents about it, they said she could go but ... she had to be home by ten o'clock.

Her friends knew that her parents treated her like a child, and they often teased³ her about it. Most of her friends had really liberal⁴ parents and could do what they liked. She sometimes thought about sharing a flat with her friend, Sharon, but she knew it was only a dream. The money she earned from babysitting wasn't even enough to buy herself some new clothes.

If she didn't go to the party with Tony, he'd probably never ask her out again. That's what usually happened. She got a lot of invitations but she always refused. It was much easier saying no than explaining why she had to be home by ten o'clock.

Trudy turned the music up louder and threw herself onto the bed. She thought she could hear her mother shouting at her to turn the music down, but she didn't care. She had lots of homework to do, but couldn't be bothered. Instead, she opened a magazine and started looking through it

¹ couldn't stand it: ne le supportait pas

² the same old story: la même histoire

³ teased: taquinaient

⁴ liberal: ouverts d'esprit

when something caught her eye⁵.

'Are you depressed⁶?' Do you feel as though your life is not, your own? You're not alone. Please write to me. Susan'

The address followed. Trudy was pleased to see she wasn't the only one with problems. She found it difficult to talk to her friends - they didn't understand her. Maybe this Susan could give her some advice.

She sat up and reached for a pen and paper. It took her half an hour to write a long letter. She wrote about her parents and her problems in communicating with them, and also about how she felt trapped⁷.

When she had finished the letter she felt much better. She posted it the next day.

A week later, she got a reply. It was a long letter from Susan. As she read it Trudy realized that they both had many things in common, apart from the fact that Susan had left school. The last paragraph made Trudy realize that Susan's problems were worse than hers.

... Things are getting unbearable⁸. They never speak to me, or ask my opinion about anything. I'm almost ignored. They don't really want me here. I heard them planning their holidays yesterday. They're thinking of going abroad and leaving me here on my own⁹. I don't know what to do ...

Write soon.

Susan

⁵ caught her eye: attira son attention

⁶ depressed: déprimé

⁷ trapped: piégé

⁸ unbearable: insupportable

⁹ on my own: tout(e) seul(e)

Trudy felt sorry for her new friend. She wrote back the same day,

Dear Susan,

Thanks for your letter, and for your advice. You were right. It's much better trying to talk to my parents, than shouting and slamming¹⁰ doors! I'm going to the party with Tony tonight but I have to be home by eleven. It's not exactly what I wanted but it's better than nothing. What about your problems?

Couldn't you go on holiday with them or speak to them? Tell them you don't want to stay at home on your own. By the way, have you got a boyfriend? Write soon and let me know.

Trudy

Things got better for Trudy. She learned how to explain things to her parents and they began to understand that she needed her freedom. At school she was doing well. She studied hard and her results were always good.

While things got better for Trudy, they got worse for Susan. The next letter made Trudy very sad.

Dear Trudy,

I'm happy to hear that you're now getting on with your parents. I wish I could say the same for myself. I mentioned going on holiday with them, but it was useless. They don't want me here - they want their freedom. After a terrible row¹¹, they sent me to my room. They say if I want to live here, I have to do what they say. I had a bad night - I'm so depressed. Nobody wants me. I haven't got a boyfriend - there was one but they frightened him away. I haven't seen or heard from him since. They're

¹⁰ slamming: claquer

¹¹ row : dispute

jealous! They don't even want me to write letters.

Please write soon.

Susan

Trudy wondered¹² what kind of parents the poor girl had. Trudy started writing a reply immediately.

Dear Susan,

I got your letter this morning. You're in a difficult situation but don't forget that adults often say things they don't mean. I'm sure they don't realize how much they are hurting you. Tell them you're not a child anymore - sending you to your room won't solve anything!

I can understand them not wanting you to go out at night (just like my parents!) but writing a few letters ... What harm can that do?

Things here are getting better. There's a concert next week and they say I can go. I think they're beginning to like Tony!

Bye for now.

Trudy

Susan's reply came after a few days.

Dear Trudy,

I'm pleased things are improving for you - the situation here is getting worse! They went out for the day yesterday and wanted me to stay at home on my own. When I told them I wanted to go out they locked me in my room. I can't stand it anymore - I feel really depressed. You're the only person I confide in. Now, they're refusing to post my letters so I give them to the boy who brings the newspapers. As for going out in the evenings,

¹² wondered : se demanda

they won't even let me out during the day. I used to meet a group of friends every Saturday but they stopped me going. Now I've lost contact with them all.

I know they wish I didn't exist, and sometimes, so do I.

Please write soon. Your letters are the only thing I look forward to¹³.

Susan

Trudy was shocked. Susan was being mentally tortured! She decided to show the letters to her parents.

'Oh, Trudy. You don't really believe everything that Susan writes, do you? It seems to me that she's got a very vivid imagination,' her father said.

'Write to her again,' her mother suggested. 'Invent something yourself. Play the same game.'

'Trudy wasn't convinced¹⁴. She wrote back the next day.

Dear Susan,

Are you on the phone? Why don't you call the police? What they're doing to you is a crime - they can't treat you like this!

It's your life - you've got to change it now! Please let me know what you decide to do.

Trudy

This time Susan took a while¹⁵ to reply. The contents of the letter didn't surprise Trudy.

Dear Trudy,

Thanks for your advice - I appreciate you're trying to help me.

I almost made the phone call you suggested but the more I thought

¹³ I look forward to: je me réjouis

¹⁴ convinced: convaincue

about it, the more I decided against it. I know you find it hard to understand, but even though they treat me so badly, I still love them. If I call the police, or social services, it'll create even more problems. Then, the police will arrest them. I'm not sure this is what I want. They're not too bad if I obey them ...

Please write soon.

Susan

Trudy began to think that her parents were right. If Susan was really desperate, she would ask for help. She wrote back but didn't mention Susan's problems. Instead, she wrote about herself and Tony, and about life in general. This time she enclosed a photograph, and asked for one in exchange.

When Trudy received Susan's reply, she knew she had to do something.

Dear Trudy,

Thanks for your photo. You sounded¹⁶ really happy in your letter.

Things are a bit different here.

A few days ago I wanted to go out for a walk, but they wouldn't let me. I was so annoyed¹⁷. I told them I was going to call the police. I've never seen them so angry, especially her. She slapped¹⁸ me, and told me to go up to my room. As I was going up the stairs I slipped¹⁹ and fell.

I was a bit bruised²⁰, but luckily didn't break any bones. I had to stay in bed for a day, but I'm much better now. I'm sure they didn't mean to do it -

¹⁵ a while: un moment

¹⁶ sounded: semblais

¹⁷ annoyed: fâchée, contrariée

¹⁸ she slapped me: elle m'a giflée

¹⁹ I slipped: j'ai glissé

²⁰ I was a bit bruised: j'avais quelques hématomes

but since then we haven't spoken. Maybe it's better, at least we don't argue!

Hope to hear from you soon.

Susan

Trudy took the letter to her parents and insisted on phoning the police. Her mother had an idea. Her friend Maggie was a social worker²¹. She phoned her and explained the situation.

Half an hour later, Maggie called at their house. She wanted to read the letters. When she'd seen them, she told Trudy that she had done well to call her. Maggie explained that a social worker would go and see Susan. She promised to keep Trudy informed²².

Trudy didn't write back to Susan. She preferred to wait and hear from Maggie. Besides, she didn't know if Susan wanted to write to her again, after what she had done.

One evening, Maggie came to visit them bringing them news of Susan. It seemed that Susan had suffered²³ physically²⁴ as well as mentally²⁵. At first, Susan would not admit that she had been treated badly. When she saw the letters she had sent Trudy, she agreed to tell the truth. After a brief stay in hospital, the social worker found her somewhere to live. She had given a letter to Maggie, for Trudy.

Dear Trudy,

At first I was upset²⁶ when I found out that you'd contacted the social services²⁷. Now I understand why you did it. I'm very happy here; the

²¹ social worker: assistante sociale

²² keep Trudy informed: tenir Trudy informée

²³ suffered: souffert

²⁴ physically: physiquement

²⁵ mentally: mentalement

²⁶ upset: contrariée, fâchée, inquiète

²⁷ social services: services sociaux

people I live with are very friendly and kind.

I live quite near to you now— why don't you come and see me?

Hope to see you soon.

Susan

A few days later, she took the train down to Hampton and then took a taxi to the address on the letter. A young girl answered the door. 'Susan's in the living room. She's waiting for you...' When Trudy walked into the room, she thought there had been a mistake. An old woman was sitting in an armchair reading a book. Trudy turned to leave, but the woman called her.

'You're Trudy, aren't you? I'm Susan,' she said, putting down her book.

'Susan?' Trudy answered perplexed²⁸. 'I thought...'

'Yes, I know. You thought you were writing to a young girl who had problems with her parents. Now you've discovered I'm an old woman who had problems with her son and wife.'

'Why didn't you tell me?' she asked.

'Because you didn't ask me.' Susan replied, laughing. 'I didn't lie to you, I just didn't mention a few details.'

'Yes, but why?'

'If you had known I was old enough to be your grandmother, would you have written to me?' Susan asked.

'I suppose not!' Trudy admitted.

'I enjoyed your letters so much. Young people are so full of life but think they're the only ones with problems... God only knows how many people there are in my situation. I was forced to live with a son who only wanted me for my pension. After all I've done for him!'

²⁸ perplexed: perplexe

Susan and Trudy talked for a while. It was as though they had known each other for years.

As Trudy left the house she could see Susan in the garden chatting away²⁹ happily to her new friends. She decided to write to her the next day.

²⁹ chatting away: bavardant

The Big mistake

Ian James was really happy. The school year had finished and the results of his exams were better than expected. Now, after all those weeks of hard work, he was going on holiday.

Fortunately, his rich uncle, Uncle Patrick, hadn't forgotten his promise. Ian had spoken to him on the phone two nights before — everything was planned. Uncle Patrick had left for France so his house by the sea was empty. He'd left the fridge³⁰ full of food and drink and the key was under the doormat³¹.

So Ian could use the house until his uncle returned. Paula, his girlfriend was coming to stay with him the next day and they would be able to spend some time together.

He stared through the train window watching the houses, fields and people go by. The train began to slow down as it came into Bridgeview Station.

The fat woman that sat opposite him was still asleep. The train stopped suddenly. 'Ooh,' she exclaimed, standing up and putting her head out of the window. 'It's Bridgeview.' She picked up her handbag and rushed to the door. 'It's lucky I woke up, otherwise I would have gone on to Littlepoint!'

So Ian knew he had to get off the train at the next station.

He looked at his watch as the train left the station. Almost six o'clock. He was hungry and started thinking about all the food in the fridge that was waiting for him.

The scenery changed. In the distance he could see the sea and a few people on the beach. Ian had never been to his uncle's house before. He hadn't

³⁰ fridge: frigo

³¹ doormat: paillason

realized that he lived so close to the sea — he hoped it wasn't too polluted³².

He could smell the salty air of the sea.

The train hooted³³ as it approached the station of Littlepoint.

Ian grabbed his suitcase and got off the train. Luckily, there was a taxi free. He put his case in the boot³⁴ and asked the driver to take him to Cliffview. 'What number?' the driver asked.

'Twenty eight,' Ian replied.

It didn't take long to get there. The taxi stopped outside the largest house in the street.

Ian paid the taxi driver and picked up his case. As he walked up the path, he wondered who had planted all the flowers in the garden. He didn't think his uncle was the type to be interested in gardening. He continued up the path, and stopped at the door. He lifted up the doormat. The key was exactly where his Uncle Patrick had promised.

He opened the door and entered the hall, closing the door behind him. He left his suitcase by the stairs, walked through the hallway and into the lounge³⁵.

There were two long sofas in one corner of the room and a table and chairs occupied the centre. The floor was covered by a thick brown carpet and beige curtains hung at the windows.

There was an enormous cabinet³⁶ containing a lot of different ornaments³⁷, and a vase of flowers on the table.

Ian explored³⁸ the rest of the ground floor. There was a bathroom, a dining room, a small study and a large kitchen.

Ian carried his suitcase upstairs. There were three bedrooms and a

³² polluted: pollué

³³ hooted: klaxonna

³⁴ boot: coffre

³⁵ lounge: living room

³⁶ cabinet: vitrine

³⁷ ornaments: objets décoratifs

bathroom. He chose the biggest room and threw his case on the bed. He was too tired to unpack it. He went into the bathroom and had a quick shower. He left the towels on the floor and went to get dressed. He emptied his case, throwing his clothes on the chair. He would hang them up in the wardrobe³⁹ later. Now he was hungry so he went downstairs to get some food. He opened the fridge — what a disappointment! There were two boiled potatoes, some ham and a bottle of milk. It wasn't much, but Ian had no choice. He ate his meal in the lounge, in front of the television.

When he had finished he took the dishes into the kitchen and threw them into the sink⁴⁰. He heard the plate break. When he returned to the lounge, his favourite quiz show was starting. He lay down on the sofa to watch television. After a while, his eyes felt heavy. He was tired. He turned off the television and went upstairs to bed.

He had been asleep for about an hour, when he was awoken by a loud noise. A window being smashed⁴¹! He heard the glass fall to the floor. He sat up in bed and switched on the bedside lamp. He could hear voices from downstairs. Burglars!

He sat still for a moment, wondering⁴² what to do. The telephone was downstairs so he couldn't call for help. Should he go downstairs and face them? No ... They may be dangerous.

He heard them walking through the hallway, and turning on a light switch. Ian got out of bed and crept⁴³ onto the landing⁴⁴.

He could hear the thieves talking — he listened to what they were saying. 'Where did you bury⁴⁵ him?'

³⁸ explored: explora

³⁹ wardrobe: garde-robe

⁴⁰ sink : évier

⁴¹ smashed: fracassé

⁴² wondering: se demandant

⁴³ crept: se faufila

⁴⁴ landing: palier

⁴⁵ bury: enterrer

'I think it's better if you don't know. Don't worry, nobody will ever find him.'

'Oh God, I didn't mean to do it!'

Ian trembled. The thieves had killed someone and buried the body.

He looked down the stairs and saw the two men. One of them was sitting on the sofa, the other stood leaning against the table. Both were wearing black suits. The man near the table had a red stain⁴⁶ on his white shirt.

Blood!?

Ian walked as quietly as possible into the bedroom. He closed the door behind him. How could he escape?

He thought of a film that he had once seen. A man had escaped from a burning house by using the bed sheets as a rope⁴⁷. Ian ran to the window. He looked down. It was a long drop⁴⁸. There was no grass beneath him, just concrete⁴⁹.

Suddenly the voices were nearer. They were coming up the stairs. Ian shook with fear. He didn't know where to hide. He looked around the room desperately. The wardrobe! He ran to it, climbed inside, and pulled the door shut.

The voices and footsteps approached. Someone opened the bedroom door — Ian stopped breathing. One of the men spoke.

'I told you. There's nobody here. Look for yourself.'

They closed the door and continued along the landing. Ian jumped out of the wardrobe and ran to the door — he opened it slowly.

He checked that the landing was empty. The voices were coming from one of the larger bedrooms — they were looking for money!

⁴⁶ stain : tache

⁴⁷ rope : corde

⁴⁸ drop : dénivelé, hauteur

⁴⁹ concrete: béton

Ian ran quickly out of the room and down the stairs — he had to call the police! He picked up the telephone and dialed 999. The phone was dead⁵⁰. The murderers had cut the outside wires⁵¹.

How could he call for help? He looked down at his bare feet⁵². His slippers⁵³ were upstairs. So were his clothes. He couldn't go out into the cold night in his pyjamas!

The light on the landing suddenly came on. He could hear someone coming down the stairs. Ian threw himself onto the floor, behind the table. One of the men had gone into the kitchen. He heard him opening a cupboard, and pouring out a glass of water.

He had an idea. Now that the men had separated, maybe he could face them on his own. He moved as quietly as possible and hid behind the kitchen door. The man finished his drink and walked towards the hall. Ian was ready. Just as the man put his foot in the doorway, Ian pushed the door as hard as he could. The man shouted with pain and fell onto the floor. Ian quickly closed the door and turned the key.

He knew that the man's cries would soon be heard by his accomplice⁵⁴ so he had to try and stop the other one. He didn't have time to think. The man was coming down the stairs.

Ian crouched down⁵⁵ behind a cupboard. It was dark and he couldn't be seen. The man lost his balance and fell down the last few steps. Ian unplugged⁵⁶ the telephone and ran quickly to where the man lay. He was face down and not fully conscious⁵⁷. Using the telephone wire, Ian tied the man's hands behind his back.

⁵⁰ the phone was dead: le téléphone n'allait plus

⁵¹ wires: fils

⁵² bare feet: pieds nus

⁵³ slippers: pantoufles

⁵⁴ accomplice: complice

⁵⁵ crouched down: s'accroupit

⁵⁶ unplugged: débrancha

⁵⁷ conscious: conscient

'Who are you? What do you want?' the man cried.

Ian didn't answer and ran up the stairs to his bedroom. He found his slippers and his dressing gown⁵⁸. Now he had to run and get help.

He jumped over the man at the bottom of the stairs, ignoring his cries, and ran towards the front door. He threw it open and screamed with fright!

There before him was the man that he'd locked in the kitchen!

Blood was dripping from his nose. The man took hold of Ian's arms and put them behind his back — he was very strong. Ian couldn't escape!

'You little hooligan! You forgot about the back door in the kitchen, didn't you?'

He pushed Ian onto the sofa.

'Bill, untie me!'

The man that Ian had left at the bottom of the stairs stood up and walked towards them. The telephone hung from the wire behind his back.

'Who's this?' he asked.

'I don't know, but I'm going to teach him a lesson!'

He put his hand to the inside pocket of his jacket. He was looking for his gun!

'Damn, I must have left it in the car,' the man said. He went out of the front door.

Ian shook with fear. He looked around him. He had no chance of escaping. The men were too big and too strong. Maybe he could convince them to let him go.

'Listen,' he said, 'I've got some money upstairs in my case. You can have it if you let me go. I won't tell anyone!'

'What?' the man laughed. 'You're joking⁵⁹!'

⁵⁸ dressing gown: peignoir

⁵⁹ you're joking: tu rigoles

The other man came back in. He was holding a small black object. Ian closed his eyes. It was the end.

'No, no!' he begged⁶⁰.

'Sorry. You deserve it,' came the reply.

Ian waited, his eyes still closed tightly⁶¹. 'Hello, police? I've just found a thief in my house. Yes, he's here in front of me.'

Ian opened his eyes in amazement⁶². The little black object was a telephone!

'Your house!' he cried. They didn't answer him.

'The address? Twenty eight, Cliffview. Yes, he's under control. We'll wait.'

'What do you mean, your house? This is my uncle's house!'

'Try telling that to the police!'

Ian tried to convince them that he was telling the truth. They wouldn't listen.

A few minutes later, a police car arrived. Ian was arrested.

At the police station he was questioned but nobody would believe him. He was allowed to phone his uncle.

'Talk to them, Uncle Patrick. Tell them that the house is yours!'

His uncle's reply shocked him.

'I can't!' Uncle Patrick replied. 'It isn't my house. Mine is number twenty six!'

Uncle Patrick spoke to the police and explained the situation. Ian had made a terrible mistake!

'What about the man they buried? I heard them talking about the murder⁶³!', he said to the policeman.

⁶⁰ begged: supplia

⁶¹ tightly: fermement

⁶² in amazement: avec étonnement

⁶³ murder : meurtre

The two men looked at each other. 'What man?' the policeman asked.

'That wasn't a man! It was a dog. We hit it with the car coming back from the restaurant. It didn't have a collar, it was a stray⁶⁴. What else could I do?'

'And the blood on your shirt?'

'That's not blood!' the policeman replied. 'It's wine. I can smell it from here.'

Ian felt stupid. He had to stay in the station while the police and one of the men went to check that nothing had been stolen. When they returned, they had Ian's suitcase with them. It was almost eight o'clock in the morning. Ian was not charged⁶⁵, and was free to go. He apologized⁶⁶ to the two men, and was accompanied to his uncle's house. This time, the right one!

Ian was left in the doorway of twenty six, Cliffview. He'd had a bad night, and he was tired. He found the door key under the mat. There was a letter under the door. He bent to pick it up. It was from Paula. It read:

After three hours on the train, I expected to find you at home. Don't bother phoning — I don't want to speak to you!

Ian had some explaining to do.

⁶⁴ stray: chien errant

⁶⁵ charged: inculpé

⁶⁶ apologized: s'excusa

Marge and Olive

Marge and Olive were two sisters who had lived together all their lives. They were both over seventy. When their father died leaving them the house and some money, it was Olive who was the boss. She was a little older than Marge and had a very bad temper. Marge was afraid of her, and soon learnt to do everything she was told to do. Olive did the shopping, paid the electricity, gas and water bills, and decided how to spend their money. Marge did the cleaning, the cooking and decided when to put the rubbish out to be collected.

Marge hadn't been shopping for a long time; she couldn't walk far because of her arthritis⁶⁷. Besides, it wasn't necessary for her to go shopping — Olive was happy to go on her own.

Marge hated shopping days. Olive arrived home carrying the heavy bags — always in a terrible mood⁶⁸ — and ordered Marge to make her a cup of tea. Then Marge would go and get Olive's slippers⁶⁹. Olive would then start complaining and say that Marge was lucky to have someone to do the shopping for her.

Marge nodded⁷⁰ silently. She knew it was better not to argue with Olive. As Marge unpacked the shopping, putting everything in the cupboards, Olive talked about the price of things. Especially clothes. They were so expensive! That is why they had to share them, or more exactly, Marge would have Olive's old clothes.

Marge often asked her sister to buy her certain foods she liked. Olive would always refuse, because she couldn't eat these things herself. Cheese, milk and yoghurt would give her terrible stomach pains. So Marge was left

⁶⁷ arthritis: arthrite

⁶⁸ in a terrible mood: d'humeur terrible

⁶⁹ slippers: pantoufles

without.

Marge had a really difficult time when Olive was ill. She would often have to get out of bed, late at night, to give Olive a tablet for her angina⁷¹. Sometimes, Olive would wake her up just because she wanted a cup of tea. Marge would always obey. She didn't have the courage to refuse, and by now, she was used to being treated badly. Besides, she had a secret that helped her to put up with⁷² Olive. Alfred was back!

When Marge was much younger, Alfred had been her boyfriend, and they had planned to get married. Olive was really jealous and had done everything possible to separate the two. When she discovered that Alfred had been accused of being a deserter⁷³ during the Second World War, she had told her father. Alfred had tried to explain that it had all been a mistake, but their father would not listen. He sent Alfred away, and ordered Marge not to see him again. Alfred left the town and later Marge heard that he had married someone else. It took her a long time to forget him. She hated Olive for this and would never forgive her.

Now, after all these years, Alfred had moved back into town. He had lost his wife a few years before, and had written to Marge asking her to forgive him. He was aware of the terrible life that Marge had with her domineering⁷⁴ sister, and he felt responsible. In his first letter he told Marge how he wished that he had had the courage to explain to her father, instead of leaving her. He had been a coward⁷⁵.

Marge was so pleased to receive his letter, that she forgave him instantly. She wrote back and they began to write regularly. When Olive found out

⁷⁰ nodded: acquiesçait

⁷¹ angina: angine de poitrine (maladie du coeur)

⁷² put up with: tolérer

⁷³ deserter: déserteur

⁷⁴ domineering: autoritaire

⁷⁵ coward: lâche

that Alfred had returned she tried to stop Marge writing to him. Marge ignored her and even managed to meet Alfred on the days when Olive went shopping. They discovered that, despite their age, and the years that had passed, there was still something special between them. Marge knew that if Olive discovered their meetings, she would never see Alfred again. The thought of this was terrible. Since Alfred had returned she had begun to live again. They talked about lost friends, the dance halls that they had danced in, and the wonderful music of the old days. Sometimes they would sing together. Alfred would often bring her chocolates, sweets and even the cream and yoghurt she adored. For the first time after so many years, Marge felt wanted. It was the only thing that helped her through the day, and she wasn't prepared to lose Alfred again.

Even though they met occasionally, they decided that it was better to keep writing to each other. Olive would be suspicious if Marge stopped receiving letters. She'd miss them, too. Olive would always read Marge's letters. She would say she had a headache, and that she would go upstairs to lie down⁷⁶. But Marge knew it was just an excuse. She had tried hiding them but it was no use. Olive still found them.

At their last meeting, Alfred had asked her to marry him. She had accepted, but what about Olive? Marge had thought about leaving home, but this meant that she'd lose all her money. Olive kept the bank books in her name. No, it was Olive that would have to go!

The next evening, Marge and Alfred met at the same time, at the same place. They talked about Olive and Alfred told Marge about a plan that would finally solve everything. Marge listened carefully. Alfred was a genius⁷⁷! She was sure that the plan would work, and soon they would be

⁷⁶ lie down: se coucher

⁷⁷ genius: génie

free. Alfred gave her a small tin⁷⁸ and a letter. He told her to be very careful, and to make sure that Olive did not find them. Marge hid them in her handbag. She could not wait, so they decided to carry out the plan the very next day.

Marge slept well that night. When Olive came downstairs for breakfast, she sang cheerfully to herself. Olive told her to shut up immediately, and complained that her tea was cold.

'The postman has already been,' Marge said, as she fried the eggs.

'So what?' Olive answered.

'There was just one letter — for me,' Marge replied.

Olive smiled. Good, she thought. Something for her to read later on.

Marge put the fried egg on Olive's plate.

'What shall we have for lunch today?' Marge asked.

'This egg is overcooked⁷⁹. Give me the other one!' Olive ordered.

Marge obeyed, and said once again, 'What shall we ... '

'I heard you the first time. I'm not deaf⁸⁰!'

Marge jumped. She always did when Olive shouted.

'Meatloaf!' Olive continued. 'We always have meatloaf on Tuesday. And don't ask stupid questions!'

Marge nodded. They carried on eating their breakfast in silence.

Afterwards, Olive went into the garden to read the newspaper. Marge did her housework, then began to prepare the meatloaf. When she'd mixed the ingredients together, she went to her handbag and found the small tin. She opened it and added the contents to the mixture. She mixed it in quickly, and hid the empty tin in the washing machine. Then she put the meatloaf in the oven to cook, and tried not to act suspiciously.

⁷⁸ tin: boîte de conserve

⁷⁹ overcooked: trop cuit

When the meatloaf was cooked, Marge sniffed⁸¹ at it. She could not smell anything unusual. She was not hungry though. She told Olive that she had a headache, and that she did not want to eat. Olive was not particularly worried and started eating. Marge watched her from behind the kitchen door. That day, Olive ate more than usual.

After lunch, Marge did the washing up and Olive went to her room to lie down. Marge knew that she would read the letter. Things were going exactly as planned.

Olive rushed into Marge's room, found the letter, then returned to her own room to read it.

Dear Marge,

The small tin that you found at the bottom of your garden is a very strong poison that I bought for the mice in my cellar⁸². You were right, my dear, it's the only way to get rid of⁸³ Olive.

Put it in the meatloaf that you mentioned.

She won't notice the taste or smell! The effect is almost immediate. Please be patient,

All my love

Alfred

Olive read the letter quickly, then she read it again, stopping at the word — poison. She threw the letter down, and suddenly felt hot. An unbearable⁸⁴ pain began in her stomach, and she cried out.

'Oh, my God! I've been poisoned. Help!'

Marge heard her from downstairs. She turned the volume of the radio up

⁸⁰ deaf : sourde

⁸¹ sniffed: renifla

⁸² cellar: cave

⁸³ get rid of: se débarrasser de

⁸⁴ unbearable: insupportable

and ignored her.

The pain got worse and Olive fell to the floor, trying to breathe. How long would it take? Was she dying? Yes, the letter had said that the poison was very strong! She lay on the carpet waiting for someone to help her. She felt another pain, much stronger than the other, in her chest⁸⁵. Her left arm ached. It was her heart. She was having an attack. Where were her tablets? She called for Marge.

Marge sang to herself and waited. After a while, she could no longer hear Olive calling for her. She picked up the telephone and called for an ambulance.

When it arrived, Olive was dead. Marge cried as they took her away, but she cried tears of joy. The doctor signed the death certificate⁸⁶. Olive had died of a heart attack; there was no mention of poison.

Alfred and Marge were married a few months after Olive's death. They often talked about how they got rid of Olive, especially after their bedtime drink. The small tin of poison was given a place on the kitchen shelf, there its label⁸⁷ could be seen by all.

It read, 'Concentrated⁸⁸ Powdered Milk'.

⁸⁵ chest: poitrine

⁸⁶ death certificate: certificat de décès

⁸⁷ label : étiquette

⁸⁸ concentrated: concentré

Simpson's Buried Treasure

Nicholas walked slowly down the narrow country road holding the dirty piece of paper tightly in his hand. In the distance he could see Buster standing against the wall, smoking a cigarette. Nicholas was frightened. He knew he was in Buster's territory^① and that Buster would probably hit him for being there. As usual, Buster was not alone. Lewis and Driscoll, two of his closest friends, stood waiting for orders. Nicholas knew he was in trouble. Buster always wanted to show that he was the boss.

'Look, there's Rabbit!'

Nicholas stopped suddenly as the three boys ran towards him.

Buster threw down his cigarette. He blew the last of the smoke into Nicholas's face.

'Are you deaf, or just stupid, eh Rabbit?'

Nicholas coughed as the disgusting^② smoke filled his nostrils^③.

He felt a sudden blow^④ to the side of his face. His cheek hurt and he wanted to cry but he made himself stop. 'You're trespassing^⑤, Rabbit!' Driscoll continued. 'I've told you to keep away from here.'

The boys surrounded him, and a heavy hand pushed him to the ground. Nicholas covered his head with his arms and closed his eyes, waiting for the blows.

'What's this?'

'Looks like a map.'

① territory: territoire

② disgusting: dégoûtant

③ nostrils: narines

④ blow: souffler

⑤ trespassing: pénétrer illégalement dans une propriété privée

'That's old Simpson's garden!'

'Yeah! But what are all those crosses for?'

Nicholas opened his eyes and lifted his head. Buster was holding the piece of paper he had dropped.

'Hey Rabbit! Whose map is this? What's it for?' Buster grabbed Nicholas by the arm, and pulled him up. Nicholas kept his head down and didn't answer.

'Come on, tell me before I...!' Buster pushed Nicholas against the wall.

'Okay, okay! It's a map of Simpson's garden,' he answered reluctantly^①.

'I can see that, you idiot^②. What are you doing with it?' Once again Nicholas refused to speak. The three bullies^③ stood over him, and he knew that they were waiting for an answer.

'It's a map of Simpson's buried treasure, but it's only a legend. Nobody believes that it really exists,' he said.

'Ah, no. Then where were you going;' Lewis replied.

'Yeah! That's why you had the nerve^④ to pass through here! You're hoping to find the treasure yourself.

'I've heard about that treasure,' added Driscoll. 'They say that old Simpson buried a fortune in his garden before he died.'

'Oh, no! It's only a legend. Nobody really believes that story.' Another blow made Nicholas fall to the ground. His arm ached.

'Shut up! I'll be the judge of that!' Buster said, smiling to the others. 'Now, get lost^⑤!'

① reluctantly: avec réticence

② idiot: idiot

③ bullies: maltraiter, harceler

④ nerve: le cran, le courage

⑤ get lost: dégage, tire-toi

Nicholas stood up and moved away. 'Go on, run!' Lewis yelled^①, laughing. Nicholas ran as fast as he could. Laughter and cries of 'run rabbit run' came from behind him.

Once he'd turned the corner, he stopped to catch his breath, and waited. As expected, the three boys were walking towards old Simpson's house chatting together excitedly. They didn't know that Nicholas was following them!

When the small group entered the garden, Nicholas crept into a large hole in the hedge^② of the house next door. Here, he could watch the boys without the risk of being discovered.

'Oh, no!' Buster exclaimed, his face falling. The garden was really overgrown with grass and weeds^③ everywhere.

'How can we dig for treasure if we can't see where we are digging?' Lewis asked, kicking at some weeds.

'We'll have to cut the grass first,' Buster announced. 'You two go and get some gardening tools and a lawn mower^④. Don't forget the spades^⑤.'

Lewis and Driscoll disappeared and left Buster alone in the garden. Nicholas knelt down to rest his tired legs, and prepared himself for a long wait. The wind blew through the hedge, and a large grey cloud blocked out the last rays of the sun. He looked up and realized that it was going to rain.

'Come on!' Buster exclaimed, as the two boys struggled^⑥ through the wooden gate with their equipment. 'I'll start mowing, you two can clear up^⑦ the grass,' he ordered, pushing the heavy mower onto the untidy lawn.

① yell: crier

② hedge: la clôture

③ weeds: les herbes

④ lawn mower: la tondeuse

⑤ spades: des pelles

⑥ struggled: avoir du mal à

⑦ clear up: nettoyer

Nicholas watched patiently as the bullies worked. The rhythmic sound of the lawn mower, and the sweet smell of freshly cut grass was quite pleasant.

The first drops of rain made them work faster, and they hardly spoke as they carried on working.

'Leave the grass over there in the corner.' Buster shouted over the noise of the howling^① wind. 'Hurry up! There's going to be a storm.'

He had hardly finished the sentence, when a loud noise startled^② all four of them — thunder^③! Large drops of rain fell heavily, soaking them to the skin instantly. All except Nicholas. The thick hedge provided an excellent shelter^④, and he enjoyed watching the three boys struggling with their spades, and following the instructions on the map.

'Have you found anything?' Lewis shouted, wiping^⑤ his face with a damp^⑥ sleeve.

'No! What about you, Driscoll?' Buster replied.

'Nothing, and I've dug three holes already! I'm really wet!'

'Me too!'

The wet earth became heavier by the minute and Buster was getting tired.

'This stupid spade won't come out of the mud,' he cried. He was getting angrier and angrier. To the relief^⑦ of his friends, he shouted, 'Let's get out of here! It's obvious^⑧ that the treasure doesn't exist!'

-
- ① howling: hurlant
 - ② startle: faire sursauter
 - ③ thunder: le tonnerre
 - ④ shelter: l'abris
 - ⑤ wiping: essuyant
 - ⑥ damp: trempé
 - ⑦ relief: soulagement
 - ⑧ obvious: évident

As he turned to go, he stumbled^① over one of the holes that he'd dug.
'Aaargh!'

Nicholas covered his mouth with his hand. The sight of Buster lying on the ground with his face covered with mud was more than he'd expected. He started laughing uncontrollably. He knew that he couldn't be heard above the noise of the rain.

He watched as the boys, arguing amongst themselves, collected up their tools, and left the garden. Nicholas couldn't stop laughing.

As suddenly as it had started, the rain stopped. Nicholas crawled^② out of his hiding place. He looked round the garden. It was wet, but very tidy. In his haste, Buster had forgotten his spade and had left it sticking out of the ground. Nicholas jumped over the hedge to get it, then ran to the front of the house and waited.

Finally, the grey clouds disappeared, and the sun came out. A blue car which Nicholas recognized immediately, approached slowly, stopping outside old Simpson's house. The driver, a tall, smart woman with red hair, stepped out of the car and walked towards him.

'Nicholas', she called, looking at the muddy spade and smiling. 'Don't tell me that you've already done that job we talked about? You haven't tidied up the garden already, have you?'

'Yes, Miss Simpson,' Nicholas replied, wiping his forehead and sighing^③. The woman walked around to the back of the garden.

'Good Lord! What a wonderful job you've done! And in the rain, too. You poor thing,' she continued, putting a hand on his shoulder. 'And you've even

① stumbled: trébucher

② crawled: ramper

③ sigh: soupirer

dug the holes for my rose bushes, exactly where I wanted them!' she exclaimed.

Without hesitation she put her hand into her shoulder bag, and pulled out a small purse.

'Let me pay you at once. I didn't expect you to do such a good job. And all on your own, too!'

She took out one, two, then three £5 notes from her purse. Nicholas gasped^①.

'But Miss Simpson ... ' he pretended to be surprised.

'Oh, no. I insist. Take it, you've done a very good job.'

Thanking her again and again, Nicholas accepted the money and turned to go home. He knew that he would have to avoid^② Buster for a while. Fortunately for him, a bad cold would keep Buster out my the way for a long time.

^① gasp: pousser un cri de surprise

^② avoid: éviter

