

Neville Sharp Must Die

A Gladys Briggs Story

by

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Published on behalf of the author by Bickering on Sea

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“Of course,” Gladys Briggs (Mrs) noted, turning sharp eye on the two women in front of her, “Neville Sharp must die.”

Calliope and Jones looked at each other, the former meeting the latter’s incredulity with a shrug of acceptance. Neither would ever have gainsaid their client in any event; they were too afraid of her.

“What has he done this time?” Calliope asked, sitting up and setting her long ebony arms on the desk between them and their client. She interlaced her dexterous, scarred fingers, levered her arms at the sharp points of her elbows and positioned her hands beneath her chin, all with the careless grace of one who is aware of both how beautiful and how deadly they are. The pale and mousy Miss Jones hid behind her spectacles and stared at her notebook and pen.

“He has come in to possession of something he should never have had access to. Naturally, I need it back and prefer that no one should know that I regained possession of it. Neither can this country afford for Mister Sharp to become aware of, or ever realise, what precisely he has had in his possession. The safest course of action in this instance is elimination. I wondered if a situation might be arranged to the mutual satisfaction of both ourselves and certain other parties interested in preserving Bickering on Sea’s reputation. I refer of course to the Sisters Todd.”

Calliope considered. Miss Jones scribbled. Gladys Briggs (Mrs) sipped silently at her tea.

“Is there a particular window?”

“The sooner the better, but the Misses Todd operate at their best – I think we all agree from our previous observations – in the early morning, when they can be at their leisure to proceed as the moment leads. They have become most adept; it’s remarkable how quickly they have taken to the work-.”

“Indeed,” Calliope agreed.

“But I have some concerns regarding the local constabulary, and Neville is something of a wily character. The Todds have become true mistresses of staging a scene – and their general crusade of morality would certainly make young Neville an ideal candidate. I doubt it would take much to bring him to their notice. That would serve the immediate needs of my colleagues and I. But I cannot have the likes of young George Rough investigating too closely. The Todds have proven too useful and I am keen to protect these particular assets.”

The telephone rang shrilly on another desk across the wood panelled office, but after the briefest of glances, the three women returned to their conversation and tuned out the digital tones of Miss Jones’ answer-phone message, “Calliope-Jones Asset Management and Financial Planning Services. We are not available to take your call at this time...”

“Your assignment is to provide insurance, oversight and post-site analysis. Clean up if necessary; I shall leave the details to your discretion. You are, after all, the expert.” The client fixed Miss Jones with an approving smile, “And your latest assistant is coming along nicely.”

Miss Jones, the third of her name, smiled nervously, and dipped her head in mild embarrassment. She was unaccustomed to such praise, especially from a veteran of the calibre of Mrs Briggs. She had found the work had not come naturally to her, but, through hard work and perseverance, she had made an extraordinary improvement and Calliope had graduated her to fieldwork.

“My star pupil,” Calliope agreed, “particularly in the field of character assassination.”

“Yes, quite,” Gladys Briggs (Mrs) enthused – a rare occurrence in Calliope’s experience, “I have been most impressed with the new three-fold service. Miss Jones the Third has certainly added value to the Asset Management market.”

“Clients have found it useful where budget is limited, or martyrdom out of the question,” Miss Jones said modestly, “And social media provides one with such fodder for these services. Embracing the digital age has had significant advantages.”

“Hear, hear,” Calliope said drily. She turned again to their client, “I shall notify you of the successful transfer of assets as soon as the transaction has been completed. Would you have any particular objection to our adaptation of the

situation to suit the needs of another client?"

"In what manner?" Gladys Briggs (Mrs) enquired.

"A client has engaged us to put one of our new services to the test. A local rival in business has proved intractable on a matter close to them, and becoming a person of interest in Mister Rough's enquiries might just alter their intractability."

"I see." Gladys Briggs (Mrs) considered, "Might I know the name of the intractable party?"

"Sir Malcolm Hughes."

"The Lord Mayor of Branchester?"

"The same."

"I see." Gladys Briggs (Mrs) considered again, "I shouldn't like to see Sir Malcolm come to any harm by this transaction."

"No indeed," Calliope unfolded her hands and made a reassuring gesture, "Miss Jones thought this was something more in the line of a character assassination."

"I see, yes." Mrs Briggs thought some more, "Yes. I have some thoughts on his replacement in office. We can discuss at next week's meeting. Yes. That will work out nicely. Thank you ladies," Gladys stood and leaned over to shake each of their hands as they too stood, "I have every confidence. I shall see myself out."

The door closed.

"She seemed rather pleased." Miss Jones observed, setting down her notebook.

"Yes. Well, I suspect she had something of an inkling already. She does appreciate a good moment of syzygy like this. Shall I put the kettle on? You know, there's hardly any biscuits left in this tin..."
