

THE INHERITANCE

The house dated from 1759, although there was evidence to suggest that it was built on the site of a previous dwelling. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was already three and playing little melodies on the keyboard. Horatio Nelson was one year old and probably sailing toy ships in his bath.

In 1759 Lord Chalfont of Hereford, a gentleman farmer married, and built his house near Pig Street, a hamlet in that county. Sam's grandfather bought the house some two hundred years later. Whilst not exactly derelict, it had fallen into a sad state of disrepair, and over the years much work and money had gone into its restoration.

Sam used to spend his school holidays with his grandparents. He loved playing in the open fields with the old sheepdog. The rambling old house with its many spacious rooms and old furniture fired his imagination, and he would spend many happy hours in the library gazing at the beautiful (and valuable) paintings and going through the old books. He would curl up in the big old armchair, often having to be awoken for his meals. He loved that old armchair, even though as a small boy in short trousers, his legs would itch from the horsehair stuffing poking through the cushions. But he would have to fight back the tears when the time came for him to return home.

Five years ago, Sam's Grandad died, and recently his Grandma followed at the amazing age of One Hundred and One. Their children including Sam's mother were already dead, leaving Sam and his four sibling cousins as beneficiaries. Three of them lived abroad, but came back for the will reading. The remaining cousin, Charles, an accountant and sole executor of the will organised everything with his solicitor, who turned out to be a close friend.

It came as a shock however, that Grannie had changed the terms of her will when her husband died. The proceeds from the sale of the house were to be divided between four worthy charities. The paintings and valuable books were to be auctioned and moneys raised shared equally between the three non U.K. residents. Charles was to have the furniture, except for the chair in the library. This dilapidated item was Sam's to do with whatever he wanted.

After the initial shock about the disposal of the house, there was more than a hint of a snigger passed around the room when it came to the last item. As for Sam, he seemed satisfied. After all, he had loved the house, its lands and all the contents. He would rather it be sold off than see the pompous Charles, for instance, occupy it. Also all the others, while not exactly paupers had relatively young families to look after and he didn't begrudge them the wealth they would undoubtedly receive. He was not consumed with material needs as most of the others seemed to be. He was single, had his house and small jobbing joinery business. All he needed.

Grannie knew how much he loved the chair, regardless of its condition. She must have known also that Sam would take much pride and care in its restoration, although she never mentioned it. Recently though, she had embarrassed him by going on about how good Sam had always been with his hands.

A week after the funeral Sam decided to make a start on the chair. It was February, and business was a bit slow, as it always was this time of year so he started by carefully removing the old brass studs around the arms of the chair. To his surprise, they came out easily, almost as if someone had taken them out in the last few years, and replaced them again. He began to examine all the studs closely. They were dirty, and it was not obvious, but they had all at sometime been removed and replaced. Then he remembered that Grandad had been interested in upholstery at one time. In fact as a small boy Sam had suggested that he should restore the chair.

"No boy, I wouldn't risk ruining it. Besides, You wouldn't want it all shiny and new, would you?"

At the time, Sam had agreed. But the chair had deteriorated markedly since those days. He set about removing the old coverings slowly and was surprised at how bulky the horsehair underneath was. It was only when he'd removed sufficient covering from the chair that he could get his fingers beneath the horsehair, what he found made not only his fingers tingle, but his whole body shake.

There were thick bundles of bonds made out in his name, all legally declaring Sam a very wealthy man, and bearing the name of Grandad's London solicitor. Sam was in shock. A short time later, so were his family.

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