

# THE PAST HAS CLAWS

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# The Past Has Claws

## Episode 11



Donald had left The Shore at closing time the previous evening and headed back to Napiers, just as Billy had said. He was fully over his jet lag now and not particularly tired. He let himself in with the key Perkins had provided and made his way upstairs to his room. He laid back on his bed, ruminating over the events of the day, particularly what he had found in the bureau and what he should do about it, and eventually dozed off. He hadn't been sleeping long when he was woken by noises. This time he wasn't groggy and confused. The woman's screams were clearly audible and seemed to be coming from directly below him. Uncharacteristically he decided to investigate.

Slipping his shoes back on, he crept silently down the stairs and slowly tried the handle of the door to his mother's room. The noises were certainly coming from in there. The handle turned. Without a plan, Donald opened the door.

It took him a little while to comprehend the scene in front of him. In silhouette, from the greenish light of the monitors, Donald's mother's emaciated figure was naked on all fours on the bed. She was held around her tiny waist by the huge hands of someone who was clearly a man but dressed as a rather well-built nurse. Again and again, the nurse thrust himself inside his mother from behind, each thrust resulting in a scream like those Donald had heard from his room, and a deep grunt from the nurse.

In his immediate shock, Donald could not resolve the incongruity of what he saw, and his only thoughts were that his weak and feeble mother was being abused. He had no great love for her, but it was wrong, and he reacted, he tried to shout but found his voice absent, and so made a lunge to push the nurse away from his mother by the shoulder. Startled and until then completely oblivious to Donald, so engrossed was he in the task in hand, in mid thrust, 'nurse' Perkins' reaction, from years of training, was to lash out. His right fist caught his assailant square on the jaw and sent him flying across the room to smash his head on the corner of the monitor screen closest to the door. He was unconscious. Perkins let out a roar.

“Is that all? That wasn’t very long, was it? Can’t you control yourself? I knew I shouldn’t have sucked your pissy cock” Mrs Napier was angry in her disappointment and wasn’t holding back. Perkins took it, impassively “You obviously enjoyed yourself, What about me? That’s not what I pay you for.” Mrs Napier snapped bitterly. “It’s hardly worth the pain of foregoing the morphine”

Perkins wasn’t really listening to her rant. It was far better to let her think he had finished early than to know the truth. He was full of relief that she hadn’t noticed Donald’s entry. “Sorry Madam, It was a moments lapse. It won’t happen again” Perkins spoke in a man’s impression of a woman’s voice. It wasn’t convincing and not helped by the fact that for some reason he had chosen a Scottish accent for ‘Margaret’, which mimicked his employer and didn’t go any way to appeasing her. “And you can stop it with all that nonsense too” she spat.

Perkins adjusted his clothing, gently placed a cover over Mrs Napier’s back and shoulders to keep her warm and reached to the trolley for the hypodermic syringe of the powerful sedative Doctor Grainger had prescribed. Taking great care, he pressed the sharp tip against the fleshiest part of her left buttock and slowly squeezed in half of the liquid. There was no complaint, so either he had been sufficiently careful, or she was sulking.

Knowing he had little time before Donald came to, Perkins stepped over to his slumbering body and jabbed the needle hard into the top of his thigh, emptying the remainder of the drug and hoping that it would be fast acting and sufficiently strong to prevent him waking.

Donald’s body breathed deeply and slowly and gave no reaction. Perkins returned to Mrs Napier, who was now starting to snore soundly. As always, using only warm water and cotton wool, he cleaned her intimately and meticulously, and then dabbed her dry with the soft cotton towel he had brought with him. He moved her into her favoured sleeping position with her head on her pillow, reattached the morphine drip and the monitors and covered her with a clean sheet and her blankets and tucked her in as neatly as any good nurse would.

Perkins then needed to get Donald out of the room and upstairs. Donald was a big man and as a deadweight was not going to be easy to move. Luckily there was a service lift at the other end of the corridor, so with no mean effort Perkins dragged Donald's slumbering form onto the wheelchair and secured it with the sheet he had removed from the bed. Donald's head had lolled from side to side and both feet dragged on the floor but, with some difficulty, Perkins had managed to get him in and out of the lift and into his bedroom.

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After sheltering briefly from the torrential rain with Harriet in the bandstand, Lulu made a dash and followed the sailors and their parents into the club. She was surprised to see Tom standing at the door looking almost happy, as they dripped past him to fill up on milkshakes and cakes for the children and another coffee for the adults. “There goes the lunch order” he said to her, laughing and looking up at the sky.

“What’s got in to you? I expected you to be beside yourself with worry.” Lulu asked. “What have you found out that has made everything fine?” she knew Tom was more than capable of putting on a public face for his customers, but she was having trouble understanding this new mood with her. Only two days ago he had been a quivering wreck of a man, and *she* certainly hadn’t given him anything concrete to allay his fears.

“I think I have had an epiphany Lu” Tom smiled, looking quite smug. He took her arm and pulled her into a side room, away from the earshot of the customers. “It doesn’t matter who set me up, who drugged me, who made the videos, who sent the emails.”

“Go on” said Lulu, confused.

“You see, I know it wasn’t really me doing those disgusting things. I have never done anything like it before and I’m sure you can tell that I am not really with it - if you look closely.”

“So?”

‘So, the only power the blackmailer has is that I don’t want Pips to see the video and, if I did pay whatever demands he or she made, they wouldn’t stop, would they? I would never be sure they wouldn’t ask for more. The threat would always be there, wouldn’t it? I couldn’t live like that. You know I’d never cope. I’m just not strong enough. I nearly reached for the bottle in the middle of the night when I realised that but then I thought Fuck it!’

“What do you mean, Fuck it?”

“Exactly that. Quite reasonably, considering all I have put her through in the past and how shit I have been, Pippa will leave me if I don’t stop drinking like I have been and being so useless. If I have the threat from the blackmailers hanging over me, I’ll drink heavily, so I’ve got nothing to lose. I’m going to show Pips the videos and explain I am innocent and it’s up to her to believe me or not.” Tom, concluded, almost triumphantly, pleased with himself like he’d solved a complex puzzle.

Lulu stared blankly at the man. She certainly couldn’t fault his logic. A high-risk strategy perhaps but logically sound. Nothing that wasn’t obvious already, but I guess he had to work it out for himself she thought. She noted how he hadn’t once thanked her for her help or asked her how her meetings went or even what she had discovered.

“Ooh look at you Sherlock” she said quietly “One night sober and you’ve worked out all the answers to everything. You should try it more often.” And walked into the dining room, all the time looking around for Donald. She’d tried him several more times and nothing. She was beginning to wonder whether he had just left with all that cash. “I don’t suppose you’ve seen a stranger, a big guy, hanging around on his own, have you?” She called back to Tom, but Tom had started chatting to one of the mothers and didn’t hear her.

“Not since he left last night.” Elsie had overheard her conversation with Tom from the bar where she was restocking the glasses.

“Hmm. Looks like I’ll be lunching with out him.” Lulu said ruefully.

“Men, all a bloody waste of time if you ask me.” Elsie, tried to show solidarity. “Including that one” she gestured with her head at Tom. “Especially that one.”

“Can you believe it?” Lulu agreed. “Two days ago, he was sobbing his heart out to me to help him and now it’s almost as if it never happened.”



“Well, you know, it’s a bit like when it stops raining after a huge downpour” Elsie wiped her hands on the tea towel, walked around to the front of the bar and looked out of the window, “You see all those mums and dads desperate to keep dry under those umbrellas and how important the umbrellas are to them? You watch, as soon as the rain stops that same umbrella, which was so important five minutes ago, now becomes not only not important but also a bit of a nuisance to carry around. And that’s what it’s like when you put yourself out to help people.” And, with that, she walked off to fetch some more glasses from the kitchen.

“Thanks for that” Lulu shrugged. “I feel better now” she said sarcastically.

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“Someone is at the window” Donald’s mother shrieked into the monitor. The noise of Billy’s scream as he fell had woken her early from her sedation and she had seen him falling past her window. As the illness progressed, she was becoming increasingly uncomfortable and therefore increasingly unhappy when she awoke, especially when disturbed. Perkins was at her bedside within moments, attempting to calm her.

“It’s all OK Madam. It’s just the wind in the trees. I’ll cut some of their branches back tomorrow, so they don’t rattle so much.” He walked over to the window and drew her curtains, big heavy black out curtains which kept out sound as well as light. He prepared a sedative for her and stroked her forehead gently. She relaxed a little.

“Did Henry send the letters? Did you send the second emails?” her voice crackled.

“Yes, Madam, they would have all received their letters yesterday morning and I sent their second emails last afternoon” Perkins repeated the information he had given her without reminding her that this was the third time she had asked him. He stroked her head again and carefully administered a little of the sedative, leaving the syringe with the remainder on the trolley for later. She slowly drifted off to sleep again and Perkins decided to head upstairs.

Donald was wide awake. Strapped tightly to his bed with luggage straps across his ankles, waist, chest and forehead. Perkins had fitted a ball gag to his mouth. His head pounded from the punch and hitting the monitor screen and he was dehydrated. To cap it all he had wet himself. Angry and frightened, he was actually relieved to hear Perkins' climbing the stairs and even more so when he saw that he had brought water.

Perkins was almost apologetic, almost. He was mostly concerned with his predicament and needed to explain.

"Afternoon Sir. I am sorry about your head and about having to strap you to your bed like that. Oh, and for the gag, that's the only one I had. It *is* clean. You don't need to worry about that." That was one thing Donald hadn't been worrying about.

"I honestly have no idea what to do now. I'm not really used to making decisions. I'm used to doing what I'm told. I always found that easier. Twenty-two years as a soldier then ten working for your father and now for Madam. I didn't decide to hit you. It was more of a reflex really. You surprised me when I was er, you know, and it was just instinct to lash out." Perkins spoke like he was at confessional. Donald was more interested in having some water and tried to indicate that to Perkins by grunting and moving his head to no avail.

"The thing is, I can't risk letting you go - you might attack me or go to the police or even worse, wake Madam. That would make my life hell. I thought about killing you but although we had to in the army, I'm not really a killer and what have you really done to me apart from quite reasonably disturbing me while I was boning your mother - Oh I can see how it must have looked but I can assure you everything I was doing was with full consent of Madam, well... everything is, actually its more than consent, it's under her instruction." He smiled to himself as if he'd cracked a funny joke.

"It's been going on a long time, long before your father left this earth. You know, he never paid her any, you know, attention, in that regard. She started off probing me, asking me questions, about where I took him at night and the other women. I know I shouldn't have said anything, but I suppose I felt a bit sorry for her, stuck at home on her own every night.

Then one day, must have been a good eight years ago now, she said to me, straight out, “Well Perkins, if he’s been fucking other women and won’t come near me, *you* are going to have to fuck me. I don’t want any kissing or any of that sentimental rubbish, I just want you to fuck me.” Well, to say I was taken aback was a bit of an understatement. But she made the decision and that’s what we’ve been doing. No cuddling, no nothing. She has experimented with a few things over the years but that’s it, I did think it would stop when she became bed bound but no, she instructed that I wake her up every night. Obviously, we are just seeing what works best for her from a pain medication viewpoint. Well, Madam and Doctor Grainger are. Oh yes, she’s told him all about it. She’s not one for secrets really is your mother.”

Donald’s thirst and his headache were his overriding interest, but he really did not want to hear Perkins describing the detail of his sexual relationship with his, Donald’s mother and was glad when Perkin’s eventually stopped talking for a minute and inserted a plastic tube through the hole in his ball gag and the other end into the bottle of water, he had brought with him. Whilst his immediate thirst was sated, his relief didn’t last long.

“I suppose I should explain the whole nurse get up thing” Perkins was warming to his subject. He couldn’t remember when he had last spoken so much and was obviously enjoying it. “I don’t know if your father had said something but Madam was getting concerned that he might be suspicious so she suggested, well actually she instructed me, that I should start talking about a wife. I haven’t got a wife and I have never had one, so I invented Margaret - it was my mother’s name. Madam said that she should be a nurse and I began talking about her like a real person to your father - which I think pleased your mother and over time I, in fact I think both Madam and I, started thinking of her as a real person. One day I found a uniform in my quarters and the rest as they say is history. It was a bit strange at first but in the end, it added a certain something to our enjoyment.”

If Donald could have screamed at him to stop, he would have but all he could do was lay there and listen. He tried to focus on other things - like how he could possibly escape, but Perkins would then say something even more unsettling which would distract him. It wasn’t that he had any feelings for the woman but after all it was his mother.

“Anyway, that’s enough about that” Perkins appeared to be reaching the end of his monologue. In fact, he was merely reverting to his original subject. “It really is a shame you know. The irony is that I was actually trying to be nice, to help you, as much as I could, without Madam knowing. The cash I gave you yesterday was mine and I thought it might help you be comfortable and rely on Madam less while you’re here. It was all the money your father paid me over the years for keeping schtum when I took him to see all those women. I don’t really have to spend money in this job, I just use the card to buy anything I need. Your mother used to check it to see what I spent but that was years ago.”

It was slowly dawning on Donald that Perkins was a very simple man.

“And it was me who sorted out your father’s papers in the bureau. I do hope I’ve done it right. I don’t really understand any of it, It took me hours and hours. That bag of money I put with it I found tucked away at the back of the bureau. It is a lot bigger than the little bag I gave you. I suppose it was money he used for lending other people. Anyway, Madam doesn’t know anything about it so I thought you should have it, seeing as you weren’t inheriting anything.”

Donald grunted and Perkins gave him some more water through the straw.

“Of course, that might all be a bit of a waste of time now...if I have to kill you. It is a real nuisance. But I suppose it’s the thought that counts.” Perkins continued quite dispassionately. “I heard somewhere that I can inject something between your big toe and your second toe which will make you have a heart attack and will never be noticed. And Doctor Grainger would think it quite reasonable for you to have a heart attack - seeing as you’re carrying a bit of extra weight, you drink quite a lot and you’ve had a big shock. I need to remember what it was. We’ve probably got some in the house. We seem to have all sorts of things here.”

He went on thinking out loud, planning when he would have to time the murder and various details. There was no menace, no malice, he might well have been writing a shopping list. “Oh, look at me getting all carried away with myself. I’m getting distracted - that’s what madam would say. My priority right now is Madam and to make sure that she stays alive long enough to see her little game play out. I sometimes think that’s the only thing keeping her stopping her from dying,”

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