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**“I GOT YOU BABE”** a novel by Derrick Goodwin.

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Chapter one.

I was drawing before I was six, mostly comic books starring a war correspondent called Betsy. As I grew older, my characters got more sophisticated, like Fantastic Jennie, girl of the future, and Janice Makepeace, determined private eye. I even tried painting with coloured crayon. But my dad was a working man - he made stockings on a big black machine called a power frame in a surgical supplies factory, he said he couldn't afford to have any of his children dillydallying around with art.

This will not be a typical Northern story, there are no Cricket bats in the hallway, or Yorkshire pudding in the oven, and I never met J.B. Priestley, or Freddie Trueman. But I did meet - Brian Trewin, a Southerner. He worked up here in York - for a firm of stockbrokers. He was a good looking young man, but there was about Brian the look of a man who needed finishing. He was a very boring, but kindly man.....so not being spoilt for choice - my parents encouraged me to marry him. I'd met him in a pub that was later to burn down. We had our first snack together in a cafe that was gutted by a rampaging ten-ton lorry two weeks later. We spent our first dale at a folk-club that caught fire the morning after. Now to some of you, this might have meant that the romance was hot. To me - it meant that the relationship was doomed from the start.

Like Holden Caulfield - in that book by Salinger, I'd wanted a red baseball cap since I was twelve years old. I was

twenty-one, before I managed to acquire one - It came from a pen-friend in America. I also wanted to be like Marlon - burly - surly - and snarling - in a Torn T-Shirt.

'Heavens girl' my Dad said. "You can't be like that Marlon Brando chap - you're a girl'

I'd known that since I was seven, when I found out how strapless gowns were held-up.

'And don't wear that red cap in the house, they don't play baseball in Yorkshire - it's not Christian, you look like a member of the young Communist League in it'. This was my father. Who always stated the obvious.

This was back in 1968, and I was 21.

'All right, I'd like to be like Pablo' I said.

'Who?' Dad said.

'Picasso, you know, the painter'.

'I've told you before, working class girls can't be artists'

'But I've been drawing since I was in nappies, you must have noticed!'

'Put away childish things'

'Spare me' I said. 'Okay, I'll be a poet then, like Emily Dickenson, she was American" .

Dad thought that was some ambition, wanting to be a Yank, and a Yank poet at that. He reminded me that my brother was studying something useful, and why couldn't I?

'Engineering! That's considered useful, practical, essential is it? I got an arts degree' I said.

'Well, that's something I suppose. You can get an office job, companies choose arts graduates for their training programmes'

The University set up interviews for me. One company - Insurance - told me I wasn't aggressive enough, I went along to a Bank - same thing. I sloped off to the meat packing factory. The instant I stepped in the door, the stench hit me. Inside the main building, the smell was over-powering, yet no one there was wearing an oxygen mask or even wrinkling their nose. A bovine receptionist chewing a spearmint cud directed me to the personnel department. Mr Green the assistant personal manager, took me on a tour of the packing department. The docile herd of male and female workers seemed to be patiently waiting the slaughter, while, in glazed pens along the wall, prize bulls watched.

Mr. Green pointed his pink hoof at a space near the back.

'That's where you'll be' he oinked, 'if we decide to take you on'.

After leaving me in an empty room, to do several tests where I could hold a handkerchief to my nose. Green returned to say.

'I see nothing in your background that prepares you for a career in meat packing. That could mean that you'd bring a measure of candour to the job' He shook my hand. 'You'll be hearing from us' As he escorted me to the door, he said 'One thing in your favour, you don't wear too much make-up'. I left with mixed feelings. I couldn't stand the slaughter

smell - but at least I hadn't been rejected. I imagined myself a scion of Steaks, a champion of the Boiled Ham. My dad would be pleased - he would be able to look forward to truck-loads of half-price Bacon.

A week later Mr. Green rang to tell me that someone had beaten me for the job.

'You're obviously a nice girl' he said. 'Perhaps a little sensitive for our needs'

'What did he say, Babe?' My father asked me.

'They said I wasn't aggressive enough' I replied. 'Anyway' I told him, 'the stench inside was so bad, it was all I could do to stay on my feet. Perhaps I should go back to University, take a teachers training course'.

'No bloody fear!' my father said 'No more University. Out into the world, daughter mine! Babe you have to earn your living'.

'Dad, there are whole armies of bright, neat, clean hygienic women with shoe button eyes, and shoe button minds and shoe button souls, willing to dedicate their lives to the creation of wealth - there's no problem finding people to fill their ranks'.

'But what about you, Babe?' said Dad.

Yes, what about me? The odd-ball - who wanted to create something - I ought to have someone to cheer me on. Dad reminded me that he and Mum had never stopped me drawing! My Dad wasn't a tyrant. But he was a Yorkshireman and very practical. Oh, before I go any further. My name? Babe! Well, Babe Ruth was a baseball player, back in Nineteen hundred and way back.....

then, one year my pen-friend in Seattle sent me a collection of cigarette cards - and there he was - funny looking bloke, but I liked the name. I've been Babe ever since.

I think mum and dad intended to call me Beverley - but they thought they couldn't afford a name like that!

Then Dad said 'I know a man in the legal business. He needs someone for the post room. A young girl who can start from the ground up'

'From the ground up?' I asked. 'What on earth does that mean?'

Dad said it meant I'd learn the job.

'Wait a minute' Wait a minute' I said 'You are going to fast for me. You're suggesting a whole new life style and.....'.

'Life style' Dad interrupted. 'What do you know about life style? There's only one way to live and that's by the sweat of your brow'. You take up the law, my girl!'

The law? What did I know about the law? The only law I knew about was what had been drummed into me at Sunday school. Moses' law - the ten commandments. I've often thought that before Moses came down the mountain with those stone tablets - he ought to have got them countersigned by God. Perhaps we'd have all taken a bit more notice. I asked Dad how much did this law firm pay? He told me a fiver a week.....and vouchers. 'What on earth are vouchers?' I asked him.

He told me they were for lunch. 'Okay'. I said. 'Not much of a wage, is it?'

I thought I'd be spared 'That beggars can't be choosers'. I wasn't. Dad of course - had to remind me. Since I was penniless at the age of twenty-one, it was hard for me to argue against taking a job. So I started in the legal business, and painting became a hobby I reserved for my spare time. The York office of 'Hancock & Millers' was a medium sized branch. Head office was in London. Our branch was big enough to have two partners, Mr Hayes, and a younger man Mr Dixon.

Mr Hayes was a tall distinguished-looking man with perfectly groomed white hair. We seldom saw him. When he did walk through the office in his double-breasted, pin-striped suit, he wore a broad grin as if to say that he knew legal secrets that he would never reveal to the staff. Mr Dixon was younger and tenser, with long arms that banged against desk-tops as he paced around the office. Mr Hayes was the one who had hired me and I always felt that Mr Dixon did not approve of his choice.

They moved me from delivering legal papers to bookkeeping. But I wasn't developing fast enough for Mr Dixon. One day, he suggested that I join the Business Club. He told me that this Business Club would help turn me into a potential and efficient member of the legal profession. I went reluctantly to my first Club meeting, expecting to meet a herd of hearty fellas' with crunching handshakes, and girls with pink twin-sets and wearing strings of pearls. The first woman I met was Sheila Finlay (later to become my best friend) We were both in the ladies cloakroom, half out of our

raincoats before we realized that the place wasn't big enough for two grown woman to disrobe in. We both giggled and both of us ended up outside the room, back in our coats. 'Let's try again' she said.

With the extra space, we successfully got out of our raincoats and then we introduced ourselves. 'Babe' I said.

'Sheila Finlay last time I looked' she said. She wore black -framed glasses on a thin face that seemed prematurely lined, especially in the hollows of her cheeks.

'This your first meeting?' 'Yes' I said.

'I hope you can stand the monumental topics we discuss here. At the present we are hoping to build a house for refugees' 'Where' 'In the park'

'You're bringing refugees, here - to York?' 'No. They're going to raffle off the house and send the money to Oxfam for medical supplies. Probably get snaffled by some politician in a shiny blue suit'.

We had dinner together - while the guest speaker, a local radio newsreader, told us all what great work we were doing. I doodled on the table napkin. Sheila watched me do a caricature of the speaker. She laughed when she saw the news-readers nose take shape. 'You like drawing' she asked over the coffee later.



'Oh, I fool around with paint and such. Yes, I like it'. I said 'But you don't work at it full time?'. 'I'd like to, I replied. It's more practical to have a job, so I'm learning the legal business'.

'You should meet the people at the Arts club. We get together every Friday, would-be writers, artists, and coffee-table philosophers. Why don't you come along some Friday?'

'I'd like that' I said 'but could it wait till after Christmas? I'm heavily booked at the moment'. 'Of course. Are you married?' She asked me. 'No. Just sort of engaged to be engaged', I said. 'Oh, that explains it' she said.

But the road was becoming clear for marriage with Brian Trewin, home, children, and living together happily ever after. We even went to Church together - every Sunday! Yes, it was getting dangerously comfortable.

#### Chapter two.

The next morning, I woke up in my cluttered bedroom and heard my mother's Hoover. My mother had no respect for the weary on Saturday mornings and dad and I had either to get up or go insane listening to the Hoover whine.

I usually lay awake cursing the noise, but this morning I thought about the idea of being an artist and living in a garret. The Hoover drove me out of the house.

I went to see Brian. He told me that yesterday he'd bought a convertible Unit Bond in ICI and 300 shares of SA Gold. One for security, the other for risk. He said that the I thought they'd both take off. I told you he was boring.

But I pretended to be interested. It seemed the least I could do.

'Isn't that great' I said, 'being right there in the centre of the big financial world? You'll probably get to be a millionaire' 'I dare say I will' replied Brian. 'When we get married, we'll have a summer cottage in the Lake District....with roses around the door....and a town house in York with a garage and a cleaning lady'.

Brian had yuppie ambitions, twenty-five years ahead of anyone else.

'Lovely Brian'. I said. He went on - 'And I'll join the Golf Club. It's got a very nice Bar and Restaurant.....and I'll wear a cravat'.

My, won't he be debonair! 'That was a good move when you joined those Stockbrokers, Clark' I said. Now, Clark was my pet name for him - Superman Comics were very big in the sixties - way before the films of the 70's and 80's. The idea was that he was Superman in disguise.

Vomit-making isn't it? That night I let him slide his hand under my favourite canary cardigan - I kidded myself I loved him like mad! Trouble is a Woman starts off with her arms around a man and finishes up with her arms in a sink. Anyway, there he was batting out stocks and shares for his Company - and there was I - wanting something totally different. Brian hated anything bohemian - people who lived the way I planned to do. He respected people who mapped out their careers, those who knew whose job they wanted in five years. Maybe I should send him a letter 'So long Clark Kent - it's been fun' But the road was becoming clearer and clearer.

Marriage with Brian was becoming too close - and when he suggested we went to see our local Priest - panic arose in my craw. I saw the future mapped out. Years of 'The Financial Times' stuck between the toast rack and The Marmalade at breakfast. If I escaped, it would reduce onlookers to frenzied contempt, buttered with jealousy.

I asked my new friend Sheila what she thought. She's training to be a first class - number one bitch! Sheila had met Brian at the Business Club and thought him a nice young man, and that I was a lucky girl.

'Did you let him feel you up?' She asked me. 'I've heard say he's really hot'.

'Well, Sheila' I said 'religion puts fear in you. If you get tempted, the Catholic Church is the best contraception'.

'What do you mean?' said Sheila. 'Sex passes the time lovely'.

She thought he was the kind of young man everyone likes. That's why I was beginning to hate the sight of him.

I know Sheila thought it wasn't Brian I hated, but my circumstances - too acceptable. Here I was, a nice university graduate, in a nice job, and someday I'd have a nice wedding, and move to a nice neighbourhood.

But I lusted after something else. Poverty perhaps - or Sloth - or Rebellion. I wanted to retreat into a little place somewhere and paint all day, and lay around, drinking and smoking, and sleep with a man I didn't even like. Sheila asked me if Brian knew about these longings? He didn't, but my secret kept floating closer

to the surface. I saw myself in a paint-stained shirt,  
open at the neck, sitting with brush, paints and easel.  
Artists have models. I'd have a fella' modelling for  
me. He'd stand there, relaxed, but as still as a marble  
statue, in a torn T-shirt, his lips quivering in  
anticipation of our next embrace. Plaster will hang off  
the walls, and a mouse will make it's home in the  
pantry.

When I told Sheila this, she said 'Why don't you go to Paris  
and live in an attic? You like to paint and there's really  
nothing holding you back?'

'But I could never afford a trip to Paris' I said.

'You could work your way over on a cargo-boat' Sheila said  
'you could stow away on a plane. You could apply for a  
government grant'.

I told her I had too many ties here. I couldn't go - just  
like that!

Sheila thought I should quit my job and move into a garret  
right here in York. 'You love to draw' she said 'You're too  
young to get saddled with a nine to five job and a house in  
the suburbs with Brian Trewin. Do what you want for awhile.

Who knows? You may even make it as a great artist'.

But I wasn't sure you could have that sort of life here in  
York? Paris yes, I'd be shoulder to shoulder with all the  
other impoverished daubers, but here?

Sheila thought giving the legal profession a year of my life  
was quite sufficient.

'Hmm' I said 'but what....' Sheila mocked me - saying

'I know - what will your parents say?'

I knew Dad would go through the roof. Mum? Well, we all know what Mum's are like!

'If you're scared of quitting, try taking a holiday, live as an artist for three weeks? See if you like it' Sheila again - interrupting my thoughts.

'No, you're right' I said 'If I am going to be a painter in a garret. I have to be in a garret, not just pretending for three weeks. Right! I've decided. I'm quitting my job tomorrow'.

Sheila asked me what sort of notice did I have to give?

I said 'two weeks, I think. Will you help me look for a room ?'

'Whenever you like' she said 'Well, see you Babe. Good luck with your notice.....and your parents'

### Chapter 3.

Next day, Sunday - Brian took my mother and me to Morning Mass. Sitting, kneeling or standing in the pew, I found my mind drifting. Here I am, I thought, playing the role of the nice girl to the hilt. As our red-faced Priest led a prayer for the Queen and the sick, I visualised Marion, posing for me - dressed as Marc Anthony in a white toga - and holding a golden shield against his hip. Oh, God, I prayed, give me courage to quit my job and move out of my house and do what I really want to do!

Next day, I waited on the corner for the bus, just as I did every weekday, but this time I could look at all the people

who waited with me and smile to myself, I wouldn't be shivering with them much longer. When I got on the bus and found a place between a fur-trimmed woman and a postman who were there every day, I didn't say a word to them. All I could do was smile and think of the days of bus less bliss that lay ahead of me. I wasn't a bit depressed by the jostling and jarring as we headed noisily to the city centre along the familiar obstacle course of morning traffic. Getting off the bus, I joined the 8pm wave of workers who rushed to be at their desks on time. It felt very odd to be among them and yet not be one of them anymore - like a tiddler going upstream with the salmon just for the ride.

It was like any other Monday at 'Hancock & Millers'. I walked dutifully into the office and went about my work, trying to be my business-as-usual self. A couple of the solicitors had me get clients securities out of the safe and put them in good shape, endorsed and ready for redrafting. People questioned me about filing problems. Clients came in to pick up legal papers. I kept busy but I couldn't forget this was D-day - the quitting day!

At mid-day, I went to the bank. This was Barclays on Micklegate. I walked up to the counter, and asked the young man if I could have an update on my current account. I watched him go to find the information, he had so much charm. I'd often wished he'd ask me out - the story was that he lived in his own flat and that placed him in a far more sophisticated class than I was in.

'Is it nice out?' he asked me, as he handed me a piece of paper with the account balance on. I was tempted to give my brother Robert's standard reply - 'Yes, in fact, I think I'll leave it out' Instead I gave my type of answer - 'It's as nice as you can expect this time of the year'. I smiled and turned to take my chequebook to one of the tables the bank provided for writing cheques and filling out deposit slips. Even though the bank clerk himself had just written the figures, I liked to be away from him when I looked at them. Privacy was important to banking. My up-to-date balance showed £354.8 shillings, a fortune amassed over eight years of delivering newspapers, several summers of odd jobs and a year and a half at 'Hancock & Millars'. It was enough to get me started. I withdrew £100.

By two o'clock I had done nothing about quitting. Mr Dixon came to my desk.

'Babe' he said in his strong radio announcer's voice 'I gave you a house deed to look over - did you check it?'

'Yes, sir'

'What did you learn?'

'I learned that the people are buying a house that has had twenty-two previous owners - and that it is over three hundred years old'.

'What conclusions have you made about whether this aforesaid property is a good investment or no?'

'None, sir'

'None?' None?' Have you no thoughts on the matter?'

'Well, our client's profession is fancy cakes - correct?'

'Yes, so?'

'I don't like cream cakes - they give me indigestion'

'Then your indigestion is holding us up. And we can't be held up. I want a complete analysis of the proposed purchase - by first thing in the morning'.

Mr Dixon red and boiled, stormed away, cursing me under his breath. Left in his wake, I now felt more like resigning. I got up from my desk and marched towards Mr Hayes's office.

There sat his secretary. She was a tweedy woman in her 50's who looked out of place behind a typewriter. She belonged behind a pair of knitting needles, producing woollen gloves for underprivileged children. 'What is it you want?' she asked me. 'I wish to see Mr. Hayes. But it's quite confidential, if you don't mind' I said.

Miss Lynch picked up the intercom telephone and buzzed. 'Mr. Hayes, I'm sorry to bother you, but Miss.....well, it's Babe - she'd like to see you' she said - sweetly enough for him but with a scowl to show me her annoyance. I distinctly heard him say 'Who?' 'You know - Babe, the girl who....yes, that's her'.

'You may go in' she said.

I entered Mr. Hayes's office and closed the door behind me. This was usually called "being on the carpet" but the broadloom was so thick that I felt in it rather than on it. The office was immense but Mr. Hayes was easy to find since



he looked so impressive, brilliant and rich. He sat tall behind his kidney-shaped desk. Glancing around me, I realized how seldom I'd been in this room, to be truthful - never. The founder-solicitors in portraits on the wall looked like those cough sweet family adverts. There were a number of upholstered chairs, a high window, two filing cabinets and a set of shelves filled with law books - and strangely enough books on how to sell things. And there was a thriving potted plant that stood like a green sentinel beside the tidy, well-polished desk.

But I had to stare at the man behind the desk. Funny how some people just look their professions. I'm sure people would have needed just one glance at Winston Churchill and they'd have said 'There is a leader of men' I looked at Mr. Hayes and thought 'There is a solicitor' 'All right' he said and he finished signing something, probably a cheque for a hundred thousand pounds 'what's on your mind?'

'It's just that I want to resign' I said. That cut through all the pleasantries we might have indulged in. 'So, you want to resign? Just supposing we all resigned, walked out to be a Disc-jockey or whatever?'

'I don't want to be a Disc-Jockey' I said.

Hayes thought that whatever bothered me, could be easily smoothed over. If people can look daggers, then he was stabbing me to death. 'I just want to resign and try something else'. 'This is just a whim, you'll get over it'.

'I hate the legal business and I want to be an artist in an attic. I feel I've been mistreated' - I told him. I stopped talking - my tongue was running off.

'Go on' he said.

'Well sir, you know it's my job to check all documents before they go out?'

'Yes' said Mr Hayes 'and your work is very satisfactory. The staff tell me that they've never seen the firms stamp printed so squarely and neatly on the documents'.

'Well, sir' I said, making my face as blank as I could, 'I've been given a conveyance document today - to check it and our clients credentials - and then been ordered to eat fancy cream cakes for purposes of research - I thought that would have been outside my job description'.

He looked taken aback, and if ever a face was nonplussed, his was.

Ah. well - might as well be hung for a Cow as a Calf. 'I don't like that strong tea or those plain biscuits we are served at eleven every day'.

He told me that was completely out of his province.

'Under the circumstances, if I had to keep eating those biscuits - it would be impossible to stay with the company a minute longer' I was just about to leave.

'Wait a moment, young lady'

I stopped by the panelled door.

'You can't leave' he said 'you've got to give notice'.

'Sorry.' I said 'I feel the way caged lions must feel - how easy to say goodbye to a prison'.

I got up. My nerves and legs felt taut. I walked briskly out of his office.

Mr Dixon was waiting. 'Wait' He cried, scrambling after me.

'I've heard from Miss Lynch - and you can't leave us with our tits in the mangle - you've got to give a months notice'.

'Dixon!!' I heard Mr Hayes say in his stern impressive voice 'You come into my office at once - and tell me all about this business of asking our young lady clerks to eat cream cakes - that is, if you can speak without taking your vocabulary from the gutter.....' I didn't wait to hear the rest. I got my coat and left before anyone stopped to ask me what had happened. I walked through the brass handled doors - onto the High Street. The lioness was out of the cage at last.

#### Chapter 4.

Wandering rather aimlessly along the street, I came to one of the many narrow cafe's you could find all over the city, the ones with the tattered, typewritten menus and the chipped plastic counters. I went in and sat down to a toasted crumpet, happy to be alone. I was only on my second bite when a friend of mine slid into the chair beside me. 'Babe, nice to see you' said Tilly Edwards, a shorthand typist and an exuberant girl - if ever I knew one. 'Nice place to find you - I notice they have terrific caviar and scrambled eggs here'.

Whenever I saw Tilly - which was very infrequently these days - she'd make these silly ironic statements which we used to call "The Fulford Slang" because we believed our suburb was the only place that used it. On a blizzardly morning we'd say 'Nice spring day, I notice' it sounded childish to me now, and I wondered if Tilly spoke that way in her office 'My typewriter ribbon is worn out, I notice'. 'I just dropped in for a snack' I said. 'It's close to Hancock & Millars, I heard, said Tilly 'I notice it's quite normal to go miles away for a tea break.

Real slave-driver you work for, putting you through the grinder like this. Making a huge decision about where to deliver your briefs, I bet' she fell about at that. 19

I forced a grin.

'Well, I notice you're not lucky to work in stocks and bonds. I'd not be in that business even if I wasn't a P A. Hey! Things haven't been going my way. I haven't got a boyfriend well, not really, you notice. Though I did meet some chap coming in on the bus the other week. His father's a real tramp, doesn't own half of the city. He failed to like me so he didn't bother to come here and visit me the other day'. She leaned toward me confidentially 'Of course, my terrible-looking boy-friend knows all about him, I notice. Well, this Reg chap and I didn't get tiddly down the pub, and he didn't get very pash....oh, no! I refused to go into the bedroom with him. He didn't grab me under the coats, I notice'. 'So, he didn't go all the way?' I said. 'No - I notice'. Tilly gritted her teeth and rammed her right fist into her left palm. She laughed raucously.

'Want something' the man at the cash register called to her. 'Yes, I do' laughed Tilly. She got off the chair and backed toward the door. 'Don't phone me sometime, I hate having a drink with my old friends' she stopped at the door. 'Hey, you'd hate my silly office - they don't put my name on the door'. Ever poor, see? See you square'. She turned and left. Finishing my snack, I paid the man who wore armbands on his shirt-sleeves - he looked greedily at my ten bob note. I imagined that everyone would look greedy, now that I didn't have a regular income. Outside, I was thankful that it wasn't too cold - I didn't want to go home until the usual knocking-off time. Meeting Tilly had depressed me. I hadn't even had the guts to tell her what I was going to do. Not chicken, I notice!

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