

My Silver Locket was Found on the Floor but ...

My silver locket was found on the floor but that was the only item of my precious jewellery that the burglar – or burglars – had left behind, or maybe dropped as they stashed everything else away, and I stared in dismay at the empty space on the dressing table where the pieces I had chosen to wear had stood ready for me to put on for tonight's gala dinner.

Hoping against hope, and in case my eyes had deceived me, I searched every inch of my room just in case I had put them somewhere else and forgotten where I had put them. And when I say 'precious jewellery' I mean precious to me, because of the memories they evoked, and not in a financial sense. They were definitely more bling than Balenciaga, if you know what I mean, but they were special and I enjoyed wearing them, in particular the locket with photos of my dear parents inside it.

Ever since I arrived for my fortnight's holiday it seemed that there had been a succession of petty losses – a credit card here, a ring carelessly left on a basin in the communal loos and not returned, money taken from a bag left forgotten by a chair – and we guests were getting most upset and were speculating on whoever could be doing it. The reception staff were not helpful at all, merely putting the responsibility back on to us by, not to put too fine a point on it, insisting it was our own fault. This time the hotel thief had definitely excelled him or herself by going boldly into my room.

I had been coming to The Grand for several years, especially since my husband died, and it seemed like a home-from-home. It didn't really compare with the minimalist approach, that seemed to be the modern fashion, with chairs that looked as though they belonged in an airport lounge, à la Alex Polizzi when she is refurbishing an ailing establishment. In The Grand the colour scheme is warm and comforting – maroon and cream – with curtains to complement these colours and armchairs that you can sink into and let the care of the day drift away, especially when aided with a G and T served by the always-obliging staff.

"I think it's a cat burglar myself," puffed Major Sullivan, an older gentleman, retired from the Army on health grounds, who was a permanent resident at the hotel and a bit short of breath. "When I came back the other evening from the theatre I looked up to look at the moon, because they'd said there was a special eclipse or something, I forget what, and I caught sight of a movement in the ivy at the side of the hotel, where that drainpipe is. I'm sure I saw a dark figure"

The other residents cast covert glances at each other and stifled sniggers. The idea of Major Sullivan being able to identify a dark figure amongst the dim foliage of the ivy was rather incredible in view of his habit of bumping into all the furniture on his way from the lounge to the dining room. The general

consensus was that he wouldn't be able to identify a petunia in an onion patch. Personally, I thought he was rather sweet. He was former Service personnel, as I now was, and his manners were charming. He always tried to stand up when a lady entered the room - well, as much as his arthritis would let him. I smiled at him and said what a good spot it was and maybe someone could follow it up and then he paid for my G and T so we were both quite satisfied.

It's obviously someone with inside knowledge," responded a lady who had arrived in the week prior to me and was one of those people who has an unlimited supply of knowledge or opinion on any subject that was raised and that she aired during our after-dinner coffee sessions. "When you think of it, all our keys are quite visible in those pigeon holes. It wouldn't be beyond the realms of possibility (she spoke rather grandly) that someone could make copies of any, or even all, of them."

I had always been interested in crime and when I was young fancied myself as an amateur sleuth. It's probably why I am a PCSO today. 'Terry Brent, Detective' was my favourite story in 'School Friend, the girls' paper that I bought each week. From that I progressed to Nancy Drew, then on to Biggles (he was always solving some mystery, and he sounded very attractive too). My favourite reading nowadays is almost always from the Crime and Thriller section at the library.

The idea that someone might have been climbing up the side of the hotel intrigued me, and I thought it would be a real boost for Major Sullivan if he was proved to have come to the right conclusion. I went into Nancy Drew mode and identified from inside where he might have seen the figure on the outside and went along the corridor on the top floor. Since the hotel was quite old the windows were of the old-fashioned style – sash windows that could be pushed open from either inside or outside – and an inspection of the window at the end of the passageway overlooking the car park revealed that not only was it open but that there was a slightly damp and muddy-looking patch on the carpet beneath.

It would be difficult for anyone who was not involved with the hotel to be in any of the corridors. People not usually expected to be there would be noticed, so that probably ruled out another guest, but within the hotel the staff could pretty well move about between departments without its being remarked on.

On an impulse I hid behind the curtains – you know, those thick ones favoured by old-fashioned hotels – to see if that would be a suitable place for a stake-out. Now I felt like a real detective. I peered through a crack so that I could see the length of the corridor. Yes, I thought, I'll work out when the next gala evening will be and I'll be here to keep watch."

Suddenly though I caught sight of one of the waitresses walking along the corridor and wondered what she was doing there. She stopped at one of the doors, called "Room Service" and, taking a key from her pocket, marched inside. In a few seconds she was out again, with something in her hand that she was in the process of putting into her pocket.

"Hey," I cried, to attract her attention. "What"

But I didn't get any farther because she whipped round, looked at me like a frightened rabbit, and ran down the corridor at great speed, faster than I could manage. I chased her as far as the grand staircase down to the foyer and saw a few guests assembled there. "Stop her – she's the thief," I panted and there, right at the bottom of the staircase, was Major Sullivan.

"Righty ho," he called back and calmly stuck his cane out across her ankles and down she went. Hotel Security dealt with the matter after that and Major Sullivan was the hero of the hour with many of the hotel guests coming up to congratulate him. At first he tried to explain my part in the proceedings but I waved it aside and let him have the glory. The hotel gave us champagne on the house in the bar that evening and made a nice speech. He revelled being in the spotlight and paid for my G and Ts for the rest of my stay. On the last night he asked me to marry him. He didn't want to rush me, he said, so he asked me to think about it and let him know.

He is a lovely chap and although we're not both madly in love being with him makes me feel all sort of protective and happy, a feeling I'd not experienced before, so now I've gone down to the bar and am standing at the door ready, waiting to catch his attention, when I'll walk across the floor and give him my answer. I'm sure he will be pleased.