

*As the sequel to “The Developer”, Alexander Kellogg continues his quest to build iconic office buildings using bravado and deceit, clashing with multiple foes and allying with strategic enablers to enhance his reputation.*

## **Second Hand Tomorrow**

By Barbara Howard

**Order the book from the publisher [BookLocker.com](http://BookLocker.com)**

**<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/12190.html?s=pdf>**

**or from your favorite neighborhood  
or online bookstore.**

# Second-hand Tomorrow

IS  
TRUST  
THE  
ANSWER?

Barbara E. Howard



==

# Second Hand Tomorrow

Barbara E. Howard



Copyright © 2021 Barbara E. Howard

Print ISBN: 978-1-64718-888-7

Epub ISBN: 978-1-64718-889-4

Mobi ISBN: 978-1-64718-890-0

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia

Printed on acid-free paper.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

BookLocker.com, Inc.  
2021

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data  
Howard, Barbara E.

Second Hand Tomorrow by Barbara E. Howard

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020916478

## 2

---

Gabrielle recognized the familiar shadow standing in amongst the trees, it was Jimmy. She picked her steps with care across the perfectly manicured lawn, while balancing her weight on the balls of her feet. It had rained, and she didn't want to skin the leather on her new heels by sinking them into the soft earth.

She hugged her Papa in greeting, and then led him by the hand onto the pathway where Joshua stood with his mother. Joshua was quick to extend his hand in greeting, as he had met Mr. Laramie previously. Babette extended her hand to the stranger that had been introduced to her as James.

"James Laramie, but please call me Bertie. I like to be called Bertie. Bertie as in Queen Victoria's beloved husband. And you are Barb?"

"A hasty correction, if I may. The name is Babette." "That's right Barb."

"No!" She asserted. "What I am trying to say is that I like to be called by my full name, Babette." Trying to make light of the moment, she continued smiling into his sanguine features. "Barb as in

barb wire, or barb on a briar, is not the term by which you will elicit my response.” As she released her words, she immediately recognised a sharp edge chiselled in by her nerves. This comment could easily have been perceived as chastisement by James Laramie.

She tried to recover the awkward moment with a light laugh. Gabrielle had the good grace to join her with a titter, but Bertie just levelled her with his gaze. Babette could feel the cold glare of Bertie’s disapproval shower down upon her. Clearly, here was a man who within his domain reigned supreme. He did not take kindly to being corrected, and Babette was sure that to question him would unleash his wrath.

Without further words, Bertie turned, took his daughter by the arm and began to lead the way into the restaurant. Mother and son shared a sideways glance, and within the expression each was able to read thoughts that couldn’t be spoken due to the observance of etiquette. While walking up the path Joshua was sure that he heard Babette take a series of deep inhalations. He was starting to tense as meeting the parents was not starting out as planned.

Walking behind father and daughter, Babette could not fail to notice the unusual costume worn by Bertie. Costume was the only word applicable

to his outfit, for it was not a suit. It looked as if it had been taken straight from the wardrobe department of a Victorian era stage play.

Standing within the frame of the doorway Bertie turned around to face Babette. At that moment she felt that he had been caught in a time warp. The image that he had created for himself was that of the old English country squire. Babette noticed that his jacket was a version of an 1800's frock coat. Allowing her eyes to drill in deeper and go beyond the outer layer of cloth, she noted he was wearing a white shirt, highlighting this was a large silver-grey cravat with silver motifs. A large pearl stud gave accent to the opulence of the fabric. His middle was held secure in a waistcoat of grey satin lavishly embroidered in gold thread. His weight was evenly distributed in black patent shoes.

Consensus by anyone outside of family would have been the same. He was eccentric if you were going to express yourself politely, or he could be described as just plain weird if you were ready to speak it as you saw it.

The maitre de rushed towards him as he gushed, "Mr. Laramie, good evening and welcome."

“So, your guests have arrived. Everyone is looking lovely tonight, particularly your daughter, Mr. Laramie. Your generous patronage of the Sage is only exceeded by our rewards when you bring everyone to dine with us. Oh! Mr. Laramie, isn't it just marvellous that you could join us tonight.”

The maitre de attired in black slipped about like a shadow in the dim of the dining area. His actions held a sharp edge as he moved with an unusual briskness, as he guided them to their table. Most of the tables were still waiting for their unseated dinner guests, so it puzzled Babette somewhat as to why he should be so effusive in his manner.

Drawing out a chair, he gave a dramatic sweep of his arm to indicate the seat to Bertie, saying as he did so. “Mr. Laramie, of course it's head of the table for you.”

Once everyone was seated, the heedful maitre de duly unfurled the white linen napkin and swaddled Bertie's lap in the white cloth. Then with a melodramatic flick of his wrist, he released the next napkin from its folds and held it horizontal along-side of his body, so that he looked like a matador teasing the bull. Babette, in a moment of insight, felt that he was playing with Bertie.



Everything was so contrived she couldn't help but wonder what the next sleeve trick would be.

A sharp click of his fingers, followed by the extension of his arm palm open and upward, the smirk on his face was the only deception of the controlled still that he was mustering to maintain. A black shadow slipped into Babette's focus, and she saw the figure hand the 'matador' the beckoned for menus.

Her matador, as she had come to view him, was dismissive of his assistant, saying with a flourish of his hand. "I think Mr. Laramie would like me to attend to him tonight." He nodded his thanks to his assistant. At that instant, Babette noticed a quiver of the outer corners of his lips. A mischievous light momentarily flicked on in his eyes as if he was going to burst out laughing, but to his credit, he maintained his composure. "Mr. Laramie, allow me to explain the menu."

"Go away and get me a drink. You can't expect a gentleman to sit at a table without a drink."

"Certainly, sir!"

"The name is Laramie," came Bertie's stiff rebuke.

The matador genteelly deferred, lowering his head just a fraction to acknowledge his position of servitude. "As you wish, Mr. Laramie," came the murmured response.

"I came in early to introduce myself so that they could use my name. With the work you do, you wouldn't know it, but if they don't use your name then you know that you're nobody special. I just happen to be that, somebody special who owns their own business. Even though it's been inherited from the in-laws, the point is that it's mine now, and that's why I want them to use my name." Quite involuntarily, Babette felt her head shake in disbelief. It was clearly evident that the man stood in a category of his own.

Shoving the menu at his daughter, Bertie instructed her to read it to him. Gabrielle was used to obeying her father without a word or a sideways glance. She dropped her head and in a muffled voice that betrayed her growing sense of discomfort, she dutifully carried out her father's demand.

"Medallions of lamb char grilled with a Moroccan blend of herbs and ground chillies. Beef parcels glazed with pawpaw and South Pacific nectar."

“What on earth is that?” All sets of eyes darted towards Bertie’s direction. “Maybe Babette can tell us what she thinks it is?”

“It’s not a case of I think, I know it to be a blend of pineapple juice and pureed bananas.”

“Well aren’t you a smart one! What makes you say that? You don’t suppose it could be salt water?”

“It’s clearly written on the menu.” was Babette’s snapped response.

“Well, well, so you can read.”

Babette was in two minds as to how she should be interpreting this statement. Was it in praise of her ability, or was it a subtle admission of his illiteracy? He had already disclosed the facts about his early years. That he left school at fourteen, was the youngest of eight children and grew up in a small country town. His parents were too poor to own land, so they grazed their animals along the side of the road, and Bertie was in charge of the herd. His responsibility was equal to that of a bank teller, he had to keep a running check on the herd numbers. Too poor to keep a cattle dog, Bertie had to pursue the straying beasts by foot. When the cows stayed close within their allotted confines, he passed his day by

hurling obscenities at drivers, who dared to run their wheels into the gravel border of the bitumen road.

“Backs then life was hard. The young ones now a days, they got it easy, they have.”

Babette was quick to note the lack of schooling in his use of grammar and in his vocabulary. His wife spent the first few years of her marriage to him by upgrading his standards, this was by his own admission. “She taught me all the ways of being a gentleman.” He haughtily declared.

Babette felt the woman needed to be applauded for her genuine attempt at trying to improve the lot in life for her husband. In that she failed in this undertaking was not a reflection on her, as much as it was on the innate arrogance of the man, who repeatedly proclaimed that by his gender alone he was above reproach.

“When you’re a man and you’re the boss as well, you don’t let anyone question you. I’m not just the boss, I’m a man.” Babette understood the fragility of his psychology. It was clearly evident that he was encountering staffing difficulties within his industry, and this was primarily due to his lack of education and his defensiveness at being in this undesirable position.

Babette was returned to the present moment by Bertie demanding what else was on the menu. "Duck, Daddy." was Gabrielle's meek reply. "Duck what?" he snorted. "You don't like duck, Daddy, so why should I read it to you?"

"You will do as I tell you because I told you to do so." was Bertie's testy response.

Gabrielle's voice was barely audible as she continued. "Duck, oven baked with a concasse of tomatoes."

"That's it!" Bertie declared loud enough for all to hear. "I've decided to have duck." Then with a great display of his emotional torment, a raising of the left eyebrow while wringing his hands. A further request was thrown upon his daughter to read the menu again, before he declared. "I love ducks. No!" The right fist coming down jumped the cutlery into a rattle. "I just can't eat duck. I just love birds. I have white peacocks, very expensive birds they cost me a lot of money, but ducks are my favourite."

"I have a lot of ducks at home, every brand you can think of, Muscovy ducks, Empire ducks and of course Peking ducks." Joshua tapped his mother's shin under the table. She gave him a sideways glance while she was trying to suppress a grin. She felt, judging by Bertie's facial

expression, that his latter statement was an announcement of his ignorance and was not an attempt at humour.

Turning to Babette, he said, “We don’t eat meat. Do you?” As she opened her mouth to respond, he shoved back her words. “I don’t know how anyone can eat meat. All those poor animals killed so that we can eat them. Cruel, totally unnecessary when we can eat from an abundance of fruit and vegetables. Don’t you think so?”

Fatigue was finding its way into Babette, and so she cared not to respond verbally. She allowed her eyes to talk with a momentary drop of her eyelids, which served to acknowledge the question without undue effort on her part. It was the end not only of a workday, but also the end of a busy week at work. Then again, maybe it was hunger, it was nine in the evening and due to Bertie’s antics, they were still waiting for their main course to be served. Her drifting thoughts were returned to the present with the whine of Bertie’s voice.

“I love geese. I also have geese on my property, they are better than watchdogs. I don’t like dogs, particularly big dogs. They frighten me.” He paused a moment to adjust the antique Victorian mourning rings on his fingers before

continuing. "When the antique furniture arrived, the delivery man was too frightened to set foot on my property because of the savagery of my geese." His face lit up with a triumphant look. "When you have antiques, you need to look after them, and my geese do that for me." He looked at Babette. "Do you have antiques? The answer is always, no! I shouldn't even ask that question because no one has the money to buy antiques, but my house is full of them."

Babette sat opposite Bertie, trying to tap into what she was actually feeling apart from confusion. Bertie's conduct was the cause for some consternation as his voice was loud and he had the attention of all in the dining room. From lowered eyelids, a discreet scan around the room reassured Babette that she didn't recognize anyone present. This realization offered a small measure of relief.

"What are you having Barb?" Babette felt that he was taunting her with the incorrect use of her name. It was just the way he looked at her as he spoke and the sneer that marked his features at that moment.

In polite response to his question, Babette was very brief by simply stating the obvious. "Fish."

“Fish!” he exclaimed not just loudly but with just a hint of rude rebuke in his tone. If previously he had lectured her on his love for all things feathered, then now she was in for a sermon on what he abhorred. It was nothing other than her selection from the menu.

“Fish!” He dared to repeat it once more in the same tone of voice that sent every hair on her body into an erectile position. “You eat fish?” All in one move, he pushed back his chair while he flipped his spectacles to find their resting place on his narrow sniffer. He adjusted his body posture so that he was facing Babette side on, then viewed her with exaggerated disdain over the rim of his spectacles as he sneered. “So, you eat fish.” It was not a statement of her choice, it was an outright mockery of her dining preference.

Babette made a move to reach under her chair for her bag, she had reached overfill and quite simply had enough of this oaf. Joshua read the sign and he made an immediate grab for Babette’s wrist. His look was pleading and although she didn’t hear him speak the words, she knew he was thinking. “Do it for me, Mum. Stay.”

All in one movement, Babette graciously completed her dive and removed a handkerchief from her bag, before touching the Swiss cotton to her nose and inhaling deeply. She had the



foresight of placing a drop of Lavender oil between the folds. She looked towards Gabrielle and Joshua and offered them a limp smile, hoping it would serve to cover her own discomfort at being at the table.

Bertie was in a state of oblivion as to the inner disquiet being harboured by his dinner guests. Now he entered into a diatribe on fish. "I don't eat fish, I never eat fish. As a matter of fact, you could say that I hate fish. The smell is just awful! It stinks. It simply stinks and the stink of it goes into everything in the house."

Now much to Babette's and Joshua's surprise after making such a strong statement about fish, Bertie stated that when he cooked fish he opened all the doors and windows. "I don't like fish but I do like whiting. Whiting is a good fish, don't you think?" He shot a look towards Babette. But before she could even register that she had been invited to contribute, to what to this point in time had become a monologue. Bertie cut her short just as she was about to speak. "If I eat fish, I will only ever eat whiting. I won't eat it if it isn't whiting." A momentary pause while he fingered the ring on his left little finger. "Whiting, it's a good fish, it's the only fish the upper class and people of importance eat. Did you know that?" The question was directed at Babette and his expression was a definite indication of his intense disdain for her.

After all she was only a working-class commoner. He had told her earlier on, that's what nurses were.

The waiter sidled up to the table ready to take their order. He stood there pen poised, his chest rose with an exaggerated inhalation. Was he feeling irritable or was he bored with the pretensions of the senior male at the table? He caught Babette's eye before he discreetly rolled his eyes in what appeared to be an act of mock despair, then he directed his question directly at Bertie. "Mr. Laramie, have you had sufficient time to make your selection from our extensive menu." Judging by Bertie, he had obviously been given sufficient time because he turned to Gabrielle and in a low growl he said, "Tell him what I want."

Gabrielle appeared uncomfortable. No, Babette decided that she was embarrassed by her father's conduct. "What shall I order for you, Daddy?"

"Have you forgotten already? I love ducks and I'm going to have what I enjoy. Tell him." Gabrielle sighed then looked up at the waiter. "My father will have duck, and I will have the lamb medallions. Thank you." And so, his choice was duly ordered.

Babette ordered Tasmanian salmon. She caught Bertie's look of disgust. Babette was

becoming curious to know what he would do once her meal was delivered. With a word would he command that she be 'moved.' After all, her choice was not even what ladies and gentlemen subject their palettes too. Joshua selected beef.

The waiter reappeared with their drinks. Although very correct in his presentation, there was an air of timidity about him as he side shuffled towards Bertie.

Bertie, with a well-rehearsed move at being casual, flipped off his spectacles and poked them at the waiter's vest. "I'll have a sweet wine." "If I may inquire, would that be with your main course?" "I said a sweet wine." was Bertie's testy response.

"Sir, if I may make a wine recommendation for your main c—" The waiter was rudely cut off before being allowed to complete his sentence. Bertie patted the waiter's hand patronizingly when he dared to remove the wine list. "Look boy! I said sweet wine and when I say sweet wine don't question me. Now get me my sweet wine." Aware that he had gained everyone's attention he went on to explain. "The trouble with staff is they have to be told firmly without a blink or a twitch of a smile, exactly what you want. Or else, if you don't become the heavy-handed dictator with them, they'll start dictating to you what they want you to

do while you're doling out your money to keep them comfortable. No! I'm not foolish enough to do that. I let them have it first, put fear into them and they won't dare to question you. People like it that way because it makes life easier for them. When they don't have to think of questions to fire at you, they don't have to sharpen their wit to flick back a fiery response. They feel comfortable because they feel secure with being ordered around."

It was clear to Babette that round table negotiations for any purpose were considered superfluous by Mr. Laramie. She caught herself thinking, how can it be that such a toad of a man could have fathered, not to mention been involved in the rearing of a girl as beautiful, sensitive and bright witted as Gabrielle. She could comprehend the dynamics that sent rockets flying to the moon, but the situation with this man was well out of her range of comprehension.

The meal was finally served. Gabrielle's lamb came in four tiny sushi sized portions, individually wrapped in vine leaves. Babette's salmon could have been hidden in an egg cup. Her appetite was simply ravenous, and here she was sitting in front of a large white platter that held a mouthful at most.

The restaurant was expensive. She was not working to keep up social pretensions. She was a woman who worked to pay the bills. Her idea of a good dining experience was to have a night that exempted her from kitchen duties. A hearty meal served within a pleasant ambiance, and of course shared with congenial company. A further flit into the abstract world of her inner yearnings delivered her into another setting.

She saw candlelight highlighting the porcelain pale of her skin. While the light mirrored the image of her beloved into her eyes. With the scent of flowers tantalizing her senses, her eyes would speak boldly of what she most desired. Take me in the moonlight, then rest with me under a bough, where we shall both linger until...

Babette could not remember how the verse continued, but she recalled the key line. Stay with me a while, until the sun ploughs the clouds with fire. Stay with me! Of course, it does not require stating that Babette was the heroine that surrendered under the bough in the moonlight. A simple shift of her gaze from Bertie to a gilt framed painting of clouds at sunrise, was the medium that jettisoned her back to her English literature class fantasy.

The distant memory of Miss.Tratcock's English class brought a warm glow to her inner

being. But now the rumble of her empty tummy reminded her of where she was. Her temporary mental trip into distant years served as a pleasant diversion from Bertie.

As she mentally stepped back into the room, she noted that her escape had not altered the direction of the conversation's flow, given that the key speaker had now become an expert on cuisine. "I don't like big meals." Bertie exclaimed. "Only the working class, the common people have big meals. I only ever have two courses, always finishing with dessert. I will have an entrée, usually a soup. But I never eat shellfish, they are too full of disease, they absorb all the dirt and diseases from the bottom of the ocean floor. I forbid my children to eat kangaroo meat. It's a very dangerous meat full of killer germs, it can see you dead by breakfast time."

With this pronouncement, Babette knew her comment would not be well received, but she was not going to be taken for a fool. So, she decided to state her case any way. "Kangaroo is known to be one of the leanest and healthiest sources of protein."

Bertie peered down the bridge of his nose and sneered. "You don't know what you're talking about." And without a pause he continued on his monologue. "I never eat pate. There's no knowing

what they mince into it, in the name of French cuisine. I don't like prawns, but I will eat crayfish. Gentlemen eat crayfish, that's why I like to eat it, but I will always have a dessert. In fact, you could say that I have a sweet tooth. I like my dessert large, and I like my meals small."

He leaned across the table and in a very conspiratorial tone of voice, stated what had become obvious, his unashamed delight of the listings on the last page of the menu. "I have been known to have seven or eight desserts. I like sweet things." He eyed Babette before continuing. "Sweet things are my reward in life." As he mused, he licked his lips with mock satisfaction.

An involuntary grimace escaped from under the ropes of her tight control. Right now, Babette was grateful for just one thing, that he wasn't able to read her mind, for the sweetest reward would be to be free of Bertie.

"Oh! Did I tell you that my daughter Janie and her friend Colin were going to join us for dessert? No! You probably didn't know that, but you can't say that you don't know now. I invited them just this evening."

Babette was thinking how refreshing it would be to have a couple of sensible people join the table. Feeling just a little benevolent she was

prepared to acknowledge, that maybe Bertie was feeling the strain of what he may perceive as being an enormous responsibility, sitting at a table with a couple of strangers. As the saying goes, she was prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt.

Was it hunger? Or was it emotional fatigue at being locked into a social situation that was everything other than gratifying. She didn't have the answer, but her mind kept darting off on tangents on its own. She was beginning to plan her weekend chores and hoped she would have enough time to call her own, so that she could catch up with Sally.

She dared herself to look down once more at the sorrowful offering that was called her dinner. Without any difficulty, she knew she could have gulped it down in one mouthful. But that would have been insensitive to the other diners, and so she would have to practise extreme self-restraint. She waited for everyone to pick up their cutlery, and then she stretched out the interval by taking a couple of very slow deliberate sips from her wine glass. As she felt the spill of the fluid spread its comforting inner warmth, she allowed herself to savour the moment by letting her eyes slip over the decor of the room.



The room was aesthetically pleasing to the eye. A few carefully selected antique pieces were strategically positioned, to accentuate the period features of the room. She noted how carefully positioned glass vases and bowls did not rival, but served to intensify the depth of time in the grain of the timber cabinets. She flicked a brief smile at her fellow diners before her face became a study of concentration. She picked up her cutlery, now with knife poised, she assumed the position of a surgeon ready to incise and reveal.

With a studied precision, which was slow and deliberate, Babette used the tip of her knife to free tiny shreds from the fish, so that they could be picked up on one tine of her fork. Every movement reflected her observance of time. She slipped the morsel over her plump and painted lips, before delivering it neatly into the inner part of her mouth. Slowly now, she must masticate. Going against all inner urges, she had to remind herself to eat slowly. Her meagre offering had to match the consumption time taken by her fellow diners, who were expanding their initial order with the addition of side dishes.

She simply could not afford to pay for a wide selection of side dishes. Even if money was not an issue, she doubted if it was possible for a person in this establishment to leave the table with their hunger abated. As she felt the groaning

space under her belt grow, she knew tonight was not going to be the night where her most basic need would be met.

Babette's appreciative glance around the room had registered itself with Bertie. Aided by his astute choice of restaurant, he now felt encouraged in his campaign. "You must have been hungry; your meal is just about gone." There was a sharp edge to his voice. Babette was not sure how his comment was intended. Was it a statement of his observation? In which case he was correct. Or was it a reproach for clearing her plate, parsley garnish included, all within a relatively small-time frame?

If she was left feeling somewhat uncertain, this matter was soon cleared up by his next pronouncement. "The working class are always hungry. They clean up their plates and ask for seconds. But I'm a gentleman. I only ever have small meals and I always leave something on my plate, that's what a gentleman does." He cocked his head and ever so condescendingly he posed the question. "I don't suppose you knew that?"

Now, it follows that at some stage after the inception of a relationship, there is a moment pivotal to the future progression of the mating game. That flash point moment as Babette had come to term it, was when the sudden jolt of

awakening brings with it a most profound realization.

With Joshua's father, it was the morning after first sharing her pillow with him. She recalled lying there, while the first fingers of light snuck out into the room through the sides of the window shade. With her head cradled in the crook of his arm, she came to breathe in the awareness that love is life. Life bereft of love would not be life at all, and quite simply expressed if you miss out on love, you miss living your life.

Within her heart, the memory was bound tight to the emotions that ultimately led her into her future cycle of personal development. The suddenness of these moments flung open doors to the inner realms, unleashing unmet needs, dreams, and deep-seated desires. All too often though, inherent vanity slams the door shut before we get to understand who we really are, and what we truly want from life. Caught up in our naivety, we readily choose to deny the feeling, and believe in the image that we are projecting.

Right now, Babette was in the grips of experiencing a flash point. Seated across from Bertie, she suddenly realized that the sole purpose of meeting him was to arrive at a heartfelt realization. A woman had to meet a man like him in order to appreciate being single. Bertie made

being single look like an attractive option. Wow! Babette's mood changed. Instead of being accommodating to his foibles, she now felt herself withdraw and she felt more akin to a fly on the wall as she impassively observed, but no longer actively contributed to the dynamics around the dining table.

Babette cast a glance in the direction of her son. She was unable to read anything from his features, he was holding himself in check and his bland expression served to mask anything that he was harbouring. How was Gabrielle faring? Certainly, no better. Babette saw the young woman sitting with her head hung low, her gaze fixed upon the napkin on her lap. It was going to be a very long night.

Suddenly, Bertie's head jerked towards the direction of the door. His features perked up with the recognition of his daughter, Janie, and her friend Colin.

Babette gave an inward sigh of relief, while artfully arching the tension out of her back as she extended her hand in welcome to greet the new comers to the table. Bertie was quick to pass comment on their flushed faces. Holding hands and looking into each other's eyes, Janie and Colin both sung the same melody as they explained that the night had become cold. But to

Babette's ever observant eyes, the flush on their cheeks was more related to love than it was to the cold.

Bertie's opening line into conversation was, "How did you get here?"

With his voice smooth with satisfaction, Colin said, "We drove in." "In your new convertible?"

Colin's chirped response to Bertie was, "That's the only way to travel these days."

The attention had deflected itself from Babette onto Colin. "I must say I love driving my car. I'm what they call an intimidating driver." Bertie made this statement with a fair measure of pride. "I sit on the guy's bumper bar just in front of me, and I just nudge him along. Then, when I finally get him to move out of my way. It feels great! It's a sudden explosion of creative power. I feel like the creator himself because I made him do it."

"Do what?" asked Colin.

"Move out of my way of course." He sneered. "I never change lanes. I stay in the right lane and everything just clears out of my path. It's much faster that way too, and it saves money because you're on the roads for shorter periods of time.

The longer you're on the roads the more it costs you in petrol."

"Travel cost does not equate with time spent on the roads. It's always directly linked to the distance travelled." Colin shook his head. It appeared that he found Bertie's reasoning, that's if one could call it by that name, clearly incredulous.

"You don't know a thing because you haven't been around long enough. I remember buying a gallon of petrol for a shilling. But none of you can remember that because you weren't around. Ah! Except for Babette."

He turned to Babette, wanting her acknowledgement of his statement, but she was well past contributing to the conversation. Mentally she was just willing the night to come to an end.

She had read somewhere that if you put sufficient mental and emotional energy into a project, it will eventually materialize according to your desire. She likened it a bit to a genie in a bottle, throwing your wish out there to be heard by the universe, and so now with everything in her being she was willing the night to end. She was visualising herself walking out that door into fresh

air, relief from tedium, freedom from Bertie and home to her kitchen.

Although she was going to be parting with the equivalent of a week's housekeeping money, to pay for her and Joshua's meagre rations, she knew that if she was to get any sleep tonight she would have to settle her tummy by feeding it first. What would she have? Right now, the idea of beans on toast held particular appeal.

She turned to her son and politely hinted, since they lived well out of town it might be wise if they started to think about making a move in that direction. Bertie took the hint and was most adamant that they stay for coffee. Babette acquiesced to his request, she was too tired to argue.

Bertie, now invigorated by his conquest at holding his guest's captive for a little longer, turned to Colin. "So, tell me what do you think of women drivers?" Without drawing breath or giving Colin the opportunity to reply, he continued. "Women don't know anything about driving. I only drive an automatic. They are made for people who appreciate quality and control."

At this point, Joshua ventured forth to make his bold contribution, or to be more exact it was a bold contradiction to Bertie's comment. "It would seem

to me that there would be more control in a manual.” Babette was not shy about beaming her approval at him.

“Nonsense! You don’t know what you’re talking about. Give the control to the car and not to the driver, I say, and you’ll be there in half the time on half the petrol. Manuals are for common people, people lacking in control. I control my staff and my family, so I don’t need to know how to control a car.”

Babette was restless, she could bear no more. So, with one swift move, she reached under her chair retrieved her bag and stood upright. Her plan was to be out and away from Bertie’s clutches, before he could launch an appeal to her sense of duty. In one word, she was decided on one thing, and that was that she would flee.

During the brief exchange of parting pleasantries, Bertie turned to her. “So, what do you drive?”

She was really struggling to hold onto her control, so through clenched teeth she snapped. “Take a guess?” “Uhm, now let me see. You’re a woman, women aren’t very smart not like men, so it must be an automatic.”



The only satisfaction in that statement lay in the fact that it was a contradiction of what he had said, only a few minutes earlier. Reading between the lines Babette saw the real reason for his driving preference, he was just too dim witted to work a manual.

With Joshua in tow, her pace was brisk as she strode towards her car. She held her key like a dualist, a press of the tab and she heard the doors unlock. A touch on the metal disc and the key flicked out, it was in the ignition before she was even fully seated. She turned the key and shifted the gear into reverse backing out carefully, ever mindful of not scraping her car on the concrete barriers. When she slipped it into first gear, she knew that she had taken her first step towards home. She recalled a hippie saying that she heard some years back. 'A journey is a path of a thousand miles, but it begins with the first step.'

Well, this was it. First step to going home was first gear.

---

In relating her story with all the trimmings of detail, the night had become lost to both Ettie and Babette. "So, there you have it! So, have I now given you a better understanding of why I feel a

reluctance to interact with my dear son's prized finds?" Ettie joined Babette in laughter.

"You do have a gift for storytelling, Babs. It was really quite fun and worth staying up late for."

"Trust me, Ettie. I was not embellishing the facts for the benefit of my storytelling. That really is how it was."

"I enjoyed hearing all about it and it was a fun story. You must agree with that?"

"With the advantage of hindsight, I have started to see the humour in the situation. But trust me, Ettie, it was not funny at the time."

### 3

---

While Babette was lost in reflection to years and events now well past, she had missed some details in Joshua's message. So once more, she had to press rewind to bring back the news that would connect her to the present.

"Mum, I've found you a man. And guess what? He wants to meet you. I've even shown him photos of you and he thinks you're a real sweetie." His voice not only sounded excited but it held a tone of, I'm deserving of a round of applause from you.

She listened to the remainder of Joshua's message, in essence he was young and in love again, and he was trying to spread his joy. She tried to see it in a positive light even though she didn't feel this way. She viewed her son's antiquated matchmaking attempts as downright interference. It was not welcome. It was most certainly, not amusing.

How many more times would she have to tell him before he understood, that she had come to appreciate her single status. Life was far less complicated, albeit not always necessarily the most fulfilling, but she was no longer a school girl

pursuing a dream. She was an adult woman who had lived, loved, and lost her heart in her attempt at attaining her heart's desire.

She didn't dislike men. In fact, she really enjoyed male company. She appreciated their sharp wit and their dry sense of humour. Yes! She mused, she really did like men but she no longer had a need for them. Quite voluntarily she pulled herself up on this thought, a slight correction was required, her need was for tradesmen only and not as a close up and personal encounter in her life.

Babette's avoidance of mixed social gatherings, ensured that her solo status was not ever going to be tampered with. If, however, she found herself lost in fanciful yearning for something other than the life experience she had come to embrace as being her own, she had developed a knack of bringing Bertie Laramie back to mind. And yes, it never failed. Her flights of fancy vanished in a flash. Once more, she was grateful to be living the life of a single woman.

So here she was, once more caught in a situation that was not of her choosing. She was prepared to acknowledge that her son's intentions came from a good place. But he was young and failed to understand that once a woman arrives at a certain age, good men were hard to find, they

were either married or buried. Experience bore down heavy upon Babette, and left her with the understanding that those men still available were just not worth bothering with.

Babette could feel an irritability settling in upon her. It happened every time someone tried to undermine her sense of purpose, by squeezing her into wearing the mantle of conformity.

“Every saucepan has a matching lid. You just need to keep on looking and not give up.”

This sound counsel came from Ellen, married for more years than she had been single, to a man that was the epitome of every single femme’s dream. Being able to call Peter a friend was a blessing, but if he had an unclaimed twin brother, that would have made for bliss.

Settled comfortably in her recliner, Babette let her gaze slip out over the garden, her mind was totally disengaged from what she was viewing. Within her head space she was rummaging around, digging up memories of dreams that were hatched by a young girl. Her fantasy, as she recalled it now, was simple. He would be handsome, absolutely adoring, and totally devoted to her. She would have two, maybe three children. Live in a middle-class suburb and be a devoted mother and a loving wife.

The blueprint for her future was simple. In essence she only asked that the Great Divine Spirit provide her with someone to love, and someone who would in return be loving towards her. Such a simple request and yet to the grown woman it came as a tall order. It was more difficult to find a good man, than it was to find a pair of shoes that were both comfortable and stylish.

For Babette, the innocence was lost with the realisation of impending motherhood. Within the naked light of day, she could see long before she could feel the changes taking place within her. Naivety was no longer a badge that could be worn to spirit away the obstacles of duty and responsibility. The child was a reality, and in her provision of care she was committed to delivering the best. Even now with the advantage of hindsight, she had the acute knowing that she did as good as she could with what was available to her at any given time. She was blessed to have her son's love, she knew of many instances where this was not the case. So, in his meddling way, Joshua was watching out for Babette and returning the love that she had shown him.

Babette's love for her garden and nature helped her to understand some of life's complexities. In matters relating to the heart energy centre, or heart chakra, it seemed that

growth was not always found in the garden where the seed was sown.

Sometimes she would see her love in the mist or cornflowers spring up in her neighbour's garden. The seed of her intent was to harvest the blooms for her flower bowl, and yet here they were growing with unashamed magnificence in her neighbour's ground. It could not be accounted for, how all the tilling of the soil, the fertilizer, and regular watering failed to retain the seed on her side of the boundary. The seed simply lifted itself free from her nurturing and floated off on a gasp of air. The lesson to Babette in this instance was, that we can't hold onto something if it's not meant for us.

She allowed her recall to return her to the day when she was robbed of the warmth embedded within her emotional core. Rendered emotionally frozen and unable to process the news, that Charlie had stepped over the boundary into another garden to sow his seed.

At that same time, she felt the size of her heart shrivel down until she was sure that it would be a fair rival for a pea. And so, she lived for years, shrivelled up and frozen, until the thaw set in one day when she was working in her garden.

## *Second Hand Tomorrow*

The call of a bird, a dove to be exact, it wasn't calling out to her but she was eavesdropping into its courtship song. She saw Mr. Dove coo and bow, coo and bow repeatedly while in hot pursuit of his beloved Ms. Dove. Mr. Dove was totally focused on the object of his love. Ms. Dove allowed him to pursue and to woo her and just when Mr. Dove thought he was about to get lucky, Ms Dove flew away.

All worked up and looking for love, Mr. Dove immediately turned his attention to another female and entered into the chase of love all over again. The lesson learned in the garden that afternoon was that it took courage to love. A brave heart secures the object of its desire.

Stretched out in her recliner and feeling content, just at being able to languish as she lost herself in reflection over life's many mysteries. Babette's gaze danced over the garden, she could link in on many levels with the life force energy and how it expressed itself in her garden.

Given that she did not always feel buoyant, Babette made an array of soul connections that were always inspired by her garden. Primarily, the colour and texture spilling forth from her garden beds never failed at uplifting her spirits. It taught her to bring the joy of the outdoors into her home. She also responded with joy and positivity when



she incorporated the wild and glorious colours of summer into her wardrobe.

She lived alone and the understanding of this fact reminded her, that if she were to perish a fly would be the first to find her. However, Babette never allowed herself to wallow in despondency. It did creep in, but reading material related to New Age thinking provided the necessary antidote. Now she accepted down moments as challenges, as an opportunity from which she could learn and grow. This approach did offer a particle of sense to an otherwise senseless situation. So very much better than surrendering to feeling, blaa, blaa.

When Babette was really in need of a motivational influence, she would think of pioneering female aviators. How she admired the spirit of those liberated women flying solo, crossing countries and oceans, without a second thought given to anything other than the joy of being free. Instead of dancing cheek to cheek with their man, they chose to flirt with the clouds. It was not just inspirational but proof of incredible achievement.

The determination of the pioneering female aviators gave them the strength to break away from the role of conformity. They laid claim to their independence. Instead of embracing a man, they embraced courage before flying into the unknown,

guided only by the stars and fuelled by their dream. So, Babette reasoned, walking the earth in an unattached state would have to be as natural as a sneeze after a sniff of pollen.

Babette replayed the recorded message for a third time, this time giving her son's energy and delivery of his words her full attention. He sounded happy, she gave a nod of assent to this observation. She always felt better when he was feeling good. His excited voice then went on to explain the circumstances of his meeting with her proposed Mr. Wonderful. He lived in New York. Now for Babette that was the first red flag for she did not like big cities, she could see no beauty in congested roadways and glass walls.

She often wondered where the city dwellers of very large cities would go, to have a moment of quiet reflection time. Admittedly, they had their parks and rooftops that lent themselves as a place for retreat, but were you ever really alone in these places? Traffic noise replaced bird calls. While neon lights created a garish night light puzzle, not like the gentle garden shadows that calmed and also inspired her creativity.

Before she heard any more, Babette knew that she would have nothing in common with this man. Given that he was very nice she was not in a position to dispute, but friendships need to grow

on common interests. With her living in Australia, as well as living in a country town, she failed to comprehend what motivated her son to initiate an introduction. She had to put a stop to it before it went any further.

Babette's fingers went to work while she touched upon the numbers to return her son's call. He had just returned to his hotel room after a late evening meeting, and upon recognizing her voice he blurted out. "I've just come in."

She heard a wham that sounded very much like a door being shifted into its frame with the encouragement of a heel. "Was that a slamming door?" Babette queried. "I told you, Mum. I just got in." A fair measure of fatigue was evident in his voice while his words were being delivered with an edge of irritability. "I've got someone on the other line. Can I call you back?" This came more as a statement than a question for the line clicked and then went quiet.

There was not much on offer in the fridge. The courgette soup had been equally shared amongst friends as well as consumed by Babette. To remove a freezer meal would be too fiddly, what with the thawing out process then the heating up of the lasagne. Thinking about it was sufficient to dull Babette's appetite.

She stepped out into her garden, it was her place of inspiration and sustenance. The recent rains had encouraged the herbs to throw up fresh tips, they were all so tender and so very succulent. At sighting them, the decision was made. A mixed herb omelette with cheese, and a baked caramelized apple with yogurt for dessert. She tugged sharply at the fruit, before the stem and the attached leaf broke free from the bough. In a time, honoured habit, she ran the apple over her chest, her soft woollen knit brought an instant lustre to the apple. Held in her hand like a trophy, the polished Bramley flicked the last rays of day light back into the deepening shadows of her home orchard.

She picked some dandelion greens, with a dressing this would make a great salad. It all smelled so fragrant, she began to feel quite uplifted by what she inhaled. By the sounds she was hearing, she knew her tummy was hungry. The fragrant herbs were also sharpening her appetite, she was ready to eat.

She found half an onion, and for good measure roughly chopped and tossed it into the frying pan. Everything was at a spitting, hissing sizzle. Now she added the egg mixture. Then using her spatula, she carefully lifted the edges until all the fluid rippled to the outer rim of the pan

where it cooked. Once the mixture took on a solid form it was ready to serve.

She placed her meal on a tray, complete with cutlery and a napkin, the presentation was quite appealing. Phone, TV control, and stereo remote control were all placed within easy reach. Once comfortably seated, she carefully balanced the tray on her lap. A press of a button and she was able to join in with a game show, mentally testing her own mettle against the contestants.

She deposited the first forkful of yummy goodness into her mouth. Savouring each mouthful, her eating became mindful, as she felt the texture of the fresh garden greens while she absorbed the flavour. Tonight, was a real treat. Because of the lengthy hours that she worked, it was not always possible to sit in front of the television, let alone have a meal fresh from her kitchen.

Aiming the remote control at the television, she dismissed the strangers who had provided her with jovial companionship, while also inviting her to share in their laughter during the course of her meal. Her next need was to inform herself about global events, and of course she couldn't miss the weather report. The full truth of the situation being that the weather report carried more influence over her life than did world events, because it held

direct relevance to the activities of her next day. How was she going to spend her day if she wasn't working? Would she be able to garden? Could she join her friends for an early morning walk? Should she be prepared with an umbrella? But to be more exact, her wardrobe situation needed to be addressed before she stepped into the next day, not knowing what to wear really didn't make for a good start to the following twenty-four hours.

So, with all of these reasons in mind, she had just switched over to ABC news, when her viewing was interrupted by the phone. It was her son calling from America. He was full of news. Babette listened with the practised ear of a mother.

His voice sounded clear and rested. There was a tone of heightened elevation, and clearly, he had had a successful day with his business meetings. He talked at length about his day, which concluded with his meeting up with Daniel for dinner. Teasingly he delivered his news. "Guess what, Mum! I've found you a man."

"Oh Josh! Will you stop that nonsense. I don't need a man." "Yes, you do! He is a great guy with the ladies."

"Halt, right there son. With the ladies you said. That's not exactly what I need, another ladies' man."

“You got it all wrong, Mum.” He paused for a moment. “What I really meant to say, was that he knows how to treat a lady.”

“Well, dear son, it’s always a delight to be able to talk with you. I appreciate your interest in promoting my social life, but—” She was unable to finish her sentence as Joshua quickly interjected.

“Mum, it’s not your social life that I’m promoting. It’s your love life!” Babette could hear his teasing chuckle in her right ear. “Have you been drinking, Josh?” An unexpected sharp edge in her voice belied her mounting irritability with her son’s interference in her life. She loved him dearly, but what did he know about life and love? Once he started to carp on the topic, he left everyone believing that second only to Bonaparte and his adored Josephine, her Joshua was the only man to have ever experienced a passionate encounter.

Joshua was quick to pick up on the bite in his mother’s voice and very skilfully, he slipped the topic into another direction. “I’m sorry Mum, that I couldn’t talk with you when you rang earlier. But I had to take a business call, after all that’s what I’m over here for.” With a wry chuckle he continued. “As you often say, life stops for a funeral, but nothing brings the world of commerce to a halt.

But never mind me. How are you?" "I'm fine Joshua, just fine."

"You always say that when I'm away." And of course, that was correct. Babette didn't want to worry her son with any mundane issues while he was away from home. What could he do about it anyway, when he was working in another country?

"It's been snowing over here, temperature below zero, so that gives you an idea of just how nut cracking cold it is out there." He sounded much more animated than he had been for some time. He explained how he had met up with friends for a meal, and that he had also found the time to meet with a former colleague, Daniel.

"He is an absolutely great guy! He looks a lot like someone in politics, but I just can't think of his name. What you need to know is that he is friendly, and he is easy to get along with." A slight pause, clearly her son was on a marketing campaign. "Guess what else? You're running with luck. He wants to communicate with you. So, what do you say to that?"

On this occasion for whose benefit he was manipulating future fates was uncertain, but his voice indicated that he was feeling good, and that's all that mattered to Babette. If she couldn't



be near her son, then knowing that he was in good spirits and in good company provided sufficient reassurance, to allay her innate maternal anxieties about the next generation.

Joshua and Daniel had sought refuge from the cold in a New York wine bar, where contrary to the name, they sampled a few whiskies during the course of the evening. When Babette cautioned Joshua about drinking too much, his reply came across as very matter of fact. "It's a great cold chaser, Mum, nothing more than that."

The friendship with Daniel was initially established when the two men were engaged on a three-month consulting project. Daniel, of his own accord mentored the young graduate.

During the course of a challenging day, where each man was dependent upon the skills of the other to collect data and compile the required audit report, a mutual respect emerged. So that by the time the November deadline was met, a friendship had been well established. As Babette understood it, the point of common interest was that the two men were both well educated. They also engaged in the same profession with an obsessive attention to detail, which was the hallmark of their success. Outside of their employment and the years between their respective generations, a passion for nature and

the pursuit of the outdoors, was the interest that served to bridge the gap.

Joshua returned to talking about work, travel arrangements, and the level of appointments that he found within his accommodation. Babette was expected to respond when he inquired about various friends back home. While her ears did the listening, Babette allowed her mind to quickly skate over the last several years.

So! It appeared that her son was trying to set her up with Daniel. He may be a New Yorker, but he was in a standalone category. It came as a surprise to her that he was unattached. Then she chided herself, what a fool she was to take her son seriously. He was only having a bit of fun. America, Australia, the distance was impossible to span, nothing would ever come of it. Nonetheless, Daniel was a pleasant fantasy to indulge herself with.

It was nothing unusual for Babette to overhear fragments of phone conversation, for Joshua was still living at home when he was working with Daniel. On a few occasions she had picked up the phone to Daniel, and after the initial introduction, they had engaged in a pleasant chat for several minutes until Joshua was free to take the call.

Babette could not recall the content of their dialogue. But what she did remember, was that she was always left with the feeling of what a very easy person he was to be engaged with in a conversation. Every time before she passed the phone to her son, or after she wrote down a message for Joshua, a few minutes would be spent in not just superficial polite talk. But a pleasant conversational interaction was always achieved. For her part, she worked at maintaining the flow of conversation, for she enjoyed this passing interaction. His tone was light, not rough or harsh as it sometimes was with other men that she had encountered.

Dare she even say it to herself, but she detected a gentleness in his manner of expression.

In his choice of words, she identified him as a man who was fair minded and considerate. His East Coast accent wrapped each word with the clarity of a news reader, and Babette was sure that she could listen indefinitely to the voice that came to her from the other end of the phone. When the conversation ended, she always wondered who Daniel went home too.

During the years of friendship, she began to speak regularly with Daniel. Her son would always pass the phone to her so that she, for her part

could at least convey the sentiments appropriate to the season. Christmas and New Year were definite dates of phone contact with that easy listening voice and the friendly guy. After one such Christmas greeting exchange, she had entered into the growing realisation that she liked Daniel.

Daniel McCabe was a real man, a nice man and fortunately for Babette, he was well out of reach. He lived in America while she lived in Australia, and great comfort was to be had in this arrangement. For Babette felt secure in the knowledge that her present status of singledom would not ever be undermined. It was an arrangement made to order, she had the benefit of enjoying male contact without the fear of an involvement.

She had met males along the way. But always she felt a reticence at stepping into a new encounter. So consequently, she remained securely single but discontentedly alone.

During the years of a lifetime long friendship, Louelle, Babette's dearest friend, had thrown her a life line on many occasions. More recently, she urged Babette to go to church, not because Louelle detected any need at salvation for Babette's soul. But rather on a more significant level it had come to Louelle's attention, that many

a woman's prayer was answered in the fellowship that followed after the service.

Now to cite an example, take May Jones who met Dr. David Longfellow, a man who was true to his name. David was tall and handsome and had more going for him than May did.

May had become quite smitten by the affable doctor, who dispensed his charm upon all the ladies in an equal measure, without paying heed to the years that separated him from the ladies. He openly enjoyed the female attention, and very graciously rewarded the ladies that fluttered around him, with his orthodontic perfect smile and murmured appreciation of their baked wares. Irrespective of their years, the women were all reduced to twittering in his presence.

To become better acquainted with him, May donated an hour every Tuesday and Thursday by enlisting her voice in choir practise. Affectionately known as Dr. David, he provided piano accompaniment to the rehearsing voices. In the social banter that followed after rehearsal, May's captivating charm and witticisms made a memorable imprint upon the good doctor. So much so, that before the year had ended, May utilised her voice for the utterance of two very sweet words. "I do."

With those words she reaffirmed to herself that dreams do come true. And through the cleverly engineered association, May threaded herself into Dr. David's life.

Babette recalled Louelle saying. "Now there is a similar tale that you should be familiar with, about Kitty Farrington. She met her fellow when she sat next to him during young Timmy Ryan's baptism." Bold Kitty was observed by Mrs. Babcock, as she was pressing her business card to her lips. Then with a flash of radiance, she passed the card from her well-manicured fingers into the warm touch of the slightly surprised recipient.

Now Kitty was a confident woman, and she felt very sure of her attributes. She didn't know what He, the nameless stranger, had been praying for. But for her it was a godsend of an opportunity, and she felt sure in the knowledge that no man would refuse her. The stranger looked upon Kitty with new eyes, his expression conveyed to Kitty that yes, he would use her number. For what he saw was best described in two words, feminine delightfulness.

Now as Babette reflected, even someone as gorgeous as Kitty encountered her challenges. She had expected a phone call during the first week. By the second week she had given up on

ever hearing from him. Finally, she made the astute realisation, that it was just as well that he didn't contact her, because she was busy establishing her new practice. She was also thinking about further professional development and going for a doctorate. So, she reasoned, a man would have just got in the way of progress. She believed that Divine guidance was protecting her, and so with this mind set she continued living each day. Then by the time she had successfully pushed his image out of her mind. Guess what? He made contact in a most unusual way.

Kitty reviewed her daily appointment book and noted that her last booking for the day was with a new patient. She didn't like new patients at the end of a day, because they often tended to make a long day longer. Her receptionist was asked to shift the patient to another time slot. Her best effort however was unsuccessful, as the patient became most inflexible, citing any number of reasons, work, business meetings, and travel. The time requested was the only time that he could make himself available for. As well as also offering the guarantee, that his appointment would not be cancelled on the last minute due to unexpected work commitments.

Kitty received her patient's activity report and solemnly said, "I suppose we had better see him. His life doesn't sound any different to mine." A

deep sigh and a shrug of the shoulders gave further confirmation to her observation.

Three days later, the new patient was ushered into her consulting room. Kitty was stunned into disbelief. The stranger now had a name, Derek Walling. He was holding himself in check, but he was unable to harness his eyes into the same level of control. They sparkled with a mischievous sense of fun that one usually only attributes to boys.

Kitty invited him to take a seat. While mustering up all her professional etiquette, she smiled. Then trying to sound benign in her approach towards him, she asked, "Now tell me what has brought you here?"

Derek produced Kitty's business card. A smug smile crossed his features as he flipped over the card, revealing the cherry stain imprint left by her lips. Trying to appear very nonchalant, she lifted her well plucked brows while she gave him a levelling gaze. Just when she had wiped him out of her mind, he appeared nine weeks and three days later. Kitty was brought to an emotional halt with this realisation, for a woman to keep a subconscious tally of the passing days, it meant that he still held a claim to a part of her.



She had invited the contact, but she had expected him to make his first approach by way of a phone call. But no! Love could not be channelled along a set course according to her dictates. As a woman who was able to account for every minute of her twenty-four-hour cycle, Kitty was now taken totally aback. The element of surprise had swung the balance of favour right back to Derek. It was as much as she could manage to say, "I expected you to call."

Derek had given himself plenty of time to rehearse the various scenarios as they could present to him, and he was quick of the mark. "And so, I did. That was my entry ticket into your presence. Wednesday, 5 PM, don't be late. It's the last appointment for the day."

Taking in Kitty's bewildered expression, he recalled how he had teased the receptionist by echoing. "Don't be late." This by his intonation, suggested that he was raising a question and not taking an order, to which Ms. Efficiency duly replied, "That's right! We all want to go home." His eyes were sparkling with amusement, he was enjoying the chase in the game called love.

"So! What can I do for you?" Kitty used her most professional tone to try and reclaim control of the situation in her consulting room.

“Well now, I’ll show you what I need from you.” Derek rose and started to move towards the door. He flicked off the switch. Standing in the dim of the consult room, he turned to Kitty. “You might find it more interesting to attend to your patient history taking over dinner.”

Kitty was unable to conceal the surprise in her voice. “So, you don’t need chiropractic treatment?”

Holding the door for Kitty his response was a grinned monosyllable. “Dinner.”

And that of course, was the first of many dinners that Kitty shared with Derek.

“So, talk to me, I’ll tell you where to find a man.” Louelle was all wound up, she was on a mission to salvage Babette’s heart and find conjugal bliss for her friend.

And what would I say to him. “Hi! I’m looking for a man. Please make yourself available.”

Louelle was becoming annoyed with Babette’s silliness. “Talk to him as you would with a woman.”

Babette gagged on her laughter and somehow managed to cough out her response. “Oh, by the way how is your needlepoint progressing? Do you

use a frame or your hands to maintain even tension? I can see myself doing that.”

“They are no different to us. They have their own performance-based anxieties, just don’t be so self-absorbed. Fix your focus on the man and get talking to him and help him to relax, and then before you know it, you’re going to be involved in a deep discussion that you don’t want to be torn away from.”

“No! At this point, I can see him being plucked out of my reaches by a fiercely protective wife.” Babette’s howls of laughter gave further emphasis to this point under conversation.

“Louelle, you’re making a complex situation sound simple but men are not women. You can’t engage a man in conversation in the same way that you would a female.”

“Yes, you can!” came the snapped reply. “No, you can’t.”

Louelle was beginning to feel exasperated, by the stubbornness of her friend to comprehend a simple fact. It reflected in the stern tone of voice that she adopted, almost as if she were addressing a misbehaving child. “Don’t just say no you can’t, because I know you can. Look at all the things that you have achieved with your life.”

Babette knew that the key point of reference in relation to this statement was what appeared to be, the successful rearing of her son without a male influence in his life. During these emotional debates initiated by the nurturing spirit that came from the core of mother earth herself, Louelle challenged Babette, coaxing her to look at her own heart centre.

These debates always ended with the same outcome, as Babette tended to become quite defensive. She was always quick to point out that she had been out of circulation for so long, that she now felt at odds with herself when around men. She was not equipped at this point in time to answer her own question, as to why she should feel the way she did. There really was no legitimate reason as far as she could logically ascertain.

Babette didn't question her friend's intention, for it was all well placed. But once home and alone, she began to explore the strength of her friend's wisdom. It was all just simply awkward. What do you talk about, what do you do? It was easier as well as kinder to the heart chakra to remain well removed from the opposite gender.

Pretend that they are a female friend and don't be so defensive, would invariably bring the image of Bertie Laramie to mind. Add preceding heart

break to the now familiar story and her response was always the same. A very polite refusal. "Thank you very much for asking, but I am not able to accept your invitation at this point in time." On one such occasion, she came up against a prospective suitor who appeared to be genuinely stunned, by her declining to accept dinner at his house.

Even now while in reflection with the advantage of hindsight, Babette was undecided whether Martin was patient, or keen. But eight months after her initial refusal he presented again with the same offer for dinner. She could not give him her standard reply for the second round. She had no choice but to confront the facts and admit that she liked being unattached. Of course, if she were to have been truly honest, she would have acknowledged that she needed to remain single to feel safe. But there was no need for Martin to know that any more than she had need to know his shoe size.

So, life continued to flow on through the last several years, phone calls with Daniel, chats interspersed with laughter. With the conclusion of these calls, her son would often say.

"Mum, he is a good man. You should get yourself someone like him." Babette would always good naturedly laugh off such comments. She

was not about to disillusion her son about her trials experienced in love and life.

She had lived and she had loved. That it didn't go as planned was totally out of her range of control, she had come to accept that. But she had no right to plant seeds of doubt about love and future togetherness in her son's mind. Babette wanted Joshua to find and to enjoy what had for her become an elusive dream— Love.

She hadn't given up on it. She saw the healing benefits of love in her work. How someone on the brink of stepping off the planet could be brought to reconsider. The tender touch or whispered encouragement of someone held dear, was all that was required.

Love is powerful. There is no limit to what true love in its purity of intent can achieve. Within all of us lies an inherent need to be loved, and to give love, and that inner unmet need is what allows a lover to be persuasive.

When Babette felt the need to hear words of love and tender expression, she would read poetry. Her preferred choice being the English classics. Using few words, they painted the image of love with the promise of shared lust, after the breaking of bread and the sipping of wine under the bough.

Babette would allow herself to stay with the words until she felt the chill leave her being. After that, she would recount all the blessings that were attached to being single. Interestingly enough, over recent times the list of benefits were not as heartfelt as they once were. Daniel, although far away, was not ever forgotten. She held a photo of the man in her mind. After countless phone calls, the image was constructed by her intuitive attention to the detail released by his voice intonation, and his preferred choice of expression.

The image was so clear at times she could smell his presence. She liked his choice of male cologne, it was just like the man that she had come to be acquainted with. He was not at all abrasive. The core of his strength lay not in primal brute force, but in his courage to express and to share himself using the lighter elements of life.

Babette had not counted on Joshua's determination. He was a man on a mission. He was not about to give up. He had contacted his mother once more. All that she could successfully tease out of him was, that if she didn't give serious consideration to communicating with Daniel, he would take up residency in America. She laughed and called his bluff as she said, "That sounds great, I've now got a holiday destination."

"I got ya there. If you come to see me, I'm going to make sure that you get taken over to visit Daniel. So, do me a favour. Just write to him." An audible sigh was funnelled into Babette's ear. She felt Joshua was being just a little melodramatic and was about to say as much when he continued. "Come on now! What does it take?"

Feeling somewhat perplexed, Babette replied. "I don't know what to write." Joshua laughed uproariously. "Now that's just nonsense you know that. You just want to get out of writing to him." Babette heard him trying to suppress a snigger before he continued. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll send him a message and let him think that it has come from you. How do you like that suggestion?" "Joshua, you will do no such thing." Babette was



standing firm in her admonishment of her son. He was starting to get totally out of hand.

“I’m getting the idea that you don’t like that suggestion.” he replied nonchalantly. “So, you had better write to him yourself, and if you don’t, I’ll do it on your behalf.” The situation was becoming perplexing, why was everyone trying to match her up with a partner.

Babette felt that adversity had taught her to become philosophic. Life was an even measure of opposing polarities, handsome and ordinary, witty and dull. What might be viewed as one woman’s desire, was another woman’s reason for a refund.

As far as Babette was concerned, partnership joy disintegrated in paradise when Eve fell prey to Adam’s temptation. It wasn’t because she had consumed her share of figs and hungered for a variance in her diet. No! She was fool enough to think that by giving her palate to the shared joy of indulgence in the forbidden apple, she would be drawn into the very matrix of Adam’s psyche, where she would be blissfully cocooned in his appreciation. How wrong she was!

Babette could hear Adam’s accusations pouring down on Eve. “You put us into this predicament, I was only teasing you with the apple, I didn’t ask you to sink your teeth into it.

Now look at the mess you've put us in, banished from Paradise."

While unwanted, it was also a part of the partnership life experience for one member to dish up the blame, and scuttle the union under the weight of guilt. She grinned cynically at her own reminisces, give and take, that was after all what marriage is all about. One dishes out the blame while the other takes the blame. No, she had been there and she had no intentions of walking down that trail again.

Employing the voice that came with maternal authority, she spelled it out as clearly as communication over such a distance permitted. "Joshua, you are being told, no a correction is required. You are being ordered to lay off from meddling in my personal affairs."

Silence now absorbed the space that had just been consumed by their heated dialogue. The break in communication lay heavy between them until it was interrupted by Babette. "Joshua, are you still there?"

"Mum! I have worked my arse off to make this happen, and Dan is looking forward to hearing from you. Just write to him once. Just once, that's all that I'm asking of you."

Once more silence served to punctuate the significance of the message that Joshua was trying to communicate. Joshua could feel his mother considering his heartfelt plea, as he heard a faint, ‘Humm.’ Ever an opportunist, he launched into the next part of his campaign. “Daniel, well let’s just say he is feeling hot for you. I showed him some more of the photos that I took in England, and some shots taken of you at Sam and Jenna’s wedding. Well, he thinks I’m a great photographer and you’re one hot Mama.”

Based on Joshua’s input into the developing situation, it all occurred during the course of a conversation shared by the two men over dinner at the Dorf hotel. Daniel had expressed his interest in communicating with Babette on a regular basis via email. None of this was along the line of what Babette ever anticipated when she answered the phone to him, she knew Daniel on a very casual basis. He had been her son’s colleague, then when the contract ended they continued their friendship. Periodically when they met, Daniel would be brought up to date with a regular photo display of Joshua’s newly acquired car, dog and family; included were more images of Babette than the dog.

For Babette, she had no difficulty in recalling how the initial contact with Daniel was made. She was linked up with the man by the sound of his

voice. She was very able to gain an overall impression that spoke most favourably about the man, which came from the sound of his voice and the lightness of tone. His sharp expressive wit, and most importantly the manner in which he communicated. After the first phone call dialled in at two-thirty in the morning, after asking for Joshua who was unavailable to take the call because he was out partying, they had chatted without inhibition for about an hour or so. Then, how did he conclude the conversation?

With words that had by now, became indelible on Babette's mind, etched in like the ink of a tattoo. "It's been very nice talking with you."

Yes, he said with you, not to you, and that one word placed him in a category that set him apart from other past male encounters. That one word, "with" was so indicative of the man and his key character traits. His choice of expression, "talking with you," gave due acknowledgement to Babette's individuality and was a respectful reference to her intellect. He was not talking at her, by his choice of language he had conveyed that he was accepting and respecting of her, she was his equal. Babette remembered lying in bed thinking about the man who had paid her the greatest tribute, he regarded her as his equal.

That one word spoke tomes about the man and his values. Before closing her eyes and attempting at a return to sleep, Babette decided that she liked Daniel. It was just such a pity that he lived in America, and she lived in Australia, getting to know him better was geographically speaking out of the question.

Lying there waiting for sleep to happen, her mind continued to slip over pages of personal history now long past. She had thought that all these events had been very well archived, but here she was making out the shadows in her room while the dark images from her past stepped forth once more.

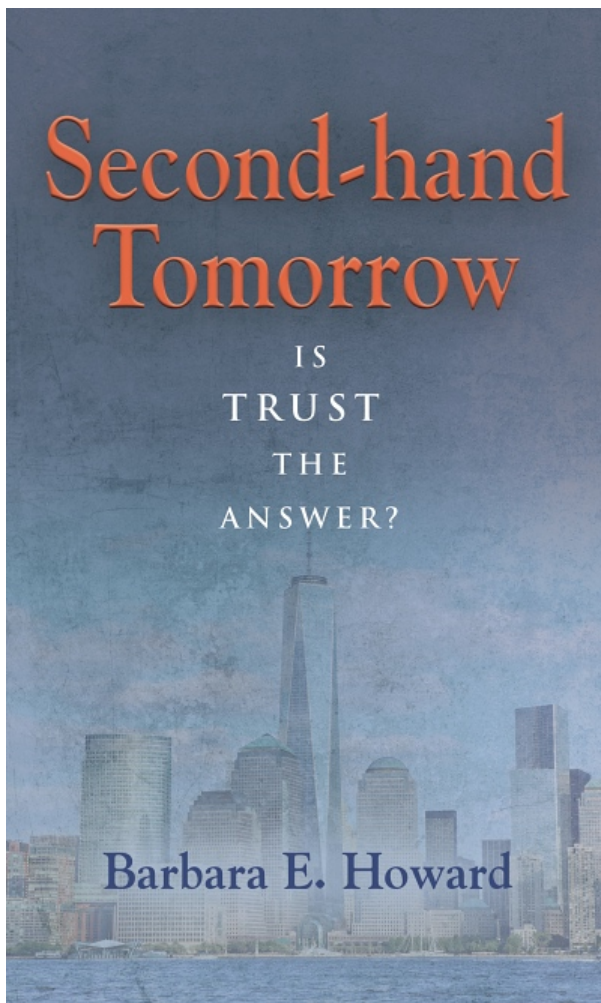
What was it that Lena had said when she paid her a visit? “When the darkness returns allow it to enter, invite it to step forward and deliver its message, then quietly ask it to return to where it came from. Learn what you can from the experience and don’t force the unwanted memories out of your mind; this act will only engage you in mental combat from which you will emerge defeated. For the unwanted seeks to be recognized, before it will choose to depart.”

“You must remember Babette.” she implored. “Negative people are ruled by dark energy, and they seek out conflict situations. If this can’t be

found, they will create the dynamics that will allow their energy to become combative.”

Charlie, her former husband had been the black velvet element in her past. His initial presentation was that of the storybook hero, handsome, impeccably groomed and, with a caustic wit. As time passed the veneer of charm covering his brittle insecurities revealed a man that spoke at her, not with her. So, in that brief but light-hearted telephone conversation with Daniel, she had come to realize the difference between a man who had the courage to walk in his own strength; and a man who failed in his own undertaking to himself, and sought out others primarily women that he could dominate in order to return control into his life.

In summary, Babette came to realize that a gentle man is a master. The controller was weak, he needed to break down the strength in others to provide for his own sustenance. She marvelled over how, one word could say so much about the qualities inherent within that person.



*As the sequel to “The Developer”, Alexander Kellogg continues his quest to build iconic office buildings using bravado and deceit, clashing with multiple foes and allying with strategic enablers to enhance his reputation.*

## **Second Hand Tomorrow**

By Barbara Howard

**Order the book from the publisher [BookLocker.com](http://BookLocker.com)**

**<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/12190.html?s=pdf>**

**or from your favorite neighborhood  
or online bookstore.**