

## A Mother's Revenge?

*Dear Mr Cartwright*

*I trust this communication finds you.*

*I am the appointed executor of the late Mrs R M Jones, who was, as I understand it, your biological mother.*

*Her will directed that all her material possessions be auctioned and that the monies so obtained be donated to the Salvation Army. The will also instructed that the remaining possessions be destroyed.*

*Amongst those to be destroyed I discovered the enclosed envelope addressed to you at this address. You will note that on the obverse she noted, 'My son's last known address'. I therefore took the liberty of not destroying this document but forwarding it to you.*

*If you are in receipt of this communication kindly acknowledge receipt.*

*Yours faithfully*

*William J O'Hara (Dip. D.E.P), Director, Estates and Testamentary Services*

The envelope was addressed to *Mr Jonathon Cartwright*. I have always been known as Jon, only my mother called me Jonathon.

*Strange*, I thought, *that she would have died so relatively young.*

I slit open the enclosed envelope and drew out a picture.

*What the hell . . .* was the first thought that crossed my mind. This was obviously the bottom half of a photo that had been cut in two. *What happened to the top half? Why was it cut?* The questions rolled, one into the other.

Sometimes when the mind tries to make sense of something it conflates reality, dreams and memory as it struggles to relate what it's presented with to experience. So mine went back to the late forties, when as boy, I devoured the weekly Champion. I remembered a serialised mystery around the bottom half of photo and the search for the missing top. Was this photo a similarly deliberate ploy by her?

My mother had had an extremely spiteful streak, the very streak that made me walk out of her life forever, or so I thought. Was she now, unwittingly, having a last go at me from beyond the grave?

My first instinct was to tear up the picture and throw it away. But then, she would have won at that point.

The only person who could still possibly shed any light on the picture was my mother's father's sister – does that make her my great Aunt? As far as I knew she would be the only surviving relative. I ran a quick age check through my brain. Maiden Aunt Jane came from a line where the females lived to ripe old ages. I was thirty-five, that means my mother was fifty-six. As the elder sister of my grandpa that would put Aunt Jane around eight-five.

I was sure that she would never have budged from her birth town so, on a whim, I caught a train to Palmerston.

I stood before her old house for a long time, musing about the past, before knocking on the door.

A strange face opened it, "Hello son, how can I help?"

"Good day, I was looking for Mrs Eleanor Watson."

He gave a rueful smile, "Son you've missed her by a few weeks. She died last month."

"Shucks." I paused for a while before asking, "Do you know what happened to her things?"

"Oh yes, they were all auctioned off. Different folks bought the larger things but many of her belongings were bought by old Britain. He deals in antiques, you know. Makes quite a good living by selling other people's treasures."

"Where can I find him?"

"He has a shop in the main street; it's called Britain's Antiques."

"Thanks Pop, you've been a great help," I said, shaking his hand.

"Glad to have been of assistance son."

Britain's was crammed from the back to the front and from the floor to the ceiling with bric-a-brac.

"Good morning, looking for anything in particular?"

"Yes. I believe that you purchased some of Mrs Watson's things?"

"I did indeed, were you looking for something in particular?"

"As a matter of fact yes. Did your purchases include any photographs or notebooks?"

"Yes, a photo album. Would you like to see it? It may be quite valuable."

"Yes please."

He opened a drawer of his desk and drew out an album that I remembered from many years ago.

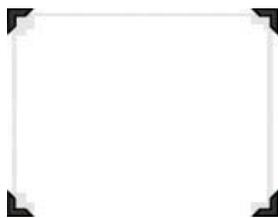
"I'm looking for something in particular, may I peruse it?"

"Of course, use that table over there."

"Thanks."

I sat down and began paging through the album with an unusual sense of expectant anticipation. Page by page my excitement grew. Then it was as though a bucket was kicked out from under me.

In the middle of a black page was a space. A blank space bordered by four corners. Underneath the space were words that probably had referred to the missing picture:



### **Bert & Baby Jonathon**

The questions rolled again, *Bert? Bert? Who the hell was Bert? Perhaps my Father? Did my mother actually know who my father was? And was I that kid? Was this the top half of the picture in my pocket? Why did Aunt Jane have this picture in her album? Perhaps it was merely my imagination trying to connect the two; perhaps there was no connection between the missing picture and the one sent to me.*

I stared at that blank space for a long time before calling out, Excuse me."

"Yes?"

"Do you perhaps know what happened to this missing picture?"

"I'm afraid not. I must confess I was intrigued by it as it is the only one missing from the album."

I thanked him for his help and walked out into the sunshine, heading back towards the station.

I mused that the top of that photo could be the only one that existed of my father, if indeed the Baby Jonathon referred to was me. If so, I'll probably never know who my father was, if not, it didn't matter.

I wondered if it was my mother who removed that picture, without Aunt Jane's knowledge or permission. That's the kind of underhanded thing she would have done, probably with some nefarious aim in mind. I conjectured that she had kept the bottom and had probably destroyed the top of the photo wanting to use it to get back at me some day, in some way, but death had intervened.

The word death prompted me to notice the old cemetery in the grounds of an old Anglican church I was walking past. It was a while before the next train arrived so I decided to linger awhile and read some of the epitaphs, I'd found some fascinating ones before.

It wasn't long before one caught my eye. Its inscription read:

James H Hargreaves

1866 - 1953

I have no hope

I have no fear

I am free.

I stared at it for a while, assimilating the power of those words.

*That's it*, I thought. In an instant I stopped hoping about my past and felt it lift from my shoulders like a helium filled balloon wafting off into the ether.

As I left the cemetery I tore up the photo and dropped the fragments into a bin while musing wryly, *that photo, probably aimed at some kind of spiteful revenge, has backfired. I no longer need, or want, to know – I too, am now free.*