JEALOUSY

It was midnight in Petersville, a fierce wind was gushing rain over a young woman dressed only in a flimsy nightdress. Desperately she rang the doorbell of a large house. The door was opened immediately, and warm hands drew her inside. “You poor darling!” exclaimed a woman. “You are safe now!” She led Susan, for that was her name, into a room with a cheerful fire burning in the grate. Opening a cupboard, she took out a large towel, undressed Susan, dried and dressed her in warm pyjamas and a thick dressing gown while the shocked Susan shivered and wept. The lady in charge of the house was called Mrs Jones, and she sat Susan in a comfortable chair near the fire, and said, “I will bring you a toasted chicken mayo sandwich and hot chocolate, and a pill so that you will sleep peacefully. I will bring you breakfast in bed in the morning.” “By the way?” she asked, “What is your name?” “Susan Smith” replied Susan. Early the next day, the phone rang, and a woman spoke. “I am Mrs Douglas. I have been trying to contact my daughter. She is not answering her cell, and my son-in-law says she is not at home. She has disappeared! I called the police, and they suggested I call you.” “Yes, Susan is with

us, safe and sound, although badly beaten up and bruised. Please bring her some clothes when you come." Mrs Douglas rang off and cried. "Jim! Jim! Come quickly! I know where Susan is!"

Mrs Jones went to Susan. "Your parents are coming, my dear," she said, "and are bringing you your clothes and your Bible. I am afraid you won't be able to go home with them. It is too dangerous. A police officer will come to take a statement from you and photos of your bruised neck and arms. This will expedite your divorce, and they will lay charges against your husband for severe assault." Susan sighed. "Everything was so perfect. Alan was a doctor at a private hospital, and I was a physiotherapist. It was love at first sight! My parents were thrilled. After a short engagement, we married and had a blissful honeymoon in London. And now, it's come to this. While Alan was showering last night, I fled. I knew this house as it's on my way to work. He has a best friend - they have been friends from grade one - and was the bestman at our wedding. I said to him, "I've been thinking about asking Freddy to

dinner tomorrow and he flew at me and beat me up!" The doorbell rang. "It's your parents, Susan," she said, and went and brought them to her. Susan fell into their arms, sobbing, "Oh Mummy and Daddy, I'm OK! Mrs Jones has been wonderful!" The phone rang, and Mrs Jones brought a tall, fortyish man into the room. "I am Inspector James," he said. "I am so sorry for all you have gone through, and I'll do my best to help. Your husband is in custody. He has been charged with assault and will probably be sentenced to between two and ten years. You are quite safe to go home with your parents while you sort out your affairs, and divorce proceedings." With many thanks to Mrs Jones and the Inspector, Susan kissed Mrs Jones and said she would visit often and maybe help other women in the house if she could be of use.

The next day a woman of about forty with a worn look on her face, got out of a taxi with a large suitcase and rang the doorbell. "I am Cynthia Thomas," she said, "and I need your help." Welcome, and come inside. I am Mrs Jones and I'm in charge of ABUSE HOUSE." Leading the way into the

lounge, she said, “Please sit and make yourself at home. I’ll make a pot of tea and bring some of my lemon tart.”

Mrs Jones got straight to the point because Cynthia was not showing any signs of distress. “What brings you here?” she asked. “I have been waiting for twenty years for this day,” she replied. “I could not come before because of my twins, Janet and Jane. They are now in residence at varsity and independent. My parents died in a car crash when I had just completed a course in secretarial work, and I became the secretary in my husband’s law firm. We fell in love, got married, the twins were born and then the trouble began.” She paused for a minute. “Horace began to abuse me. I never knew why, and when it happened it was totally unexpected. He would suddenly rush at me and start hitting me. Once he broke my nose – you can see the bump, and it bled profusely. Other times he would beat me, sometimes with his belt, or try to throttle me, and sometimes by not speaking to me for months on end. The attacks always happened while the twins were not there. I wore long dresses and scarves to disguise the scars. When I couldn’t

go to the office, he said I was sick." Mrs Jones was appalled. Twenty years of suffering such abuse! "What a tragic life you have had, my dear," she said. "You are safe here. I suppose you will file for divorce?" "Yes, today." replied Cynthia. "I will also phone the twins, and explain all this to them." "I had better call the police to take a statement from you, and some photos of your scars because your husband will be charged with grievous bodily and mental harm and undoubtedly spend time in jail. Come I will show you your bedroom." When Horace went home for lunch in a bad temper because Cynthia had not turned up for work, he found a police van parked outside his house. A policeman served him with a warrant for his arrest and bungled him into the van watched by curious neighbours.

Cynthia began to unpack her trunk. The room was very pleasant with an ensuite bathroom. It had a window with security bars across it, and a view over the back garden. A high electrified perimeter fence surrounded the property. The garden was lawned, and there were seats and tables under sunshades, where some women were having tea,

and chatting animatedly. Cherry trees were in blossom, and a wide flowerbed of mixed flowers bloomed in front of the fence. Cynthia thought it looked really nice and that she would enjoy sitting in it. She also wanted to write a book about her life and see if she could publish it.

Mrs Jones tapped on her door and asked if she could come in. “Please do,” replied Cynthia. “This is a lovely room. Thank you so very very much!” “The inspector has just phoned,” said Mrs Jones. “He is coming to take a statement from you and some photos. Your husband is contesting his arrest and will probably be released on bail, so you will be here for some time.” “I expected that,” answered Cynthia. “When the case is over, I plan to live in London and start a new life there. I have managed to save a good sum of money over the last twenty years. I will never let Horace know where I have gone.”

Mrs Jones was a widow and a devout Christian. At meals she said Grace, and told all newcomers that if they needed prayer, she would pray for them. She had comforted many

abused women in their distress, reading the Bible to them, telling them that God loved them and was with them in their suffering. Every room had a Bible and a book of daily devotions. There was a small library in the house, its shelves were filled with stories of hope and encouragement. There were Christian novels, magazines and daily newspapers. Most residents arrived in the clothes they were wearing, and she had a stock of good quality clothes and shoes that she had collected from her friends at church. Each week she had arranged that Reverend Andrew, her minister, would conduct a Communion Service, and his wife a weekly Bible Study. There was no pressure put on residents to attend, but over time most of them did and were converted. Some residents stayed for a very short time like Shirley had, others for longer stays, and if they had children they were placed in care until their mothers could be with them. ABUSE HOUSE had been started by the Diocese of Petersville, which maintained it, and paid for everything.

One day Mrs Jones opened the front door and was very surprised to see a man of about thirty standing there with a big carry pack on his back. “Please may I come in?” he asked hesitantly. “Of course,” she replied, “and welcome!” “I’ve been wanting to come for a long time,” Eddie Weston said as they sipped coffee and ate Mrs Jones’ homemade biscuits. “I only managed to get away because Ella, my wife, took our six-year-old daughter, Jasmine, to visit her cousin in a distant town. As she left, she said, “Clean the whole house or there will be trouble when I get back!” He sighed, his face twitched, and he looked afraid. “You are quite safe now,” she told him. “I have a pleasant room available for you. Follow me and have a rest. There is a slab of chocolate beside your bed to cheer you up. Press the bell if you need anything. The police will be coming fairly soon to ask you some questions, and to see if you suffered physical as well as verbal abuse.” “Yes, I did.” he said. Ella is a tall, well-built woman. Once she broke my arm, and I had a plate put in it.” “That’s a piece of good evidence!” exclaimed Mrs Jones. “My body is also badly bruised from recent beatings. Ella beat me with anything that was near at hand, from pots in

the kitchen to books in the sitting room. I never knew what set her off or when it would happen." Did Jasmine see this?" asked Mrs Jones. "Yes, and it made her cry and try and pull Ella away from me." "You will definitely face a custody battle over her." said Mrs Jones. She will be charged and imprisoned, and during this time and the divorce proceedings, you will need care and advice from experts to overcome feelings of depression, low self- esteem, and advice on how to counter these. You will be given custody of Jasmine. By the way, do you know if she has confided in her teacher at school. That would be good evidence in a custody battle. After all this is past and gone, it would be good if you could move to another city or country. What do you do for a living Eddie?" she asked. "I am a vet. In future, I would like to live in the countryside and treat farm animals." "My, that's wonderful! exclaimed Mrs Jones. And all that they had discussed happened. Eddie fell in love with a pleasant girl and married her.

Mrs Jones woke up early. It was spring. The cherry trees were blooming in the garden as she opened the window. “I wonder who will come today,” she asked herself.