

Here the group was given an outline scenario for a short story; a woman living in Edinburgh in her retirement who had chosen to build a modern house in the grounds of her large walled garden and, with the help of her grand-children, to bury a time capsule celebrating the event.

THE STEWARTS OF ROSE COTTAGE

The somehow regal surname seemed appropriate for the place where James and Olivia decided to buy their home in one of Edinburgh's most historic areas.

It was the description in the estate agent's window of Rose Cottage that almost put them off going to see it; they were keen to buy a property where they would have plenty of room for their family to visit, so a cottage seemed out of the question. However, unperturbed the young estate agent was determined to show them the property. This was a very affluent area and a healthy commission was at stake, should he succeed.

Rose Cottage was one of three properties chosen for them to see. It was also the first one they saw and when they were driven up to the house they felt sure there had been a mistake; the house was a few minutes from Duddingston Loch, the houses with high walls gave privacy and set back from the cobbled streets only the wrought-iron gates of this wonderful house gave a glimpse of the splendour behind them.

James and Olivia were now retired after leading a very busy working life; James was the former owner of an engineering company which he had started himself with a loan from his parents which was repaid in many ways and always with love.

Olivia was a schoolteacher at St Margaret's School for Girls and had taught music; she rarely spoke of the pupils she taught, but you can be sure they would have included some famous names. This would have been clear had you observed her Christmas card list; she was very discreet.

They were both keen that the new house should have a large established garden as this was Olivia's hobby. James used to sit and observe Olivia tending to her precious flowers and plants; he was sure he heard her talking to them on occasions, which she denied of course. They were great friends as well as lifetime partners.

They knew that Rose Cottage was the perfect home for their retirement when they saw it. There were five bedrooms, a large walled garden with a huge oak tree in the back garden to the side of the summer house. It was perfect. They put in an offer and to their surprise it was accepted very quickly; the previous owners were going abroad so required a quick sale. This was now 25 years ago, and here we are now she thought. James had gone some ten years before. She found the house too big for her now even though she had her grandchildren; Ian aged 14, James 12 and seven year-old Amy. She adored them and they her.

The decision to embark on such an enormous challenge was made because of the children and not in spite of them. She knew exactly what she wanted, a smaller home with an up to date interior but still making room for her cherished ornaments given to her by family and friends, all with their own meaning. A garden, of course, only smaller. This new home should be constructed at the other side of the large walled garden; this was the main specification that had to be agreed by any prospective buyer of Rose Cottage.

Once the details had been clarified, it seemed in no time at all that the house was sold to a lovely couple with two children. Tony was an oil company executive and Alana owned a florists. The children Mary aged seven and Lauren aged five were enrolled in St Margaret's School for Girls (this may have sealed the deal).

Olivia's new home was to be finished in October. The children were coming up from Bedford on holiday and were looking forward to the time capsule ceremony. They were very excited and for Olivia, who would choose the items for the time capsule, it would be nostalgic with a great deal of mixed emotions. She felt sure, however, that James would have approved of her plans for the new Rose Cottage. The new owners would be her neighbours now and, finally, the future was yet to come.

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