

The Unlinked Tree

written by

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INT. TOM'S BEDROOM - EVENING

TOM LEES (55) lightly strums an acoustic guitar.

DING.

He looks at the POP UP from ANCESTRY.COM as it appears on his phone.

He puts down the guitar and picks up the phone. He stares at the message.

His POV: "You have a new DNA match. Click the link to review."

TOM (ASIDE)

Who is it this time - the Earl of
Arundel?

He clicks the link.

His POV: "COLEEN CLARKE - Unlinked tree. 1st cousin. Matched to Parent Two.

TOM (CONT'D)

Dad's side.

Inquisitively he rings his sibling.

INTERCUT: with JACKIE (59)

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

She stands at the stove when her phone sounds off.

She walks to the table and picks it up.

JACKIE

(on phone)

Tommy.

TOM

(on phone)

You alright?

JACKIE

Not bad. Just cooking his
majesty's dinner.

TOM

What is it tonight then - rib
eyed steak with all the
trimmings?

JACKIE

He'll be lucky. Sausage, egg,
chips and beans.

(chuckles)

Anyway, what do I owe this
pleasure? I haven't heard from
you in ages.

She carries the phone with her to the stove and stirs a pot
of beans with her free hand.

TOM

I just received an annoying pop
up from Ancestry.

JACKIE

A new match?

TOM

Yeah.

JACKIE

Ignore it. I get them all the
time. Apparently we've got
relatives in Australia, New
Zealand, Canada and America...
even India which explains my love
of curries.

(chuckles)

And we're forty-one percent
Irish. Twenty-two percent English
and the rest is all over the
place.

TOM

Who's Coleen Clarke?

JACKIE

(knowingly)

Oh, that one.

TOM

Yeah.

JACKIE

Yeah, I got that one as well. I meant to ring you about that.

(sighs)

She looks a lot like me, doesn't she?

TOM

That's what I thought. She's linked to dad, not mum, and she's not related to anyone else in the family, yet she's a first cousin. How does that work?

JACKIE

I know know. I'm going to talk to mum about that tomorrow when I see her. I think he was playing away when we were living at Moreland Court.

TOM

D'you think that's wise, Jackie? It might upset her - Open a can of worms.

JACKIE

She knew he was a philanderer. I remember every Friday night he'd come home from work and spruce himself up before he went out on the razzle dazzle. We wouldn't see him till Sunday afternoon, and that was only for his dinner. On one occasion mum took his dinner to the pub and left it on the bar. He went berserk at her when he got home. He gave her a black eye.

TOM

What about the name Clarke?

JACKIE

She was our next door neighbour - Margery Clarke. We used to call her her Margery Tart.

TOM

Ha! You're kidding?

JACKIE

No, I'm not, Tommy. She was also known as Moped Marge. He used to pop in while Desi - her husband was out. She had a son my age. He was a right little tyke. Always getting into mischief. The police were knocking on her door often.

TOM

I can't believe she stood for it, mum.

JACKIE

She never had a lot of choice, Tommy. When Moped Marge needed something, she'd usually knock on the door in just a see-through dressing gown and fluffy slippers and ask if dad was in.

TOM

No Shit!

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. STREET. DAY

A three storey block of maisonettes and balcony consisting of eight flats on each floor.

PAN IN. FIRST FLOOR BALCONY - DAY

Blonde bombshell MARGERY CLARKE (30s) opens her front door and peers down the balcony.

She exits and knocks on the flat next door wearing just a flimsy black negligee and heeled furry slippers.

Teddy Boy BENNY LEES (30s) opens the door. He bears a wide knowing grin.

BENNY

Alright there, sexy?

MARGERY

(grins)

My drawer's broken again, Ben.
You couldn't screw it back for
me, could ya? I can't seem to
shift it at all?

BENNY

I'll be right with ya, sexy
draws.

She giggles and scurries back into her flat.

BENNY O.S

*Nora, I'm just popping next door.
Margery needs her drawer fixed. I
won't be long.*

He enters Margery's flat with a screwdriver in hand.

END FLASHBACK

BACK TO INTERCUT

TOM

So, she is our sister, then?

JACKIE

DNA don't lie, Tommy. She's
1,677cM's. That's a direct link
to us... unless she's our
grandmother, or niece. And at her
age that's simply not possible.

TOM

(scratches head)

I want to be there when you talk
to mum.

JACKIE

Of course. I'm going tomorrow.
But remember her mind's not how
it used to be. She gets
kerfuffled.

TOM

I know she does.

JACKIE

Her medication causes her to babble. She goes off on a tangent soon as you mention anything to do with the past. Anyway, if you visited her more often you'd know that.

TOM

Has it worsened?

JACKIE

Yes, it has. It doesn't get better, Tommy. Dementia gets worse, if anything.

TOM

So what time will you be going there, then?

JACKIE

Well, I'm going hairdressers, but I should be there just after she has her lunch between 1PM and 2PM.

TOM

OK. I'll be there.

JACKIE

OK. But don't say anything to her until I get there. I don't want her getting upset. She's already disillusioned as to why you don't visit. You've only got one mum, Tommy.

TOM

I know-I know. It's just so difficult with her being so far away. It takes me two hours to get there.

JACKIE

Well at least try.

TOM

I will-I will.

END INTERCUT.

INT. CARE HOME - DAY

Frail NORA 82, sits lost and alone on her bed.

Tom enters carrying a wide grin. He clutches a plastic shopping bag filled with confectionery.

She looks up at him and smiles.

NORA

Tommy, is that you?

TOM

Yes it is, mum.

NORA

Tommy, it's so nice to see you.
Where've you been? I haven't seen
you in years. It must be at least
five years since I saw you last.

TOM

Six months actually. I've been
busy with work. I'm sorry I
haven't been to see you sooner.

NORA

What have you brought for me?

TOM

Sweets.

He gives her the bag containing soft sweets and chocolates.

Her hands shake as she attempts to open a packet of jelly babies.

TOM

Here, let me do that for you.

He opens the bag for her.

NORA

Aw, jelly babies, my favourite.
Ah, you shouldn't have. They must
have cost you a fortune.

TOM

Of course not.

NORA

Look at all these. Ah, you're so kind. Gives us a kiss. You are my son, you know.

TOM

(kisses he cheek)

I know-I know.

A CARER enters the room with clean laundry. She goes directly to the cupboard and stacks them inside.

NORA

(proudly)

This is my son, Tommy. Isn't he handsome?

CARER

(smiles)

I know. I saw him last month.

NORA

He's come to see me.

CARER

That's nice.

NORA

And he brought me sweets. He's so good to me.

The Carer smiles politely and exits.

NORA (CONT'D)

(scowls)

I fucking hate it here. I want to go home. I just want to go back to my home. I don't even know what I'm fucking doing here. I feel like I'm being kept a prisoner.

TOM

Haven't you made friends yet?

NORA

(tearfully)

No. I don't want to talk to anyone. They look like death warmed up. I just want to go home.

TOM

This is your home now, mum. You need proper care. You won't get that at home, will you? And look what happened last time when you fell over and broke your hip. At least you've got twenty-four-seven care, haven't you?

NORA

But I don't like it here, Tommy. I fucking hate it! I just want to go home. Take me home.

Tom's eye well-up as he feels the emotion in her trembling voice.

TOM

Oh, it's not that bad, mum. You've got your own room and everything. Anyway, I'm taking you out for a nice cup of tea and cake. I'll just go and see if I can find a wheelchair.

He turns to exit.

NORA

I'd offer you a cup, but I don't have any money. Bloody good innit?

TOM

You don't need money here, mum. Everything's paid for. You can have whatever you want if you ask them.

He exits, as Jackie enters.

JACKIE

(brightly)

Hello, mum. Sorry I'm late. The traffic was diabolical on the A120. As he gone to find you a wheelchair?

Nora grits her teeth at her during am moment of anger.

NORA

Yeah. He's taking me out. Are you coming?

JACKIE

Yes. I'll drive.

NORA

Well, you better tell him I wont
be needing a wheelchair then,
will I?

JACKIE

It's entirely up to you, mum. D'
you think you'll be okay on your
feet this time?

NORA

I can't see why not. It's me
brain that's not working, not me
feet.

Tom returns without a wheelchair.

TOM

They're just trying to find you
one, mum.

JACKIE

She wont be needing it, Tommy.
I'm gonna drive us there.
Besides, it's not very nice
outside there.

TOM

OK. I'll let them know.

He goes off again.

Nora gets to her feet. Jackie helps to put her coat on.

EXT/INT. CAFE - DAY

SEAGULLS command the skies as the whoosh of the waves from
the sea crash against the rock-face.

They find a table with a pot of tea and a plate of cream
cakes.

JACKIE

Here mum, do you remember Margery
Clarke? She used to live next
door to us at Moreland Court.

NORA

(angrily)

Slut! Your father was giving her one. Her old man left her for the postman's wife. That's what I heard anyway. She was a whore.

JACKIE

Oh. I never knew that.

NORA

Well you wouldn't, would you? You were too young. You both were.

TOM

Why didn't you try and stop him?

NORA

While he was banging her, he was leaving me alone. I caught them at it. She forgot to lock the front door one day, and I walked in on them. Naked, the pair of 'em.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

A daintier, younger NORA (30s) clutches a plate of chicken roast and baked potatoes.

NORA

Benny, your dinner's ready.

Silence.

She exits with his dinner plate.

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

She steps onto the balcony and spots Margery's front door ajar.

She enters Margery's flat.

INT. MARGERY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Nora quietly pushed the door open with his roast dinner in hand.

Her POV: Margery writhes naked on top of Benny as he steers her thighs with his hands.

Nora stands agape. Benny and Margery gaze at her in mortification.

NORA (cont'd)
(appalled)
You forgot your mains, you dirty
bastard!

She throws the dinner over him, then storms out in tears.

END FLASHBACK.

BACK TO SCENE

TOM
Holy shit! What happened after
that?

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. BALCONY - DAY

NORA
Don't forget these, you cheating
bastard!

During her rage, Nora lobs his suits over the balcony.

Benny bundles them up and throws them in the car before he drives off.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT/INT. MARGERY'S FLAT - NIGHT

Yelling and screaming can be heard.

Benny bangs on the front door with SAW in hand.

Short, stocky DESI (30s) opens the door, then throws a punch. Benny ducks and drives the Saw into his thigh.

Desi screams in pain and falls to the ground.

Margery appears bearing a black eye. She has a glass of gin in hand.

She screams at the sight of Desi lying on the floor with blood dripping from a wound to his thigh.

MARGERY

What have you done to him, you fucking animal, Benny Lees?

BENNY

Oh, stop screaming, you silly cow. Go and get him a towel.

MARGERY

But he's bleeding heavily. A towel won't be enough to stop the blood.

BENNY

Just shut up and do it!

She exits as Benny stands over him shaking his head.

END FLASHBACK.

BACK TO SCENE

TOM

What happened? Did they call the police?

NORA

Oh, I can't remember. It was too long ago. I think he went to prison.

A protracted silence as they eat and drink.

JACKIE

We have a half sister.

NORA

(dismissively)

I don't care.

(reflects)

He still visits me.

TOM

Who does, mum?

NORA

(babbles)

Your father. I was only talking to him last night, on the phone. He don't live with her any more. He's got his own life now. I'm not bothered. He never gave me anything, except a black eye. We still talk now and then.

JACKIE

(side-eyed)

Mum, he died ten years ago.

NORA

No he didn't! Did he?

JACKIE

Yes, mum, he did.

NORA

Well, no one told me. I never knew. Where was I?

JACKIE

You were at his funeral. He died of cancer, remember? It was before your dementia.

NORA

No. I don't believe you. He phoned me this morning. Told me he was coming over to take me out. He wants to get back with me. I'm not ready for all that again.

Jackie raises a knowing brow at Tom.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT.

Tom lies on his bed staring at Coleen's fair image on his phone.

He makes the call.

INTERCUT: Phone conversation with Coleen and Tom.

INT. LOUNGE - NIGHT

Coleen sits on a sofa next to a burning log fire. She has a glass of red in hand and strokes her fluffy white cat.

Her phone lights up. She grabs it and puts it to ear.

TOM

(apprehensively)

Is that Coleen Clarke?

COLEEN

(aback)

Yes. Who is this?

TOM

You don't know me personally, but I received a message from Ancestry.com.

Short silence.

COLEEN

Are you Tom Lees?

TOM

Yeah.

COLEEN

I saw that too.

TOM

What do you know about it?

COLEEN

I know that you and Jackie are my half sister and brother. And that your dad is also my dad, according to the DNA results.

TOM

Would you like to meet up and discuss it? You don't have to if you don't want to. I understand. It's a bit awkward, isn't it?

COLEEN

Yeah. No. Sure. But your dad isn't my dad, you know.

TOM

Biologically?

COLEEN

Maybe, but my dad was a decent man. I loved him, and he loved me more than anything in the world.

Short silence.

TOM

When shall we meet?

COLLEEN

I'm free tomorrow?

TOM

OK.

COLEEN

Just as long as you like dogs.

TOM

Yeah, I do.

(pauses)

I live in London.

COLEEN

Me too.

TOM

What about Victoria Park, then?

COLEEN

OK. I can do 1 PM.

TOM

OK. That's fine.

COLEEN

See you there. Bye.

TOM

Bye.

END INTERCUT.

EXT. VICTORIA PARK - DARK DAY

Rain clouds gather above a large lake and picnic area where Tom and Coleen are seated.

She wears a red hooded jacket, hat and scarf, and has two poodles on a long leash.

COLEEN

(dispassionately)

So what d' you wanna discuss with me? There's not a lot we can say really, is there?

(pauses)

I mean, your dad had an affair with my mum. I'm the product of a quick fumble behind my dad's back.

Short silence.

TOM

I know. And I want to apologise on behalf of him.

(pauses)

My dad was a waste of space. And by all accounts your dad had left your mum at the time he was seeing her.

COLEEN

I wouldn't know. I wasn't born, was I? You'd know more about it than me.

TOM

I was a toddler myself. My sister remembers more than me. You should talk to her. She wants to meet you.

COLEEN

(shakes head)

What for? There's not much to say about it. It is what it is.

TOM

She knows more about what went on between your mum and my dad.

COLEEN

My mum died twenty-five years ago. I moved in with my dad.

TOM

Sorry to hear that.

COLEEN

She died of cancer of the liver.
She was an alcoholic. My dad said
he left her because he couldn't
control her drinking.

Short silence.

COLEEN (CONT'D)

So what made you wanna take a DNA
test?

TOM

Oh, it was my sister's idea
really. She bought me a test kit
for my birthday.

(pauses)

And you?

COLEEN

I'm into genealogy.

TOM

It must've been a real shock
finding out that your dad wasn't
you real dad. It was for me,
knowing I had a half sister, I
mean.

COLEEN

He was my dad, in my eyes!

(tearfully)

I'm just glad he never found out
about them. It would've broken
his heart like it has mine.

TOM

I'm really sorry.

COLEEN

I became suicidal when I first
found out my dad wasn't my dad. I
spoke to my brother about it. He
knew that your dad and my mum
were having sex. He wasn't going
to tell me, but I forced him to
when I asked him who you were.

TOM

Your brother knows about it?

COLEEN

Yeah. He's the same age as your sister. When I told him about the DNA match he put two and two together. He said my dad found out and that was the reason why he left.

TOM

I don't blame him.

COLEEN

It's so depressing. Your dad broke our hearts.

TOM

I'm in the same boat as you. He broke ours too.

COLEEN

I better go. Don't contact me again, ever. It wouldn't be right. And I don't want anything bad to happen to you or your family.

She gets to her feet and walks off with her dogs.

Tom sits deflated as he looks up at the rain clouds gathering in the sky.

He takes out his phone and makes a call.

LONG BLEEP.

TOM

(on phone)

It's me. When you get this message call me back and I'll tell you how it went. It wasn't pretty.

He ends the call then gets to his feet.

Blue lights of an AMBULANCE flicker in the distance as a CROWD gathers around the lake.

FADE TO BLACK:

THE END