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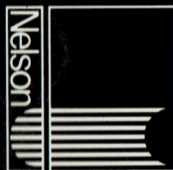
SERIES EDITOR: JOHN McRAE

Jane calls her friend Nancy in London. But who answers the phone? A strange voice with a terrifying message!

Is Nancy dead? Why can nobody find her?

This is a mystery story where nothing is simple ... or where everything is simple, except the question 'who was Nancy?'

LEVEL 1 600 WORDS



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Who Was Nancy?



JOHN McRAE



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John McRae

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Chapter 1

Jane Sanders is making a telephone call. She is in Glasgow, so she remembers that 071 is the code for Central London. Then, 'What is the number?' she thinks. '588 7421? I think that's it.'

Today Jane is going to the island of Tenerife for a holiday. She will be there for two weeks, so she wants to call her friend Nancy in London to say goodbye. Nancy works as a telephonist, answering the telephone for a large insurance company in London. Jane often calls her at work, and Nancy usually calls Jane back, so the insurance company actually pays for the call!

When Jane calls the number in London she hears the sound that tells her the number is engaged. This is a little unusual. A big company has a lot of lines, so usually someone answers even if there are a lot of calls.

Anyway, Jane still has many things to do. She has to pack her cases for her holiday and buy things like sun-tan oil and . . . 'What is it Neil wants me to buy?' she says to herself. She always tells herself to make a list of the things she has to do because she always forgets

something important. Today she can't remember what Neil wants her to buy.

Neil is Jane's boyfriend. He is on his way to London right now, as he is a steward on the flights between Glasgow and London Heathrow. He flies twice each way – four flights today before he comes back to Jane, and they can go to catch their holiday flight.

Neil starts work at seven-thirty in the morning, as the first flight leaves at eight o'clock. Today he finishes work at three-thirty in the afternoon, when the two o'clock flight from London comes in to Glasgow and all the passengers get off.

It's now just before noon. Jane is trying to remember all the things she has to do, but she still can't remember what Neil wants her to buy. 'Shampoo? No, he has some shampoo,' she says as she looks in the bathroom of the flat. 'Maybe he wants some . . .' She looks around. Hair gel? No. Shaving foam? No. What can it be?

Then she remembers about Nancy. She goes to the phone again, lifts the receiver and presses the 're-dial' button, so that she can call the same number again automatically.

'Neil,' she thinks, 'is just leaving for London again. He is doing the eight o'clock and twelve o'clock flights to London. That means the ten



o'clock and two o'clock flights back.'

The phone is ringing at the London end, but there is no reply. 'Strange,' Jane thinks. 'Someone usually answers.'

Her cat, Tibby, wakes up slowly. He is thinking about breakfast – and suddenly Jane remembers one thing she must do before she goes on holiday – find someone to look after the cat. Just as she is putting the phone down, she thinks she hears someone answering. 'Nancy? Can I speak to Nancy?' she says into the receiver. But there is only silence.

She decides to ask her next-door neighbour, Jimmy, if he will come in and give the cat its food while she and Neil are away. Jimmy likes Jane a lot. She is exactly his kind of girl: tall, blonde and very elegantly dressed. But Jane, of course, loves Neil. Neil is attractive, with a little moustache, tall and very good-looking in his airline steward's uniform.

Jimmy is unemployed – he doesn't have a job. He is a little jealous of Neil. Neil has a nice car, a good job and a lovely girlfriend. Jimmy is short, with a beard, and he is getting fat. But he will do anything to please Jane. So when she comes to his door, he says, 'Of course I'll feed the cat. No problem.'

'Oh thanks, Jimmy. You're such a sweetie.'

Jane smiles at him.

'Is there anything else I can do for you, Jane?'

'I have a million things to do before we leave,' Jane tells him. 'Things to buy, cases to pack. I must wash my hair. And I'm trying to phone Nancy. You remember Nancy? It's funny, but I can't get her on the phone today.'

Jimmy remembers Nancy. Jane wants Nancy and Jimmy to be close friends, but they don't really know each other. Jimmy sees Jane every day, so he prefers her. And Nancy lives in London, so she can't see Jimmy very often. But Jane doesn't know anything about all these complications. She is busy thinking about her own problems. 'Oh dear. There are so many things to do!'

'Well, don't worry. If I can help, just ask me. I'm here all day,' says Jimmy. He hopes she will ask him to do something to help. But for the moment she can't think what she wants him to do. Then she hears the phone ringing in her flat. 'I'll talk to you later, Jimmy. That's the phone. I wonder who it is.'

'See you later then, Jane,' he says.

As she hurries back into her flat to answer the phone, Jimmy gives a little smile. 'She's always like that,' he thinks. 'She can never decide what she wants, or remember the things she's doing.' He closes his door gently, as Jane's door closes with a bang.

Chapter 2

The phone is ringing as Jane hurries back into her flat from Jimmy's. The cat is walking slowly from the bed towards his food and water dishes and Jane doesn't see him as she runs in. He gives a little miaow just to tell her to be careful. 'Oh sorry, Tibby,' she says. 'I'll fall over you one day if I don't look where I'm going.' Tibby looks at her in just the same way as Jimmy. Even the cat understands Jane's ways!

She gets to the phone out of breath and it stops ringing the moment she picks it up. 'Damn,' she says angrily. 'Nothing is going right today.' Tibby miaows again. There is no food in his dish, and he's hungry. 'Oh, Tibby, I'm sorry,' Jane says again. 'That's another thing I have to get – cat food. Enough for two weeks.' She looks for some in the kitchen cupboard, and in the fridge, but she can't find any. Tibby miaows again.

'Oh shut up, Tibby,' Jane shouts. Tibby doesn't like it when she shouts at him and he looks at her now and goes slowly out of the room. 'It's all right, Tibby, don't worry. I'll go and get some food now.' Then she stops and

thinks, 'Maybe I can ask Jimmy to go and get the cat food. He'll go if I ask him. That way I can wash my hair, and pack my cases, and – oh!' She remembers about Nancy and turns back to the phone. Tibby watches her from the door. He knows that she will not now remember about him and the cat food. So he waits until there is a good moment to remind her.

Jane goes to the phone, thinks for a second about Nancy's number, then remembers the 'redial' button. Such a good idea. It automatically remembers the number for you if the other person doesn't answer. She presses the button and, after a moment, she hears the ringing sound. It rings ten or twelve times, then someone picks up the phone, but doesn't speak.

'Hello,' says Jane. 'I'm looking for Nancy. Is Nancy there?' But she hears only silence. 'Hello,' she says again. 'Nancy?' Then a voice speaks. 'Nancy's dead. Don't worry about Nancy. She's dead.'

Jane is horrified. She can't say anything. She doesn't know what to think. Suddenly she feels very alone, and very frightened. She begins to feel strange all over, and is almost crying.

She looks at the phone in her hand. Now there is nothing – just the sound that means she can make a call. The voice is no longer there. What



a horrible voice – a deep voice, a man’s voice, not like any other voice Jane knows. And such a horrible message. Who is he? And what about Nancy? Is she really dead?

Jane doesn’t know what to do. She looks at the silent phone in her hand. She thinks about calling the same number again, but she is afraid. She doesn’t want to hear that voice again, or that message.

A few minutes pass, and Jane does nothing. She is still standing there thinking about Nancy when Tibby comes up to her. He wants to remind her about his food and decides that this is a good moment.

‘Oh Tibby,’ she cries when she hears his miaow. ‘Tibby, what can I do? Poor Nancy. Oh dear, I don’t know what to do.’

Tibby knows that Jane is sometimes like this – tense, or worried. But, of course, he doesn’t know that this time Jane is really very worried. This is a serious problem.

Jane decides to phone Neil. He is going to London and he’ll know what to do. She tries to remember the number of the airport – 874 2483. She dials.

‘Hello, Button Laundry,’ someone answers.

‘Oh, sorry,’ says Jane. ‘I want the airport.’

‘Wrong number, I’m afraid,’ the person at

the Button Laundry replies.

'Sorry. Very sorry,' says Jane and puts the phone down. 'Damn, damn. Where is the phone book? Why can I never remember the number?' She quickly finds the number in the little book she keeps beside the phone. '875 2483. That's it,' she says. She calls the airport.

'Good afternoon, British Midland. How can I help you?' replies a woman's voice.

'Oh, hello. It's Jane Sanders here. I want to speak to Neil. Neil Donaldson. He's a steward. He's on the twelve o'clock flight to London.'

'I'm sorry,' says the woman at the airport. 'It's ten past twelve now. So the plane isn't here. It's on its way to London. You can speak to Mr Donaldson when he arrives there.'

'Oh dear, but I need him now,' Jane says in desperation.

'I'm sorry, but I really can't help you. Maybe you can try calling someone else.' The British Midland lady wants to help Jane, but she doesn't know what to say.

'Yes,' Jane says. 'That's an idea. I'll call Ben and Joe in London.'

'That's all right, then,' the woman's voice says. 'Sorry I can't give you more help. Goodbye.'

'Bye.' Jane puts the phone down again. She is very nearly crying. But it will be a good idea to call Ben and Joe. They are friends of Nancy's and they live near her office. They can maybe go there and see if . . . Remembering that horrible voice, Jane sits down and starts to cry. Poor Nancy. It can't be true.

Chapter 3

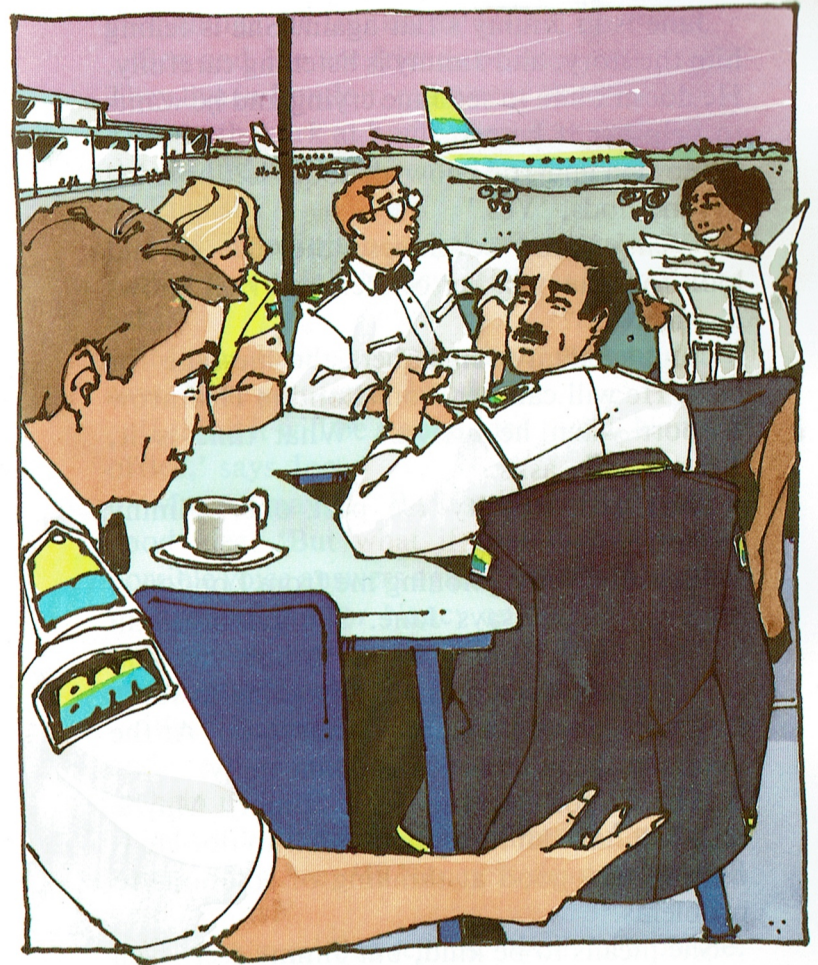
When Neil arrives at Heathrow at ten past one, he is happy. 'Just one more flight to go,' he thinks, 'and then we're off to Tenerife.' Two weeks' holiday with Jane is like a dream. He can't wait!

He goes into the room where the stewards wait between flights. 'A quick lunch and a chat with some friends, and soon I'll be back at work. Then . . .' But one of his friends, Jack, who is working on flights to Edinburgh today, comes over to him quickly. 'Hey, Neil,' Jack says, 'there's a very urgent message for you. Phone Jane immediately.'

'Why? Is something wrong?' Neil asks. He is beginning to get a little worried.

'I don't know,' says Jack. 'There was just that message.'

Neil doesn't think any more about his lunch, but runs to the telephone. He calls Jane's number in Glasgow, and hears it ringing. It rings and rings but Jane doesn't answer. Neil is really worried now. 'Where is she? What is happening?' he thinks to himself. 'Where can Jane be?'



Jane is in Jimmy's flat again. She is telling him the story, and Jimmy is listening carefully. He doesn't like to see Jane crying and he wants to help her if he can.

'So Ben and Joe know all about it?' he asks.

Jane nods, 'Yes.'

'Well,' Jimmy continues, 'they can go and look for Nancy at her office. And Neil knows about it too?'

Jane suddenly remembers the message for Neil. He will call her from London Heathrow Airport when he arrives. 'What time is it, Jimmy?' she asks.

'Just after twenty-five past one,' Jimmy replies. 'Why?'

'Because Neil's phoning me from London. I must go back,' says Jane. She gets up, still crying a little. Jimmy wants to hold her and comfort her, but she is already going towards the door. He doesn't know what to do. At the door she turns and looks at him sadly.

'Thanks for listening to me, Jimmy. Maybe Neil will have an idea about what to do. He is usually very good at thinking of solutions to problems.'

She means to be kind, but Jimmy feels even more unhappy because Neil can think of solutions and he can't. 'Neil can always do

everything,' he thinks, as Jane goes out.

Ben and Joe are friends of Jane and Neil's. They live in London, quite near Nancy's office. They both work at home. Ben does designs for the theatre, and Joe writes books for students of English.

After Jane's phone call they are very worried.

'Do you think Nancy really is dead?' Joe asks.

'Maybe Jane is worried about nothing,' Ben says. 'But you never know.'

'I think it will be a good idea to call Nancy's office,' says Joe.

'Mm - maybe.' Ben is thinking it's not a good idea. 'But what if that man with the horrible voice answers again? He will think that we are looking for Nancy and . . .'

'But we *are* looking for Nancy,' Joe interrupts. 'That's the important thing.'

'Yes,' Ben agrees. 'OK. Let's go to her office and see if we can find something, or someone, to help us.'

'But I don't want to find that man with the voice,' says Joe. 'If Nancy is dead, what will he do to us?'

'That's true,' Ben replies. 'Well, let's phone. We'll not say anything until we hear who answers the phone. And if it's him, we'll know

he's still there.'

'I don't know,' says Ben. 'We can't just ask him, "Is Nancy there?" You remember his words, "Nancy's dead. Don't worry about Nancy. She's dead."''

Neil is frantic now. 'Three times, and still no reply,' he says. 'Where can she be?' Then he stops and thinks for a moment. 'Maybe she's at Jimmy's. If something is wrong, she'll ask him for help.'

He looks for Jimmy's number in his Filofax notebook. As he is looking for it, Jack passes him and says, 'No answer? Maybe she doesn't want to go to Tenerife with you after all.'

Jack does not mean to be unkind, but his words make Neil angry.

'Stay out of this! You don't know what you're talking about,' he shouts.

'Sorry, old chap, just my little joke,' says Jack. 'When's your flight back to Glasgow? Isn't it better to wait until you're back there?'

'The message was urgent. You know that.' He begins to call Jimmy's number in Glasgow. 'Look at the time,' he says to Jack. 'The flight leaves in twenty minutes.'

'Yes,' Jack agrees. 'My flight to Edinburgh leaves in ten minutes. I can't stand around here

chatting. Bye. I hope you enjoy your holiday anyway.'

Neil isn't thinking about his holiday. He is listening to the ringing sounds and waiting for Jimmy to answer.

Chapter 4

Jane is going back into her flat from Jimmy's. She is still crying a little. As she opens the door she hears the telephone ringing, just like the last time. 'It's Neil,' she thinks and runs towards the phone.

There is a very angry sound and Jane falls flat on her face. Tibby runs away, still miaowing angrily. He always waits for Jane behind the door, especially when he is hungry! But Jane often forgets about him when she is thinking of other things, like now.

'Damn you, Tibby,' Jane cries. Tibby looks at her from the door of the bedroom. Jane can see he is angry with her for standing on him. 'Oh Tibby, I'm sorry,' she says, crying again. As she gets up the phone stops ringing. 'Oh damn,' she says again, crying even more. 'I want Neil to phone.' She is thinking more of herself than about poor Nancy now. Suddenly she remembers her and thinks of Ben and Joe. What are they doing?

'Hello Jimmy. It's Neil.'

'Oh, hello Neil.' Jimmy always feels a bit uncomfortable when he talks to Neil. 'Erm ...,



Jane is waiting for you to call,' he says.

'Is she with you?' Neil asks.

'No, she's at home now.'

'Oh damn. What's the problem, anyway?'

Jimmy tries to explain to Neil about Nancy.

'What do you mean, she's dead?' Neil asks.

'Well, that's what Jane says. There was this man on the phone and he . . .'

'Yes, yes,' Neil interrupts. 'Don't tell me again. But is it true?'

'How do I know?' Jimmy asks. 'That's what Jane says. Why don't you phone her?'

'Three times. Three times . . .'

Neil almost can't speak because he is so nervous and tense. 'I'll try again.'

'You do that,' says Jimmy, thinking that Neil is not in a very good state to help Jane now.

Ben and Joe decide to telephone Nancy's office before they go there.

'What's the number, Joe?'

'It's, let me see, yes. I think it's 588 4721,' Joe replies.

'Are you sure?'

'Yes, certain.'

'Right,' says Ben, as he dials the number, '588 4721.'

Immediately there is a female voice, 'Good afternoon, Safeguard Insurance.'

'Hello,' says Ben, 'I'm glad you aren't a man.'

'Pardon?' asks the female voice.

'Sorry. What I mean is . . . No, it's too long to explain.' Then Ben asks, 'Is Nancy there please?'

'Nancy? Nancy who?'

'Nancy er . . .,' Ben turns to Joe. 'What's Nancy's surname, Joe?' he asks.

'Summerson,' Joe replies.

'Nancy Summerson,' Ben says into the telephone. 'She works there as a telephonist.'

'I don't know anybody of that name,' the girl says. 'But I'm new here. Someone is off ill, and someone else is going on holiday, and then there's the funeral. That's why I'm here, you see.'

'Funeral? What funeral? Whose funeral?' Ben asks. He turns to Joe. 'There's a funeral,' he tells him. 'Someone's dead.'

'Who? Not Nancy?' Joe asks.

The girl is speaking to Ben. 'She doesn't know,' Ben tells Joe. 'She's new. She doesn't know anything or anybody.' Into the phone he says, 'OK, thanks very much. Goodbye.' But he is thinking, 'Thanks for nothing.'

Jane is sitting beside the phone crying. 'Oh, Neil,' she thinks, 'please phone back.' But it's

after a quarter to two now, and she knows his flight leaves at two o'clock. 'How can I wait till he comes back to Glasgow?'

Then she remembers Ben and Joe. What are they doing? 'I'll call them,' she thinks. 'But no – Neil will call, and if I am talking to Ben and Joe ...'

The phone rings with a sudden loud noise. After a moment of surprise Jane picks it up.

'Hello?' she says.

'Jane, it's me. What's wrong?'

'Oh Neil. Finally,' Jane says, and starts to cry again. Tibby comes back in and goes up to her. 'Go away,' she says. Tibby goes away, still very hungry – and angry.

'What?' says Neil. 'You want me to call, then you want me to go away.'

'No no. No, not you. Tibby,' Jane says.

'Well, what is it? My plane is leaving. Tell me all about it. What's wrong?'

Jane tells him about the terrible phone call. 'What can we do about Nancy?' she asks, crying still.

'I can't do anything. I'm leaving now. Look, I'll be home very soon. Just a couple of hours. Maybe Ben and Joe will find her,' Neil says.

'But Neil, I'm worried, I'm frightened.'

'Call Ben and Joe again. Try not to worry.

I have to go. I'm late.' Neil puts the phone down and runs to his plane. It's ready to leave, and everyone is waiting for him.

'What's the problem?' the pilot asks.

'It's Jane,' Neil replies. 'About her friend Nancy. I don't know what to think.' He is worried now, too. And he can't do anything in London because the plane is leaving right now for Glasgow. He is thinking of Nancy. 'Is she dead?' he wonders.

Chapter 5

Ben and Joe are standing across the road from Nancy's office. They are watching the big main entrance to see if there is anything unusual or strange happening.

'Do you think it's terrorists?' Joe asks.

'No, I don't. These things don't happen to people like us. There will be a simple explanation for it all,' Ben replies. But in his own mind he is not so sure.

'Everything looks normal,' he says. 'But that doesn't mean that it really *is* normal.'

'Let's just go in and ask for Nancy,' says Joe. 'I think it's a good idea to be direct. If we wait out here, we'll only get more worried.'

'OK,' says Ben. But he does not move. 'Look,' he says, 'there is nobody going into the offices, or coming out. That's a bit unusual.'

'No it isn't. It's perfectly normal,' says Joe. 'It's just that for four or five minutes you have a quiet time. There's someone going in now. Let's follow him.'

In Glasgow, Jimmy is thinking about Jane. She is in a very bad state, and she has a lot of things to do before she goes on holiday this

evening. And now Jimmy remembers something from yesterday. What was it?

'Nancy's coming. While we are in Tenerife.'

Yes, Jimmy remembers Jane's words. So Nancy is coming here. In that case it's not necessary for Jimmy to look after the cat. Nancy will stay in Jane's flat and feed Tibby. 'How Jane forgets things,' Jimmy thinks. 'She really has a very bad memory.'

'But what if Nancy is dead? She can't come if she's dead. Don't be stupid, Jimmy,' he tells himself. 'That's obvious. Of course she can't come if she's dead.' He likes Nancy, and hopes she isn't dead. Because then she will come. 'Better to remind Jane,' he thinks. 'Anyway better to see if she's all right.'

Really, Jimmy just wants a reason, any reason, for going to see Jane now. He goes to the door of her flat and listens. He can't hear anything. 'Is she all right?' he wonders. 'Will she be angry with me if I go in now?' He decides to wait for a few minutes.

Neil is on the plane, flying to Glasgow. He is giving the passengers lunch, but he is not really thinking about them. He is hungry too, but he is thinking about Nancy. And he is worried about Jane.

What about their holiday? Just an hour ago

it was a lovely dream. Now he thinks it's going to be a terrible holiday if Jane is crying all the time about Nancy. How can she be dead?

'Oh, I beg your pardon, sir.' Neil is thinking about his own problems and a passenger wants to ask him for something. 'A glass of white wine, sir? Certainly. Here you are, sir,' Neil says.

In an hour he will be in Glasgow.

Of course, when Jane tries to call Ben and Joe there is no reply. They are out looking for Nancy. But Jane is beginning not to feel so bad. She is not crying any more. And when Tibby looks at her and says, 'Miaow,' she remembers that he is still waiting for something to eat!

'Oh, Tibby, you poor darling,' she says. 'You're hungry.'

'Mwuurr,' replies Tibby, finally thinking the problems are over.

'But there's no food in the house. Oh dear.'

'Mwur?'

'I'm sorry, Tibby,' Jane says. 'I'll go and ask Jimmy to get some. Just a minute.'

Ben and Joe are now at the door of the Safeguard Insurance building. As they go in, a security guard comes out. He looks at them, and Joe turns to Ben to ask a question. Ben says



quietly, 'Just keep going. Don't speak to me or to the guard.'

'What? Not even to ask him ...,' Joe asks.

'No,' Ben interrupts. 'Let's wait till we're inside.'

But inside everything is perfectly normal. There is a reception desk where a smiling and helpful girl is sitting.

'Good afternoon,' she says. 'Can I help you?'

Ben and Joe start to speak together. They stop, look at each other, then Ben starts again.

'We're looking for a girl, Nancy Summerson. She is a telephonist here. We're worried about her,' he tells the receptionist.

'Just a moment then, sir,' she replies. 'I'll call the telephone room and see if she's there.'

Jane comes out of her flat to go to Jimmy's at exactly the same moment as Jimmy opens his door to go and see if Jane is all right.

They look at each other in surprise for a moment. Then Jane speaks. 'What a strange day. All sorts of funny things are happening!'

Jimmy sees that she isn't crying any more, so obviously she feels a little better.

'It's all right now,' he says, but she interrupts him.

'Oh no, it isn't, Jimmy. But there's one thing you can do to help. There's no cat food in the

house and Tibby's hungry.'

'Of course. I'll go and get some,' Jimmy says. He is not sure if he can tell her what he remembers about Nancy. 'But,' he begins ... and stops.

'What is it, Jimmy?'

'Nancy. Isn't Nancy coming to look after Tibby?'

Jane looks very surprised. 'Oh dear. Yes she is. Or ... well, she *was*.' Jimmy thinks she is going to cry again.

'Don't worry, Jane,' he says. 'Everything will be all right. You'll see.'

'But what if she's dead?' says Jane. 'That voice ...'

'Stop thinking about that voice. Think of something good. Think about your holiday.' Jane smiles at Jimmy a little.

'Thanks, Jimmy,' she says. 'You're always so nice to me.'

'Now,' he asks her, 'is there anything else I can get you when I go for the cat food? Anything you want before you go on holiday? Or to take with you?'

'Oh yes. There was something. Neil wants something, but I can't for the life of me remember what it is. Something to take with us. Why do I always forget things?'

'Don't worry, Jane,' Jimmy tells her. 'I'll go and get the cat food. You start packing, or something. Then if you remember what it is that Neil wants, I can go and get it later.'

'Thanks Jimmy. You're an angel,' Jane says.

They go back into their flats. As she closes the door Jane hears the telephone again.

'Hello, Jane? It's Ben,' Jane hears when she answers the phone.

'Oh Ben. Where are you?' she asks. She suddenly feels tense and worried again.

'I'm at Safeguard Insurance. Nancy's office. She's not here. They tell me she's away on holiday. She's not coming back for two weeks.'

'Oh no. Where is she? Ben, I'm worried,' says Jane.

'Me too. Look, Jane, are you sure about that voice this morning? Are you sure ... you know, about the words?'

'Of course I am, Ben. How can I forget? I'll never forget: "Nancy's dead. Don't worry about Nancy. She's dead."''

Chapter 6

It is just after ten past two. British Midland flight number BD6 from London is arriving at Gate 12 at Glasgow Airport. The passengers are getting ready to leave the plane. Neil wants to be first off the plane, to phone Jane, but he keeps smiling to all the passengers as they move slowly, very slowly he thinks, through the door and into the airport.

'Thank you very much. Goodbye,' he says to every passenger.

Finally, everyone is off the plane. Neil runs to a telephone and calls Jane.

'Neil,' she says into the phone. 'Ben and Joe can't find Nancy. Where can she be?'

'Don't worry, darling.' Neil tries not to seem worried. 'Everything will be all right. I'm coming home right now.'

Ben and Joe are leaving the Safeguard Insurance building after calling Jane from a public telephone in the reception area. Suddenly Joe stops. He has an idea.

'Ben,' he says. 'That voice on the telephone, the voice about Nancy ...'

'Yes,' says Ben.

'It was a man's voice.'

'Yes, it was. At least, that's what Jane says,' Ben agrees.

'Let's ask them who the telephonists are. If there's a male telephonist we can ask him if he knows anything about Nancy.'

'Yes, good idea,' says Ben. 'Maybe we'll find who the telephonist was this morning.'

They go back in. The security guard at the door looks at them. It is strange for two men to come in, go to reception, start to come out, then go back to reception again.

At the desk, the friendly receptionist answers, 'No, we have no male telephonists here. All the telephonists are women. Safeguard Insurance isn't very modern in its ideas, so only women do that kind of work. I think it's a pity, myself.'

'Me too,' says Joe. 'But where does that leave us? Are you sure a man never answers the phone here?' he asks again.

'Never. Impossible. There are always two or three women working on the phones. No men. No men at all,' the receptionist tells them.

'Well,' says Ben, 'that changes everything.' He looks at Joe.

'What do we do now?'

'You tell me,' says Ben.

Obviously the receptionist wants to know why they are looking for Nancy and why this news changes everything. But she can't ask. And they are moving away again. 'Ah well,' she thinks, 'I'll never know what all that was about.'

Jimmy comes back to Jane's flat with the cat food.

'Thanks very much, Jimmy,' says Jane. 'Now at least Tibby will be happy.' Tibby finally thinks that he will have something to eat, and makes a little sound, 'Mwurr!' to show that he is pleased.

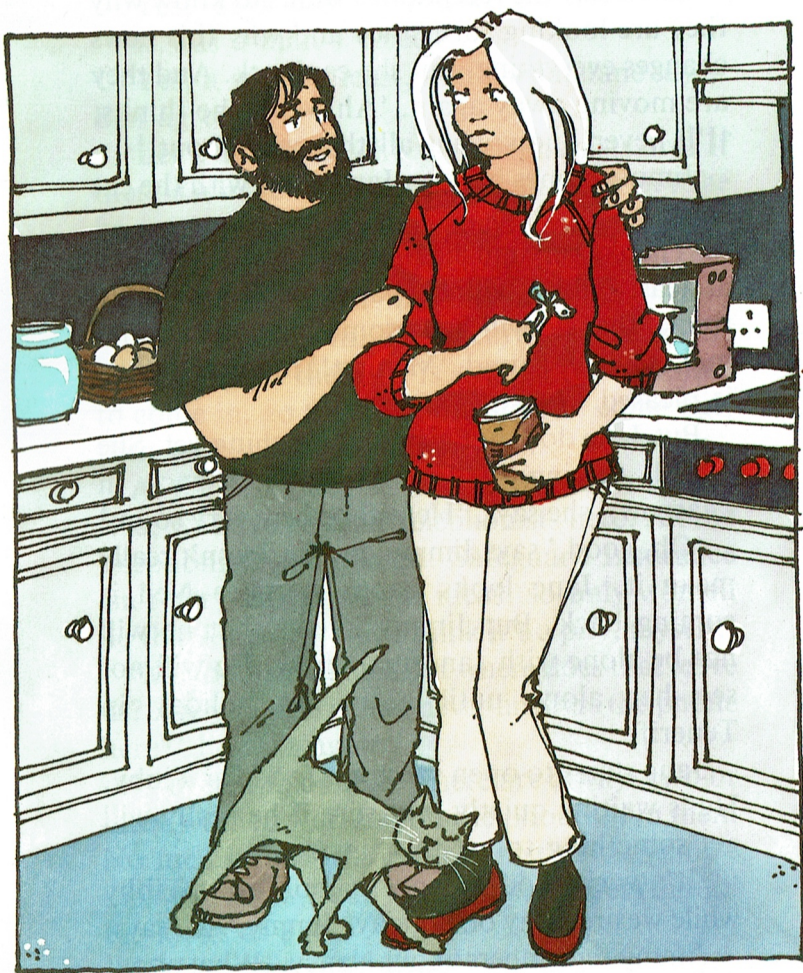
But Jane does not give him anything yet. She is still talking to Jimmy. 'Neil is back in Glasgow,' she says. 'He will be here very soon.'

'Oh, good,' says Jimmy, but he doesn't really mean it. Jane looks happy because Neil is coming back. But Jimmy knows that he will not be alone with Jane again now. He will not see her alone until after her holiday in Tenerife.

Jane starts to open some cat food for Tibby. He is waiting quietly, not sure if he really will get something to eat this time.

'It's very good of you to look after Tibby while we are away on holiday, Jimmy,' she says.

Jimmy remembers about Nancy. 'What about Nancy?' he asks.



‘Oh, don’t talk about Nancy,’ Jane says. ‘I don’t know what to think about her. That voice on the phone ...’

Tibby looks at Jimmy. If Jane starts to cry again Tibby will still have nothing to eat. Jimmy quickly goes to help Jane. ‘Don’t worry. Don’t think about her,’ he tells her. And, with Jimmy’s help, Tibby finally can have his breakfast – at a quarter to three in the afternoon!

Ben and Joe are having a coffee and a Big Mac in a McDonald’s in Oxford Street in London.

‘If Nancy isn’t at work, maybe she’s at home,’ says Ben. ‘Why don’t we call her flat?’

So Joe goes to find another public telephone. He tries four of them before he finds one that works. And when he calls Nancy’s number, there is no reply. He is beginning to get a little angry.

‘Where can she be? This is incredible. A woman can’t just disappear,’ he says.

‘There will be a simple explanation,’ says Ben. ‘I just don’t believe she is dead.’

‘I hope you’re right,’ Joe says. ‘But how can we be sure? I don’t think we can do any more.’

‘No,’ Ben agrees. ‘If we go home, maybe Jane or Neil will phone us. Maybe they know where Nancy is now ... I can’t believe she’s dead.’

Neil is back home with Jane. 'Don't worry, darling. Please try not to think about Nancy,' he says. 'We're going on holiday in two hours' time. We still have to pack our cases and get everything ready.'

'Oh Neil,' Jane says sadly. 'How can we go to Tenerife when we don't know if Nancy is all right? Maybe she's dead.'

'Don't think about it,' Neil interrupts her. 'There will be a simple explanation. There must be. Let's do all the things we have to do.'

'When does the plane leave?' Jane asks. She is still worried about Nancy, but now that Neil is with her she begins to think more about their holiday. 'But ...,' she thinks, 'there was something ...'

'Film for the camera,' says Neil, as if he can read what she is thinking. 'That's the only thing we need to buy.'

Jane remembers now. 'I'm sorry, Neil,' she says. 'That was one of the things to do this morning. You know how I forget things. Then not knowing what to do about Nancy ...' .

'All right. Don't worry. We can buy a film at the airport,' Neil says. 'It doesn't matter now. Come on. Let's pack our cases.'

'I don't know what to take,' Jane says.

'Well,' Neil answers, 'there is no time to

decide.' He is looking at their tickets. 'The plane leaves at seven o'clock. So we have to be at the airport by six. It's nearly four o'clock now and it takes forty minutes to get there. You know how I always tell you not to be late for a flight. I know how it's terrible for us, the stewards and the captain of the plane, if passengers arrive late. So come on. Let's get packing.'

Chapter 7

As they are quickly packing, Neil asks Jane about Tibby.

'Who is going to look after the cat? Jimmy?'

'Yes,' Jane replies. 'He says he'll do it.'

The phone rings. 'I'll answer,' says Neil. It is Ben, calling from London. 'Any news?' he asks.

'No, nothing,' Neil replies. 'We're packing. We're leaving in about an hour.'

'Where are you going?' asks Ben.

'To Tenerife, for a holiday,' Neil answers. 'So there's no time to worry about Nancy. Anyway, you know Jane. She gets worried about nothing. I'm sure there will be an explanation.'

'Well I hope so,' says Ben. 'She was very worried. So Joe and I are worried too. But there is nothing wrong at Nancy's office. She isn't there. We don't know where she is. That's the question: where is she?'

'Look, Ben, if she *is* dead, there's nothing we can do,' says Neil.

'What a horrible thing to say,' Ben tells him.

'No. I don't mean to be horrible. I hope she is not dead, of course. But let's be realistic. Jane

doesn't know who it was on the telephone, and you and Joe can't find Nancy. What can we do?'

'Call the police?' Ben says.

Neil replies, 'But what can we tell the police? A voice on the telephone is not really enough for them to make an investigation.'

'No. You're right, Neil,' says Ben. 'But it seems so strange for you just to go away on holiday, not knowing.'

'Yes, it is,' Neil agrees. 'But I want Jane to stop worrying, to relax. You know what she's like. If we just go, maybe the problem will be over when we come back.'

'You can't just run away from problems, Neil,' Ben tells him. 'That's no help.'

'I know. I know. But what can I do? Forget our holiday because of a voice on the telephone? I don't think so.'

'Oh well,' says Ben. 'Do what you think is right. Joe and I will try to find Nancy somewhere.'

'Thanks very much for all your help,' Neil says.

'Have a good holiday,' says Ben. 'Give our love to Jane. Tell her not to worry.'

'Thanks, Ben. Goodbye.'

'Bye,' says Ben. But he is still thinking about Nancy.

It is almost half-past five. 'Come on, Jane,' Neil shouts, 'or we'll be late.'

Jane is looking around the flat, and Neil is going downstairs with the last of the cases. Jimmy comes out of his door to say goodbye to them.

'Is everything all right?' he asks Jane.

'I'm just looking round to see if there's anything I ...' Jane stops. 'You see – sun-tan oil. We'll need that. Neil is in such a hurry that I'm sure we'll forget something important.'

'Sun-tan oil isn't important,' says Neil, out of breath as he hurries back in. 'We can always buy it in Tenerife. Now will you please just come. We're late already.' He turns to go. 'Bye, Jimmy. Thanks for saying you'll look after Tibby. Sorry about the problems today.'

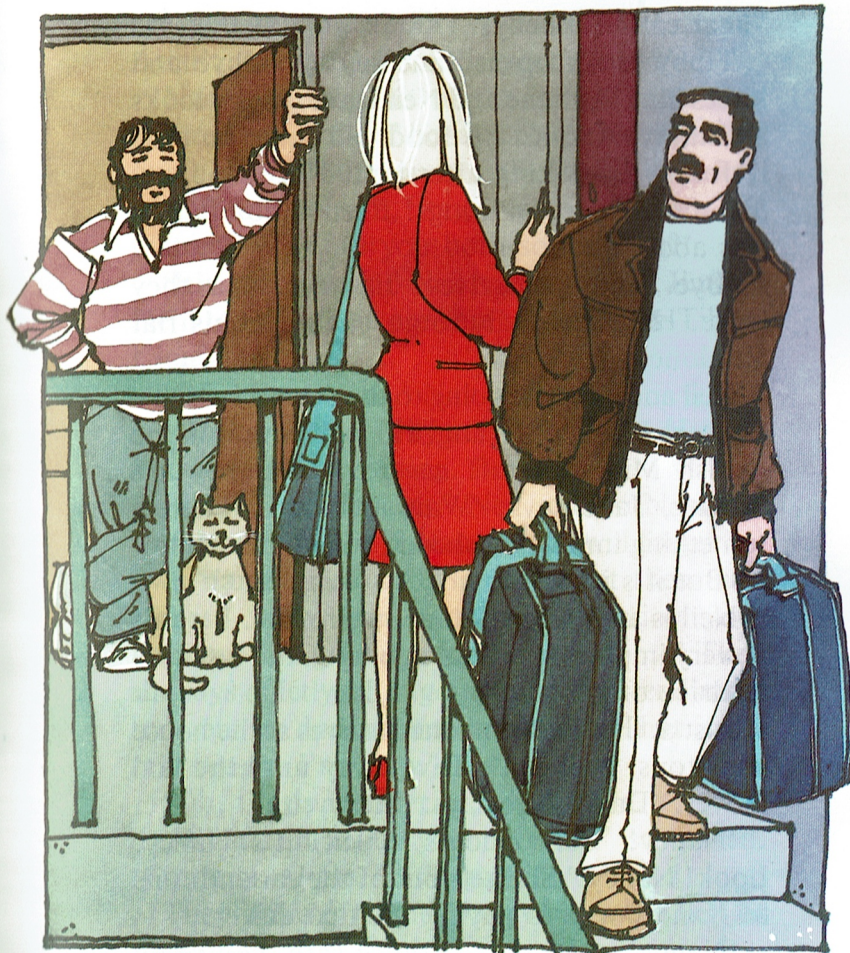
'Oh, don't worry. It was nothing,' Jimmy says. 'I just hope Nancy's all right. I'm worried about her too, you know.'

'Poor Jimmy,' says Jane, giving him a quick kiss.

Neil says nothing. He doesn't want to talk about Nancy. 'Come on, Jane,' he shouts, as he goes downstairs again.

'I'm coming, I'm coming,' Jane says. 'I just have to say goodbye to Tibby.'

Neil stops and looks round. Jimmy smiles.



'That cat!' Neil says.

Tibby looks up as Jane says goodbye and kisses him. As Jane and Neil leave, Tibby looks at Jimmy. At least his food will come on time if Jimmy is looking after him. Not like Jane. She always forgets things! Even Tibby knows this about Jane.

'Bye. Enjoy yourselves,' Jimmy says, as they leave. He turns sadly to go back into his flat all alone.

Neil and Jane are going to the airport in Neil's car, a red Rover Sterling. He will leave it in the British Midland staff car park. As they are leaving, Jane says, 'Wait a minute. There's something important. I can't remember what it is. But it's important.'

Neil is angry now. 'Jane, we're late. It can't be very important. We are going.' And he starts to drive off.

Just at that moment a taxi arrives at the house and stops. Neil can't drive away until the taxi moves. 'Damn,' he says. 'Hurry up.'

'Nancy!' Jane shouts. 'Neil, it's Nancy. Look! Nancy!' She gets out of the car and runs to Nancy, who is paying the taxi driver.

'Nancy!' she cries. 'You're safe, you're all right. Oh, I was so worried. That horrible man!'

'Jane,' says Nancy, as the taxi leaves, 'what

are you talking about? What horrible man? Aren't you late? When is your plane?'

Neil is getting out of the car. 'Thank God you're here, Nancy,' he says. 'Now we can enjoy our holiday. But you are all right?' he asks.

'Of course I am,' says Nancy. 'What's the matter? Why are you both so worried?'

'It's a long story,' Neil tells her. 'Ask Jimmy. He'll tell you. You are here to look after Tibby, I imagine.'

'Of course I am,' Nancy replies.

'Oh, of course. Silly me,' says Jane. 'Jimmy knows you are coming. But I ...'

'She always forgets,' Neil says to Nancy.

'Oh, I know,' says Nancy. 'She will forget her own name one day!' She looks at them and smiles. 'Now you two go and enjoy your holiday. I'm going to look after Tibby.' Then she says quietly, 'I'm going to look after Jimmy too, but he doesn't know that yet. That is the real reason I'm here.'

'Oh, that's wonderful,' says Jane.

'What romantics you two are,' says Neil. 'Come on, Jane. Let's go.'

They drive off, and Nancy rings the bell of Jimmy's flat.

'But who was Nancy?'

'What?' Neil asks.

'Who was Nancy?' Jane asks again.

'What do you mean?'

'The voice, the man on the phone,' Jane says. 'Remember his words? "She's dead." Well, who is she? Or who *was* she?'

It is just after ten o'clock, and Neil and Jane are very tired. Their plane was two hours late. Now they are finally on their way to Tenerife, and Neil doesn't want to think about Nancy any more. He just wants to think about their holiday.

'Don't think about it. It's all over,' he says to Jane.

'No it isn't,' she replies. 'Our Nancy is all right. She was not in her office because she was on her way to Glasgow. But who is the Nancy who *is* dead?'

Neil turns to her and says, 'Don't think about it, Jane, love. There are some mysteries we will never know about. Nancy's dead. Don't worry. Forget about her.'

Jane looks at him in surprise at his words – the very same words as the man on the phone this morning! It seems like more than just ten hours ago. It seems like a lifetime!

But Jane knows she will never forget this Nancy. She is dead, if the man's words are true. But she will live on in Jane's mind. Who was

the man on the phone? Was it a wrong number?

Jane holds Neil's hand and looks out of the window of the plane. She sees the summer sunset on the clouds far below. And she thinks of Nancy.

'Nancy. Who was she? Who was Nancy?'

Glossary

damn an exclamation, one of the things you can say when you are angry

dial to press the numbers you want to call on the telephone

dish plate, a container for food or water

feed to give things to eat (food)

frantic very nervous and worried

funeral ceremony when someone dies

funny strange, unusual

hurry move quickly

interrupt speak when someone else is speaking

look after make sure someone is all right

nod move your head, agreeing with someone

pack put things into cases for travelling

receiver the part of the telephone you use to speak and listen

remind make someone remember

steward man who works with passengers on an aeroplane

wonder to ask yourself

worry (worried) to think about problems