

# THE CATALYST

## The Penultimate

Shrouded in an eerie pre-dawn light and hidden by white canvas screens, pathologist Alice Ross gingerly prised the rotting lid from the crumbling casket. No word was spoken, as the bones, after lying all this time in damp soil, were carefully logged. Uniformed officers patrolled the field's perimeter, while clamouring paparazzi, waited impatiently in the November cold, flashing camera shots into the absorbing darkness from what they hoped were vantage points.

Backing slowly under direction, a police vehicle approached the hub of the activity and again screens were employed to shroud the scene.

Elsewhere newspaper editors all over the country were primed to flash one of two prepared headlines to pressrooms for late editions.

*“Sensational Revelations Solve 25 Year Mystery.”*

Or

*“Strathcaldy Police Draw A Blank Over Missing Persons.... again.”*

At separate locations in Scotland two men pondered over the outcome of the exhumation. Individually they knew that modern DNA technology could prove beyond doubt whose hand ‘drew the curtain’ over two lives some twenty five years ago.

True to his word Albert along with his long-time friend Joan Brown left their cottage on the Braes of Caldy that morning to meet the long-suffering Newspaperman he only knew as Dave

in the Auld Caldys Arms Hotel at nine 'o'clock. He had promised Dave that when the facts were about to become public knowledge he would reveal all he knew, exclusively to *The Global News*.

"How do you feel about it?" He asked Joan.

"I think you are doing the right thing, after all we are both getting on in years and clearing up the loose ends seems only right to me."

Albert stretched out his hand and gratefully patted her arm. "You know all these years since Victoria passed away, you have been a wonderful support for me, there is no way I could have brought Alice up properly without your help.

"Is the road icy?" Joan asked as she felt the rear end of their car slew slightly.

"Yes it is, the council has not got round to gritting our stretch of road yet, but not to worry I'm used to it."

In the PolloCom Ltd. Dispatch Section, Billy Gordon was preparing to set off in his thirty-six ton articulated lorry with a load of electrical units and spare parts for delivery in Manchester. He wasn't nervous but he did feel a slight apprehension, this was his first trip in icy conditions since he gained his Class One driving licence and he wished the loading manager had listened to him over his load dispersal. Too much weight over the back trailing axle he had pointed out, but he was a 'rookie' or so he was told and his concern was ignored.

‘Ah well I’ll be extra careful,’ he promised himself.

With a wave of his gloved hand he climbed aboard and after checking his dashboard warning lights selected the correct gear ratio for his day’s hauling. It was just 8.30 and the vehicle needed it’s full headlights on. ‘Not as bad as I thought,’ he spoke aloud as an assurance to himself, while his truck rumbled over the brow of the hill leading to the main trunk road network.

‘Damn,’ he swore as he saw the first flakes of the winter’s snow fell gently against his windscreen, switching to intermittent wipe he tuned in to Radio One for a weather and road report.

Almost exactly at the same time two miles away Albert duplicated Billy’s precautions but continued to keep up his speed. “I hate being late for an appointment,” He told Joan, “We have a wee bit to go yet.”

Joan said nothing just kept looking at the countryside in the November morning light, while marvelling at the transformation a skiff of snow could do to a drab landscape.

Billy hummed quietly in time with the music coming from the overhead twin speakers and his fingers too were in synchronisation as they tapped the steering wheel.

“My God, a cow on the road, how the hell did that get out?” He said with undue volume.

‘Brake gently, gently,’ He told himself, remember your training, this rig has every modern contraption for safe stopping.

Chewing the cud stoically the cow seemed to have no intention of moving on to the verge. “Bugger,” Billy cursed as he began his swerve to avoid the beast crossing the double white lines to do so.

Albert on the other hand was unaware of the drama that was developing just around the next bend as he continued his dialogue telling Joan how he was going to approach Dave with his information. “I must remain anonymous what ever else,” These were the last words he would ever utter.

Joan’s scream made him slam on his brakes and as his vehicle went into a four-wheel skid he looked in horror as the huge juggernaut came straight at them.

The police had to call in the fire brigade to free the couple. But despite using their cutting gear quickly and expertly the rescue crew knew that survival was not a possibility for the car’s occupants.

Several miles away sipping an after breakfast coffee in the foyer of the Auld Caldys Arms Hotel, Dave looked impatiently at his wrist watch for the third time, he badly needed copy for the next edition of the Global News and if his informant was not there soon it would be too late for the deadline.

‘Why the hell was Albert not here by now?’ he asked himself.

In the Longburgh Police Station the task of telling pathologist Alice Ross that her father Albert and his friend Joan Brown had met with a fatal road accident was being discussed.

“Its bizarre that this could happen,” Sergeant Donaldson said angrily, “What a bloody waste.”

Sandie heard a report on the local radio station later that morning and immediately telephoned Stroma to tell her about the sad news and the twist in the saga. “And that’s not all,” she said, “Roger tells me the two birch trees in the quarry you and Anita were looking at, are still in full leaf even although it is November, he was up there yesterday on his day off.”

In turn Stroma called Antonia, filling her in with all the happenings in the Caldly Glen and the puzzlement of the birch trees.

“You can never tell with nature, she has a lots of secrets.” Antonia concluded.

Inconclusive End.

I’m sure many readers just like me are cheesed off when a story they have read has no conclusive ending. The Catalyst has no conclusive ending either, but when you identify the ‘Catalyst’ you can write an ending to this story that’s suits your own conclusion.

Euilleam.