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Opening Extract from...

A Proper Family Adventure

Written by Chrissie Manby

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Chapter One

Jack

'Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you! Happy *birrrrth*-day, dear Granddad Bill. You smell like a poo.'

'*Jack Benson-Edwards*!'

That rising tone. Jack knew he was in trouble.

'Don't be so bloody rude to your great-grandfather,' said his mother Ronnie.

'Don't say "bloody",' seven-year-old Jack countered.

'Why, you little . . .' Ronnie made a scary face at her beloved son. He ran for the cover of his Auntie Chelsea.

'I'm sorry, Granddad Bill,' said Jack from behind Chelsea's legs. 'You don't really smell like a poo.'

'He does a bit,' whispered Lily, daughter of Chelsea's boyfriend Adam. She was also seven years old.

Granddad Bill didn't care. He was turning eighty-seven that afternoon. His entire family had gathered at his eldest granddaughter Annabel's big house in the country to celebrate in style. The party comprised his son and daughter-in-law, Dave and Jacqui, his three granddaughters, Chelsea, Ronnie and Annabel, their partners, four great-grandchildren and Lily, who counted as one of the great-grandkids as far as everyone was concerned. Now Bill blew out the candles on his cake. Not eighty-seven of them, but twenty-two.

'You'll just have to multiply by four and minus one,'

said Annabel. 'If we'd gone the whole hog, we might have burned the house down.'

And that would have been a big disaster. Annabel's spectacular manor house was a listed building of special historical interest. During the English Civil War, two princes – the future Charles II and James II – had slept in the attic that was now Annabel's teenaged daughter's bedroom.

Annabel's younger sisters, Ronnie and Chelsea, were both quietly impressed by the cake, which was in the shape of a shield, bearing the Coventry City FC crest. It was the first time Annabel had taken on the role of family cake-maker, which usually fell to Ronnie or to their mother Jacqui. She'd done a good job despite her protestations that she really couldn't bake. Granddad Bill was delighted to see his beloved football team honoured in sky blue icing. He blew out the candles in just five breaths.

'He's full of wind, is Granddad Bill,' said Mark, Ronnie's husband.

'Three cheers for Granddad Bill,' suggested Annabel.

'Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!' yelled Jack without waiting for any 'hip hips'.

Jack and Lily leapt forward to have the chance to cut the first slice of cake, each placing a hand on Annabel's fancy silver cake knife like a pair of diminutive newly-weds. That afternoon, the two children were getting on famously. This was a huge relief to everyone, since, like a real married couple, Jack and Lily were usually more likely to be found bickering or plotting murder than playing nicely.

'And now for the presents!' Jack squealed, piling brightly wrapped packages into his great-grandfather's lap as the old man sat in his electric wheelchair. 'This

is from Mummy and Daddy. This one is from Auntie Chelsea. This is from Cathy Next Door.'

Granddad Bill opened the gifts his family and friends had chosen so carefully. He was delighted with a CD of the greatest hits of Acker Bilk, that year's Coventry City FC away shirt and a new pair of velvet carpet slippers to replace the old ones he wore every day. Cathy Next Door had bought Bill a packet of the small cigars he was supposed to have given up in the 1980s (they were swiftly confiscated by Dave). But Jack was sure that his gift was going to be the best of all.

'Izzy and Sophie had to help me get it,' he said. 'Because it's illegal.'

Illegal? The adults wondered what on earth Jack had asked his sixteen-year-old sister Sophie and his cousin Izzy to buy. Jack's parents, Ronnie and Mark, shared worried glances. They had known Jack was planning something special for his great-grandfather's birthday – he'd asked for an advance on his pocket money – but they would never have guessed it was something outside the law.

'But I chose the numbers,' Jack continued.

Jack handed Granddad Bill an envelope, decorated with the slightly wonky smiley faces that were Jack's signature. Unfortunately Granddad Bill had trouble with envelopes and it wasn't long before Jack grew impatient and opened his special gift himself. He pulled out the card he'd made with much secrecy the previous afternoon and waved it under the old man's nose, far too close for Granddad Bill to focus on, even with his glasses.

'Do you like the picture?' Jack asked.

'That's a very fine Dalek,' said Bill, making an educated guess.

'It's not a Dalek,' Jack sighed. 'It's you in your wheelchair.'

'Oh yes,' said Bill. 'I see that now.'

'And look what's in here. Look!'

Jack opened the card with a showman's flourish. Stuck inside with a piece of sticky tape was . . .

'A lottery ticket!'

'Not a couple of spliffs after all,' said Mark.

'Mark,' Ronnie scolded her husband. 'Keep your voice down.'

'What a clever idea,' said Jacqui, Jack's maternal grandmother. 'How did you come up with that?'

'Well, Granddad Bill is always talking about the lottery so me and Sophie and Izzy all went to Tesco and I wrote the numbers down and they went up to the till to pay because you have to be sixteen.'

Ah. That's what he meant by illegal.

'But it was mostly my money. I put in twenty pee.'

'You're a very generous boy,' said Jacqui.

The other adults agreed.

'I've got a good feeling about this one,' said Bill, holding the card and the ticket so that he could read what was written on both. 'How did you know thirteen's my lucky number?'

'It's my lucky number too!' said Jack.

'Come here, lad.' Bill opened his arms and Jack climbed onto his lap for a cuddle. 'Whether it's lucky or not, with a family like you lot, I've already won the bloody lottery.'

Chapter Two

Bill

Granddad Bill lived with his son Dave and his daughter-in-law Jacqui in a terraced house near the centre of Coventry. He'd lived in Coventry for as long as he could remember, never moving more than two miles from the Coundon Road Stadium, which was where his second favourite team, Coventry RFC, used to play. Like the stadium, these days Bill could almost be counted as a landmark.

Bill lived in the city through the Coventry Blitz and joined the army as soon as he was able, fighting in France at the tail end of the Second World War. When he came back, he worked at Dunlop for a while and, at twenty, he married Jennifer – a proper Coventry girl. Seven years later, they welcomed baby David into their lives. They were blissfully happy but alas, Jennifer died young, while Dave was still at secondary school. Bill always said that Jennifer was irreplaceable and indeed he never remarried (though he came close at the age of eighty-six after meeting a gold-digger in Lanzarote, but that's another story).

Bill moved in with his son and daughter-in-law once all his grandchildren had flown the nest. It was ideal for everybody. Bill didn't need the space he had in his old house and Dave and Jacqui could use the help with the mortgage on theirs. And while Bill was still relatively

able, he also helped out in the garden. He had green fingers and suddenly there were carrots where Dave had cultivated only weeds.

In recent years however Dave and Jacqui had converted the front room into a bedroom for Bill, who was not as good on his feet as he had been. Though, on a good day, he could still get around using sticks, most of the time he used a wheelchair. He wasn't great on stairs. He also suffered from dementia, which seemed to be much worse at some times than others. There were days – such as his birthday that year – when Bill seemed entirely 'with it': totally lucid and aware of what was going on. Other days he mistook his son for his brother and called Jacqui by his dead wife's name. There were days, too, when Bill seemed to be living in a completely different time from everyone else, like when he asked why Jacqui wasn't carrying her gas mask when they went out to the shops.

It could be hard work, caring for Bill, but Dave and Jacqui would not have had it any other way. Bill had always been so good to them. When they were first married and struggling to cope with the financial and psychological pressure of raising two small children, Bill was always there. He was forever pressing money for housekeeping into Jacqui's hand, or offering them a few quid so they could have a night out. Ronnie and Chelsea were thrilled whenever they heard Granddad Bill would be babysitting. Bill never tired of dolly tea parties or adjudicating endless rounds of Happy Families and Go Fish.

Bill was such an important part of the family, Jacqui and Dave were determined to keep him out of residential care for as long as humanly possible. They were fortunate to have the support of a fantastic GP, who had

recently put Bill onto a new medication regime that seemed to be working well. At least they'd not had any major incidents since that afternoon before Christmas when Jack commandeered Bill and his electric wheelchair for a cross-country adventure that ended up involving the police.

So, Bill was at home with Dave and Jacqui when the lottery draw took place on the Saturday after his birthday. They always watched the lottery show, though they never usually bought tickets. Mark, husband of Bill's granddaughter Ronnie, bought a ticket every week and had only won about fifty quid in the sixteen years he'd been playing. Bill had once won thirty quid on the EuroMillions. But it was a mug's game. A tax on the poor, Jacqui told Mark every time he mentioned his 'investment strategy'. Even one ticket a week added up to a small fortune over the course of a year. And it wasn't as though any of the Bensons were made of money.

But they still liked to watch *Win Your Wish List* and the draw itself. It was good entertainment. They all liked Shane Richie. And secretly Jacqui rather liked to reassure herself that she wouldn't have chosen any of the winning numbers. As the draw was announced, she would put down her habitual Saturday night Sudoku for a moment and mentally check off the balls.

'Twenty-eight? No, I wouldn't have chosen that. Nobody's birthday is on the twenty-eighth. Thirty-two doesn't sound very lucky to me. Who'd pick thirty-two? Six? I might have chosen that last year because of Jack but now he's seven, I wouldn't have picked it this week.' And so on.

Deciding that she would have merely wasted two pounds gave Jacqui a very warm feeling inside. It was almost as good as actually winning.

However, everything was about to change because that week, Granddad Bill had a ticket, courtesy of his great-grandchildren, Jack, Sophie and Izzy. Oh, and six-month-old Baby Humfrey, who was included on the card (as were the family cat, Fishy, and Izzy's dog Leander). For once, the National Lottery show had altogether more meaning.

'Let's get that ticket out then,' said Jacqui, sitting down on the sofa between Bill and Dave. 'See how Jack did with his picks.' She took up her special Sudoku biro, ready to tick the numbers off. The familiar music began to play as the multicoloured bouncing balls tumbled into the machine on-screen.

'What are you going to buy us if you win, Dad?' Dave asked Bill.

'Don't get your hopes up,' Jacqui laughed. 'If there's even two numbers on here, I'll eat my Sudoku pen.'

In the end, thirteen – Bill's lucky number – was the only one of the numbers Jack had chosen that *didn't* come up. At least, not in the main draw. It came up as the bonus ball.

Chapter Three

The Bensons

Jacqui, Bill and Dave all stared at the pale red ticket.

'Time to eat your pen,' Dave told his wife.

'I feel a bit sick,' said Jacqui. 'Look!' She showed Dave the goosebumps on her arms.

'Did we win it?' asked Bill.

'We didn't get them all,' said Dave.

'No, but we got five numbers and the bonus ball,' said Jacqui. 'Five. You still get something for that. If you get twenty-five quid for three numbers you must get something for five. How much do you think it is?'

'I don't know,' said Dave. 'We better call Ronnie.'

Over at Ronnie's house, Mark was scrunching up yet another losing ticket. That week he'd managed to get just one number right. Hopeless.

'I should give this up,' said Mark. 'I'd be better off throwing the money down the drain.'

'Or down your neck,' said Ronnie. 'Think of the amount of beer you could have bought with all the money you've spent on lottery tickets over the years.'

'Don't,' said Mark, as Ronnie's mobile began to ring. 'I can't bear to think about it. And if that's your mother calling to crow about my 'investment strategy', you can tell her where to stick it and all.'

'Ssssh.' Ronnie put her finger to her husband's lips

as she answered the call. It *was* her mother. 'Hello, Mum. You all right?'

'Oh Ronnie,' said Jacqui, her voice shivering with something that sounded like distress over the bad mobile line. 'Something's happened.'

'What, Mum? What?'

'Are you sitting down, sweetheart?'

Ronnie, who had stood up to find her phone, quickly collapsed onto the sofa in preparation for the worst.

'You're not going to believe this.'

'I wish you'd just tell me so I could find out whether I believe it or not.'

'It's Granddad Bill . . .' Jacqui began.

'Oh no!' Ronnie cried. Since he had his pacemaker fitted, the Bensons were always waiting to hear bad news about Granddad Bill. Ronnie screwed her eyes tightly shut. She couldn't bear the thought of losing him.

'We think he's won the bloody lottery,' Jacqui continued.

'What?!'

Ronnie immediately handed over the phone to Mark, who, having put so much effort into trying to win over the years since he was old enough to start playing, was rightly considered the family expert.

'Tell me again what the numbers are,' said Mark, checking them off against the Lottery app on his own phone. 'And tell me what it says on the top of the ticket. We need to make sure it's the right date. There are draws on a Wednesday too.'

Jacqui read out all the information. It definitely sounded as though she might be right.

'Can you take a picture of it, Jacqui?' Mark asked. 'And send it to my mobile. That way we'll know for sure.'

When the photograph came through, Mark and Ronnie stared at the picture on the screen as though they were seeing a newly discovered Dead Sea Scroll. They looked at it from all angles. Mark zoomed in on the figures. They so wanted to believe . . .

Sophie, who had been in her bedroom, talking to her cousin Izzy on Skype, came downstairs to find her parents thus absorbed.

'What's going on?' she asked.

Ronnie pointed to the screen of Mark's phone.

'Five numbers,' she mouthed. 'Five. And the bonus ball.'

'So?' said Sophie.

'So, we think Granddad Bill's just won fifty thousand pounds. With that lottery ticket you all got him for his birthday.'

Sophie shrieked in surprise and delight.

Jack was in his room. He'd been playing up all day, whining from the moment he woke, and his bad behaviour had been rewarded with an early bedtime and no *Doctor Who*.

'We've got to get him up,' said Sophie. 'He chose the numbers. This is huge.'

They didn't need to wake Jack up. He had heard his sister shriek and was already standing at the top of the stairs, trying to work out whether the shriek was a good or a bad one and whether he needed to intervene with his Sonic Screwdriver. He was clutching it in his hand, already on high alert.

'Jack!' Ronnie called. 'Jack! Come down here quickly. We're going over to Grandma and Granddad's.'

'What? Now?' said Jack. 'It's nearly midnight.'

'Yes. Now. Hurry up.'

Ronnie didn't even change Jack out of his pyjamas. She just put his anorak over the top. The Benson-Edwards family then piled into Mark's old car and drove at high speed across town.

Fifty thousand pounds. Jack's carefully chosen numbers had won his great-grandfather fifty thousand pounds.

But of course, the money wasn't just for Granddad Bill. From the very beginning, the Bensons all talked of a communal win. That was the way it was in their family. All for one and one for all. It would have been the same if Mark's ticket had come up, or Dave's, or Jacqui's, or Ronnie's.

Indeed in the past, Jacqui and Ronnie had spent many a happy hour at the kitchen table, drinking tea and pondering how they would split a win on the premium bonds (though they only had fifty quid's worth of bonds between them and hadn't seen one win in thirty years). There was never any question that the person whose numbers came up would share the bounty with everyone else. If Jacqui won a million, she would pay off all her daughters' debts. If Ronnie won, she would share with Chelsea (keeping just a little behind for some Jimmy Choos). So Granddad Bill's sudden windfall was a windfall for them all.

When they got to Dave and Jacqui's house, the celebrations were already under way. Jacqui had been on the phone to the people at the Lottery and they'd confirmed that Granddad Bill's ticket was indeed a big winner. The holy ticket itself was in a biscuit tin between the mattress and box spring of Dave and Jacqui's bed – the most secure place they could think of – awaiting such time as it could be handed over safely in exchange for a cheque. With the ticket safely stowed, Jacqui and Dave

had opened the cocktail cabinet. Bill was drinking a bottle of Spitfire, though these days they tried to keep him off the booze. Even one bottle might disturb his sleep (though Dave was convinced Bill was actually more lucid when he'd had alcohol).

Jack rang the doorbell to his grandparents' house. Having been briefed on what was happening during the car journey, he was fizzing with excitement. When Jacqui opened the door, he ran straight past her to find his great-granddad in his chair.

'You did it, Granddad Bill. You won the bloody lottery!'

'Don't say bloody,' Ronnie yelled from the hall.

'I think he can say bloody all he likes tonight,' said Dave.

'We've won the lottery! We've won the lottery!' Jack danced around the living room.

More alcohol was opened. There was a bottle of champagne left over from Christmas. It was a gift from the Bensons' eldest daughter Annabel, whose husband Richard was very much into his wine. Dave and Jacqui weren't so much into their wine and the champagne would probably have made it through the whole year unopened, but you can't celebrate a lottery win without bubbles. Everyone was agreed on that. Dave got the bottle down from the kitchen shelf. Jack wanted to shake it like a grand prix champion. Jacqui let him do it, which was a mistake. When Mark got the cork out, the champagne exploded with such force it soaked the living room carpet and the curtains.

'Never mind,' said Dave. 'You'll be getting some new curtains now.'

'New curtains! Can we? Oh, I can't believe it.'

Jacqui took Ronnie by the hands and they polkaed around the coffee table.

'Oh, Dave. Do you think we could get a new carpet too?' Jacqui sighed.

'I can get a new Sonic Screwdriver!' said Jack. 'Can I get it tomorrow?'

'I'm sure we can sort that out,' said Jacqui.

'Can I get a new phone?' Sophie asked.

'I'm sure that will be possible,' said Ronnie.

'But we need to have a proper family talk about the money before we all start spending like crazy,' Jacqui pointed out. 'It's got to be shared between everyone. Not just us lot here this evening but Chelsea and Annabel and Richard and their children too.'

'It's not as though Annabel needs any,' said Ronnie.

'No. But she's your sister. And her children Izzy and Humfrey have exactly the same status in this family as Sophie and Jack. It's what Granddad Bill wants, I'm sure.'

'Oh yes,' said Granddad Bill. 'Everybody must have something.'

In truth, Granddad Bill wanted nothing more right then than another bottle of Spitfire. The sudden activity was making him dizzy. As Bill was sitting in his special television chair, his electric wheelchair was empty. Jack jumped in and took hold of the controls. He jerked the chair forwards and backwards across the plastic mat that covered the carpet by the door to make moving the wheelchair easier. He put on a deep voice and pretended to be his great-grandfather.

'I've won the bloody lottery,' he intoned.

'Jack!' cried his mother, grandmother and sister in exasperation. But Jack's glee in that moment was something they would all remember for the rest of their lives. It was a truly wonderful night.