

## First life, then death

I HEAR the scrabbling, I hear it every night, in the ceiling and sometimes in the walls, and they know I'm listening because they'll stop just to fool me, pretend they're not there, but I know what's going on, I know, I can't prove it, but I know, they're working with Wayne and Lois and made them take me in, forced me to come and live with them, though I'm stuck out here in the shed and that isn't what I call living, no way, and Wayne made me sign that paper to let him handle my money though I didn't want him to, but he said Dr Gregson said I should, well Dr Gregson never said anything like that to me and when I told him about the scratching and scrabbling in the ceiling and walls, he told me I was imagining it and that there was nothing there. Really? Nothing? So what is making all that noise, because I am certainly not imagining all that noise, it's pretty loud, loud enough to hear over that garbage on TV and the TV is loud enough, so what is that noise? And Wayne won't let me have a phone out here because, well, I can't remember why not but he won't and that's all I want to know. I haven't spoken to Janice or Kerry since I moved in with Wayne and Lois, and I want to, and I want to talk to my Linda, my darling Linda, why won't Linda speak to me, why not, did she agree I should move in with Wayne and Lois, because I was fine on my own in Baker's Hill, just fine, but Wayne said I was a 'danger to myself' and that 'if anything happened' I was too far away to get an ambulance out quick, but that's goddam bullshit, he knows it and I know it and he knows I know and that's why I don't believe him when he says he and Lois don't hear the scratching and scrabbling, and Lois was only in here for a few minutes and never comes so how could she try to hear?

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We finally got Dad to agree to leave Baker's Hill and into the outhouse, which was a relief, it's comfortable and warm, and there's always someone close by if he needs help, though he's so quiet we barely know he's there. The outhouse is by the kitchen, a few feet from the back door, so he's not alone or anything, and we stuck a TV on the wall for him, though I can't think he's interested in documentaries about volcanoes and clouds and UFOs and all that, I rigged up an intercom, though we found out it wasn't working, but as Dad hadn't tried to use it, we didn't know, Janice claims he might have tried, but because it wasn't working that's why we didn't realise it was on the fritz. I said well so why didn't he mention it, say no one had come, which shut her up for a while, but there are plenty of other things she won't shut up about, however much we'd her like her to, mainly the money, she's obsessed. Money, it's been obvious to the world since folk started using it, is poison, poison, poison, and it's poisoning everything between Janice and me and Kerry, but Kerry's in

Canada and doesn't take much interest in Dad, but Janice seems to have her ear, and, of course, I'm the villain, well, that depends on what you believe, though it's funny that whatever Janice believes always makes me the villain, the money-grabber, the greedy one, the nasty one, always.

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Kerry agreed with me Dad should not be living with Wayne and Wayne should not be dealing with Dad's money, but now he's there we can't do much and Dr Gregson will say anything Wayne tells him, OK, I'm in Denver and Kerry's in Vancouver and Dad can't move in with Kerry because she's tied up looking after Martin, but there's no reason he couldn't move here, except that would mean paid care every day as Jim and I are out at work all day, and he's certainly not got the money for that, but apart from that there's no reason he couldn't come here, so now Wayne gets to spend all Dad's money on I don't know what, and if there's a way of moving Dad here with me and Jim, we could certainly do with the money though what with hiring daily care while we are out it wouldn't last long whatever it is that he has and Wayne don't tell us, he's such a snake, he always was even as a little boy.

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It's obvious she and Kerry in Vancouver talk a lot, make that Janice rings Kerry a lot, because as I say, Kerry doesn't take much of an interest, well, she can't, couldn't even get to Mom's funeral, OK, she had a good excuse, Martin was in hospital with something or other, she did tell me what but I always forget. Janice didn't like it when Dad asked me to look after his affairs and handle his money, and you've got to have a really sick mind to dream this up, that I was pretty much stealing as much of Dad's money as I can. Well, I told her, if he's living with us and Dr Gregson in a lot, that's extra cost all round, power bills and he's paying a share of the insurance and there's nothing wrong with that, but oh no, Janice sees deviousness at every turn and seems to have persuaded Kerry that I'm a crook, so what do you do? I've no idea.

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I know what they are doing, that's what they are telling me with their scrabbling and scratching, quiet messages, that's what it is, warning me Wayne and Janice and Kerry are working together to get my money. Well, Wayne has got it now, or thinks he has, but he was always too clever by half, even as a boy, but not clever enough for

me or Linda, because he doesn't know about the gold I've got in the cellar at Baker's Hill, because I didn't tell him or Janice or Kerry or anyone, even Linda doesn't know, those bars are for my children, well, Wayne and Janice and Kerry are my children, but I mean for my real children, the ones in the ceiling and walls scratching and scabbling and telling me what's going on, because no one else is telling me, so I can only listen to them, only trust them, my other children, they're on my side.

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Janice keeps ringing and complaining about Wayne and I'm sick of it, I've got enough keeping an eye on Martin 24/7 without listening to her go on and on about how she's sure Wayne is spending all Daddy's money and it will be all gone when Daddy dies. So what if it's all gone, it's Daddy's money and he agreed to let Wayne handle it, but that's not even the point, Wayne took Daddy in and it's not easy what with the catheter coming off in the night and having to fit one to your own father can't be nice, and I don't remember Janice offering to take Daddy in after he fell again at Baker's Hill, said she couldn't because she and Jim are at work all day, but they could if she wanted, Jim earns fine, business is good and she works because she gets bored at home, that's what she once told me and I don't think that's changed after Daddy's fall, but she always was the selfish one, if anyone's going to try to steal Daddy's money, I would be our dear Janice, the put-upon saint, never trust anyone who keeps telling you how honest they are and how hard they work, but that's Janice, her two are out of the house now, long gone, and I don't doubt they were glad to get out what with her bitching and complaining and whining about everything, things ain't easy but they're a lot easier when you're one and a half thousand miles away from Janice Bartolli, that's for sure.

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Dad's getting worse, keeps talking about his children in the ceiling and the walls, but Dr Gregson says it's the dementia and there's not lot we can do, just keep him warm and safe and talk to him even if he doesn't reply, but it's bringing Lois down a lot, though she doesn't say anything or complain, but I see it's costing her and she has to take care after her heart attack, she was lucky there, but that cuts no ice with Janice, folk say 'they love their siblings dearly despite the differences' but that's bullshit, I don't love Janice and didn't much like her when we were growing up, and now with all this crap about 'stealing Dad's money', where does she get that idea from, but I'm not rising to the bait, it takes two to fight, best just to turn the other cheek as Jesus says and get on with it.

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I think I'm going to ring Lois – not Wayne, he would just lie – and ask straight out how much it is costing them to have Dad in the house, because it can't be all that much, and Lois was always honest and she trusts me because she came to me when Wayne had his affair that time, so I'm sure she'll be honest with me, I'm sure of it, because honesty is what is needed here, and there's not enough of it, not enough clarity and trust. I'll ring Lois tonight when Wayne is at his bowling and ask her. Yes, I will.

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Do I tell Wayne? No, it'll just make him angry and I get so worried when he gets angry and goes red in the face, and I'm sure that's what's causing his blood pressure, all the aggro from Janice and Kerry not being in touch, I could kill bloody Janice, she's a troublemaker, always was and always will be and it was obvious she was pleased when Wayne was had his fling, and she didn't like it that we didn't split up. Bitch.

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*BRANDON SPITZ, husband to the late Linda Spitz and father of Janice Bartolli, Wayne Spitz and Kerry Cavanagh, is now dead. Mr Spitz was 88. Death was certified by Dr Thomas Gregson MD. He left a total of \$124,562,30 and has asked the residue to be shared equally by his three children once estate tax is settled.*