

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

Chapter Two.

She felt a transitory but nonetheless intense moment of anxiety as she got out of the car and walked down the path to number 47 Elderberry Drive, suddenly assaulted by all-too-familiar memories. Until her mother had died, this had been the family home—the very place where she and Gail had grown up. Those times had been happier. Neither of them could deny that. But still Samantha did not especially enjoy thinking of them. The contrast was too apparent, too extreme. The happiness, the childhood ease and freedom, had ultimately, as it always must, given way to responsibility, to bold actions and decisions that would shape their opposing destinies. Standing on the doorstep, in two minds about the wisdom of this, she recalled how it had been once Barrett had come on the scene—the questions, the judgement... finally the resigned acceptance that would with time deteriorate into resentment and bile. When her mother had finally passed away and Gail, her husband, Denny, and the children had moved in here—her mother having left the house to them in her will—the two sisters had become entrenched and, it had to be said, hateful. Try as Denny and even Barrett had, the two of them could not be brought together for more than a few minutes without all their efforts going up in smoke. In retrospect, even as she now expected more of the same from herself and Gail, it had all been fairly childish. Childish and yet undeniable—a mix of emotions that, even as she stood waiting for the door to be answered, was oddly comforting, if only perversely in its familiarity.

Run all you want, run all you can, hide if you must—but know that you're dust.

The silly childhood rhyme came back to her, now. It had been one of Gail's favourites, something, Samantha believed, Gail herself had made up. It had been a

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

teasing rhyme—one that she had used time and again to irritate and, even, frighten Samantha. Creeping up on her as she watched children’s television, Gail would recite it with a menacing tone, her hands hooked into claws, the both of them knowing exactly what the rhyme meant, in childhood more than familiar with the concept of their own mortality even as the reality seemed pretty absurd.

Samantha tried not to think about it, tried to run *and* hide from the cruelty that Gail had then so often exhibited. It was true, she had only been a child teasing her sister. Siblings the world over did that every minute of every day. It was just the way it was, one of the unwritten rules. Nevertheless, the thoughts and memories persisted and as Denny opened the door to let her in, his face wan and thinner than she remembered, she shuddered.

“Samantha,” he said. It may have been a smile. It may have been a grimace. It wasn’t easy to say.

“I came as quickly as I could. Is everything...?”

“Come in, Sam. Please.”

Denny stepped back so that she could enter. As he closed the door behind her, she noticed how gloomy the house was. It wasn’t simply the heavy, oppressiveness of the dark wallpaper and carpeting—the feeling she got that the curtains in every room were closed against the meagre daylight. There was more to it than that, a sadness that seemed to subdue light and colour, bring it down and all but negate it. She glanced again at Denny, hoping for clues or, preferably, explanations. This—the cloying, claustrophobic and intensely depressing mood—coupled with the way that Gail had sounded on the phone, got beneath the skin, prickled there anxiously and so insistently that she found herself wanting to scratch her arms. When Denny, struggling to find something to say, sighed with what only could be described as

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

hopelessness, full-blown dread set in.

“It’s bad, isn’t it?” she said—and Denny nodded.

“She’s in the living room.”

He gestured for her to go through but she found that she couldn’t—not yet, at least. He stood beside her, waiting patiently, a hand at the small of her back, and Samantha breathed in bleak expectation, the bald, unadorned horror of knowing that she had to face something nameless and offensive, something from which she would under normal circumstances—

hide if you must

—run a mile.

“It’s okay,” Denny whispered, but they both knew it wasn’t. Whatever it was, it was most certainly *not* okay. It was anything but. If this went the way she expected, she doubted anything would ever be okay again. “She’s waiting for us.”

The living room curtains were not closed, as she’d thought they would be. In spite of the overcast day the room was, in fact, actually quite bright. Nowhere near as oppressive as Samantha had expected. Pausing for a moment in the doorway, she took this in—receiving some solace from it, not quite as pessimistic as she had moments before been—again aware of Denny’s hand at the small of her back, tense and prepared, it seemed. As she wondered just what *that* was all about, breathing in the room’s slightly musky odour, she felt herself relax a little...

... and then her eyes met those of her almost unrecognizable sister.

She was seated at the far end of the settee by the window, her legs up beneath a throw that once again took Samantha back to their childhood, to those days off school with measles and chickenpox and what her mother—*their* mother—had

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

sometimes referred to as *Imaginary Fever*. Nothing had been serious, then. Nothing had been a threat.

But now they were children no more. Their parents were dead and whilst that familiar childhood throw was still extant, it was looking rather the worse for wear.

“I’m glad you could come,” Gail said, her voice sounding even weaker than it had on the phone. “There’s a lot we need to talk about, Sam. A lot of lost time to...”

“What is it, Gail?” she said, fairly sure she already knew the answer.

Only when Samantha had sat down would Gail speak. She moved her legs to make room for her sister and reached out a hand for her to hold. It was a moment that Samantha suspected she would always remember, both for Gail’s touching vulnerability and for the sudden revulsion that she herself felt. Wanting to leave even as she wished to remain—wished to help her sister in spite of all they’d put each other through—Samantha resisted that need to regress again, to return to the reassurance of childhood, to the reassurance of the games they had played in happier, healthier times. She now wanted nothing other than to deal with the reality which now faced her. That was enough to contend with. Taunting herself with the memory of (possibly) better times, she was suddenly convinced, was more than she could bear under such circumstances.

“I need you to be strong for me,” Gail said—and it was as if Samantha had heard this line a million times already, the words dripping with cliché and an odd impropriety. It was every soap opera she’d ever watched, every Aga saga she’d ever read. Gail’s clammy hand held in hers, she was struck suddenly and inappropriately by the sheer absurdity of Gail’s predicament, of life itself, for that matter. *We are born*, she thought, *and we live—and in the process, we fool ourselves completely*. It was nothing so simple as death being imagined only to happen to other people. It was

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

not even anything as ridiculous as a complete denial of death itself. *We know our time will come*, Samantha continued to herself. *We know our time will come and yet we always imagine it to be far, far in the future. Death will happen tomorrow—always tomorrow. Never today.*

“Tell me, Gail,” Samantha said, squeezing her sisters hand gently, careful not to hurt her evidently fragile fingers, suddenly quite afraid that her hysteria would break and that the tears and terrified laughter would come prematurely.

“I think you’ve already worked it out for yourself, love,” she said.

Samantha could feel Denny still standing in the doorway behind her. His presence was both a comfort and a harbinger. Even as she welcomed it, she resented it—and when she nodded at Gail, confirming that she had indeed drawn her own conclusions, the tears already beginning to fall, she felt him shift. With relief or simply in preparation she could never have guessed, but she pitied him nonetheless. Denny was a good man. He deserved to have Gail forever by his side. Such unplanned and unwanted departures were for lesser people. He had a right to expect more. They all did.

“Can’t they...?”

Gail shook her head slowly, eyes half closed. Emaciated and somehow hollow, the flesh on her face as discoloured as old parchment, there seemed little of Gail left on the surface. Whatever remained of her was within and—as cruel as the old, true Gail could be—Samantha nonetheless found herself hoping to see something of her again before the end came, as it surely must.

“It’s metastasised,” Gail told her. She swallowed hard before continuing. “It’s all over me, Samantha. They found the primary about a month ago and since then... it’s been like dominoes toppling. One affected organ keeps leading them to the next

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

and the next and..." She sighed the most melancholic, painful sigh that Samantha had ever heard and rested the side of her head against the back of the settee. Overcome with fatigue and, Samantha suspected, pain, she insisted on continuing when Denny came over and knelt on the floor beside her. "I just... after they told me I just cried for days. Screamed, really. I didn't... it wasn't so much that I was dying. Yes, that's scary but..." She looked at Denny and placed her other free hand on his, smiling softly—her teeth looking far too big for her face—before turning back to Samantha, her eyes suddenly more alert.

"I need you, Samantha," she said. "I need you like I've never needed anyone before."

It was like climbing out from under a warm, reassuring blanket. He shifted. He focused. Tentatively rotating his neck, rolling his head from shoulder to shoulder, he heard the wholly predictable pops and clicks. Reality falling back into place, the world of words and ideologies slowly and with regret retreating. Getting to his feet, he was careful not to rush the process. He'd been immersed in thought for at least a couple of hours, the self almost obliterated during that time, and finding that he again had limbs now seemed the absurdist of propositions. What was he meant to do with these strange appendages? What purpose did they have? How was he meant to incorporate them into his everyday existence? These were the questions he asked himself, and these were the questions that, within a moment or two, he found himself laughing at.

Had it really been two hours? He looked at the clock and saw that, in fact, it had been nearer to three. All that time writing. All that time lost in thought, reshaping the world as he believed he knew it. All that time alone, without Samantha.

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

He stood listening for a few moments. Had she returned home, seen that he was involved in his “work” and simply left him to it? That didn’t seem likely or, for that matter, even possible. Surely he could not have been that deeply immersed in the piece he’d been writing. If Samantha was home he was quite sure that he would know about it. She was too precious to him, too important for her to not register on his radar—no matter what he might be doing at the time. But if, indeed, she was not home, where on earth was she?

Heading downstairs after first posting his blog, Barrett did indeed find the house empty—and only with much uncharacteristic self-control did he prevent himself from calling Samantha’s mobile. He was also not meant to be home, yet, he reminded himself. And unless he was mistaken today had been her day for meeting Kendra. They’d probably got talking and lost track of the time... not such a bad thing, he now reasoned, remembering his redundancy and the fact that he hadn’t yet decided quite how he was going to break the news to her.

In the kitchen, he made a sandwich and thought about his day—about how he had endured his time in Roger’s office, the glances as he had left for the final time with his belongings tucked under his arm, the sense of relief at being home again commingled with a growing sense of anticipation and slightly nebulous threat. In his study, working on his blog post, it was true that a calmness had begun to dominate. He’d lost himself in his thoughts and ideas, all sense of insecurity gone as the words had taken over. The door had opened—not the same door that he had been writing about, it was true, but a significant door to self-awareness, nonetheless—and he had willingly, enthusiastically, even, stepped over the threshold. Now, there was little that he could remember. The words were there on that server on the West Coast of America for all to see, but the sense of what he’d written now only came to him in

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

dribs and drabs.

The secret is not to deny it, he now remembered himself thinking. The madness is there within all of us, a potentiality, at least, if not an actuality. To turn away from it, to fail to stare right back at it, is to risk having it come up behind you—fleet of foot and quick to act.

Meticulously cutting his sandwich in half and placing it with great care on a plate, Barrett put the knife in the bowl to wash later and took his late lunch through to the living room. He didn't want to think, now, about that madness, about the obsessions that at times threatened to overwhelm him or the heavy, head-crowding dark moods that all but incapacitated him. Whether madness in his case was a potentiality or an actuality—or whether, for that matter, “madness” was even an appropriate term—he didn't know and it was certainly not a question he yet found himself ready to address. But whatever the answers to these questions might be, now was not the time—he first had to address the problem closest to hand; what was he going to say to Samantha?

Some people believed that he didn't care about her. Some people would be very quick to tell anyone who wished to listen that Barrett Osbourne was a self-obsessed, by nature reclusive and moody loser who didn't give a damn about how his behaviour affected his wife. They would spin their tales and spout their Jeremy Kyle philosophies and diagnoses and, though they would never have used such a word, with a wave of the hand he would be *condemned*. But that simply wasn't true. He did care. He cared to the point where he had on a number of occasions contemplated leaving her—not because he no longer wished to be with her but simply because it occurred to him that it might be the best thing for her, even if she might not have realised it. She was the closest person to him, the only person he really and truly

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

loved and he had no doubt that what he felt for her was willingly reciprocated. Samantha could never have endured the things he had put her through—the long silences, the obsessive need to stay in, the fear he sometimes exhibited of the people they knew and the places they had been, the long, meandering diatribes that ultimately led nowhere—had she not loved him. Others might argue that it wasn't love at all but merely codependency, reaching into their handy bags of television psychologist soundbites and coming out with the most impressive nonsense they could lay their hands on, but what was love if not codependency? They needed each other, that was true, but Barrett saw nothing unhealthy in that. In fact, he believed that this mutual need could well provide the secret to their way of understanding and dealing with this.

Their love would see them through, Barrett thought and smiled wryly to himself as he paused by the settee before sitting down.

Something had caught his eye. He set his sandwiches down on the coffee table and walked towards the front door. The post was still on the floor where he had moved it and he now picked it up and went with it back to the settee, sitting down and taking a bite of his sandwich as he shuffled through the bills and junk.

It never ceased to amaze him just how much was said about so little. Words were used as if they were not the valuable commodity that they actually were. At best, they were ill-chosen; at worst, pointless and wasteful—a dripping tap in a desert, a complete lack of understanding and respect. *This is the very thing that separates us from other species*, he thought to himself. *Our capacity to communicate, to share complex ideas through time and space. So why on earth are we so careless with this ability? Have we really got so bloody complacent?*

The thought depressed him further and he quickly riffled through the rest of

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

the post, telling himself that he should just eat his sandwich and think about Samantha—Samantha and what he had to tell her.

But as he was about to put the post down, a postcard in the pile caught his attention.

To someone else, it might not have seemed all that special or significant. A pleasantly filtered image of a rather unspectacular ridge of hills, the sun lighting it from the right, the shadows long and unyielding. At its peak, a transmitter mast—stark and insubstantial, but nonetheless erect and oddly accusatory.

Armdon Hills.

In the shadow of which Barrett Osbourne had grown up.

His sandwich now forgotten, his hands shaking ever so slightly, he turned over the card to read any message that might be written on the other side. He didn't know what to expect. The meaning of this—whether friendly or... not—was as yet beyond him, but he couldn't help feeling that this was somehow *not right*. Why would anyone want to send him a postcard of Armdon Hills? It didn't make sense.

And looking at the reverse side—lacking a message or even his address—it only became more puzzling.

Someone wanted him to remember Armdon Hills.

And that someone, it seemed, had gone to the trouble of hand delivering the postcard.

Barrett wished he'd remained in his study, writing.

It had been a quiet and contemplative hour. Samantha sat quietly holding her sisters hand, hiccupping softly, finally—or at least for now—all cried out. Thinking back over all that had been said, the details of Gail's condition—long-winded and, yet,

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

inarguable in their simplicity—her sisters fears about how Denny would cope, having to explain it to the children, Samantha tried to fully absorb it all, briefly relishing the quiet calmness that had now come over them. She remembered what it had been like only an hour or two earlier as she had sat in her car thinking about her morning with Kendra. She'd been unhappy, then. Or that was what she had believed at the time. Kendra's insistence, the boundaries Barrett continually provided—however hard he might at times work to avoid this—all this had conspired to make her feel that everything was futile, everything was pointless. Now she understood just how ridiculous that really was. She had her health. She had the ability to make choices. She had—when all was said and done—a man who, whatever his faults, loved her, and at least one friend who thought enough of her to on occasion stick her neck out. And what of Gail? What did she have? A loving husband and two beautiful children... a loving husband and two beautiful children that she would soon be leaving in the most permanent, heartrending way imaginable.

Samantha thought about Ruth and Gene—Denny and Gail's children. Ruth would be fourteen by now, which would make Gene... twelve, if she wasn't mistaken. They were still just children. They would probably disagree, she knew, but the simple fact was that it only seemed like a few missed moments since they were toddling and saying their first words. To have their mother wrenched from them so early on in their lives didn't bear thinking about.

“How are... how are the children coping?” she asked Gail.

Denny had left them alone ten minutes or so ago and Gail seemed a little more relaxed—as if she felt she could let her guard drop rather more when he wasn't around. She inhaled shakily and shook her head despondently. “They've been incredible, really,” she said, smiling. “Gene, bless him, has spent hours on the

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

Internet, determined to find ‘alternative’ therapies that he’s sure will help me. Denny had to have a word with him. He still thinks that everything can be fixed if we *just try hard enough*, you see. He loves science. Always fiddling about with clocks and watches—you know the kind of thing.”

“A bit like Dad. He was always into stuff like that.”

Gail nodded. “Yes. Now that you mention it, he’s a lot like Dad.” She chuckled. “He’s even got that habit of his. Remember? How he would suck his bottom lip when he knew he was wrong and didn’t want to admit it?”

“I remember that,” Samantha laughed. “It used to drive Mam round the bend.”

“Yes, well, Gene does just the same thing—only with him it’s actually quite sweet. Everything about him is quite sweet.”

“They’re lovely children,” Samantha agreed.

Gail was silent for a minute or two. She stared at the clock on the mantelpiece, everything, Samantha now suspected, a cruel reminder of just how precious every minute really was—how much time had been wasted in triviality and feud. Samantha suddenly felt quite ashamed as she wondered if that was how it was for Gail. Did she berate herself for all the opportunities that had simply been thrown away, discarded without so much as a nod of acknowledgement? In the long, dark mornings of drugged sleeplessness, did she mourn all the things that could have been if she had simply been braver and had a little more foresight? Or had resignation simply taken over now? Gene, from what Gail had told her, would take the clock to pieces and try to find a way of making it go more slowly—but had Gail herself now, after much struggle, accepted if not embraced her destiny, the fact that she would not see her daughter married or her son excel as an engineer or physicist? Could someone like Gail ever do that? Stubborn as she was, could she take her doctors’ words as

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

incontrovertible fact?

“They’ve grown so much,” Gail was saying—talking about the children, again. “You wouldn’t believe it. Wait till you see them. Ruth... I swear, you won’t recognize her. A proper young woman, all curves and attitude.”

“She’d just got her first bra the last time I saw her,” Samantha said.

That wistful smile again. “She’s gone up a few sizes since then. She’s bigger than me, now.”

“I hate to break it to you, sis, but she was bigger than you then.”

There had been a time when Samantha’s attempts at humour would not have gone down too well with Gail—especially when the joke was at Gail’s expense. But now, whilst Samantha saw an initial flicker of the old Gail behind those dim-hazel eyes, a fleeting impatience and irritation, her dying sister was quite different. It wasn’t just that she had a better understanding of what was and wasn’t important. Samantha believed that Gail now *needed* humour. She needed to find a way to laugh through this because, if she didn’t, the consequences would be quite unthinkable.

“Well, I can’t argue with that now, can I?”

“There was a time when you would have tried.”

“A lot’s changed since then.” The humour slipped away. It had been good while it had lasted. “Sam?”

“Yes?”

“Can I ask you a favour?”

Wary, Samantha nevertheless said, “Of course you can. You know that.”

Gail took a deep breath. For a moment, Samantha was quite convinced that she wasn’t going to make it. That breath would be the death of her—the effort more than her tormented body could bear. It would hitch, she would struggle and that

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

would be it. The favour would go unasked. The final joke. The final slight.

“It’s the children...”

“What about them?”

It was no more than she would have expected. Had she been in Gail’s position she was quite sure that she would have made the same request. Life was difficult. Life was complicated and constantly changing. Ruth and Gene would have to learn to accept that and develop mechanisms to help them through the difficulties. But that could only ever come gradually. However deep the water in which they now found themselves, it would take them a good while to learn to swim with anything like proficiency or elegance. They would, both Gail and Samantha knew, have to do their fair share of sinking. All Gail really asked was that Samantha be there whenever possible to fish them out.

“Denny will cope fine,” Gail was saying. “He’s strong and he loves them—but there’ll be times when he, for whatever reason, finds it hard. That’s when they’ll need you, Samantha. Ruth especially, I’d expect. Will you...?”

She didn’t need to ask, Samantha assured her—nevertheless doubting her own credentials, wondering if she could even in the most marginal of ways ever hope to fill the gap that Gail would leave for Ruth and Gene. She would be there, that much was true. She would listen, she would offer advice where it was required—for what it was worth—whatever problems it might cause in her difficult relationship with Barrett she would, if necessary, even take the children in. On that count, Gail had nothing to worry about. But just how successful she would be as a hands-on aunt she couldn’t say. Heaven knew, she was having a difficult enough time keeping her own life on track.

These were doubts that she nevertheless kept to herself. Denny would be

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

there. She was sure he would deal with most of the crises admirably. Better not to add to Gail's worries unnecessarily.

"You know I will," Samantha assured her, filling up again when Gail's chin started to tremble. "They'll be okay, Gail. We'll make sure they are."

It had been such a long time. Months. Years. What seemed, foolishly, like a lifetime—so far removed from his current existence that, whatever the troubles he might recently have been experiencing, it was initially difficult to recognize just what the impulse meant, what it required of him. The pressure seemed to build in a way that it hadn't through his recent trials, demanding a kind of release that he couldn't initially identify. It had been his father's funeral. The last time. Just after. Everything had grown dark and claustrophobic, closing in on him even as the void within him expanded to, quite perversely, embrace it. It had been a panic attack, "they" had later told him, but it had also been so much more. Yet another of those harbingers. *The shape of things to come*, an inner turmoil and pointlessness, meaninglessness, for which he had at that time only succeeded in finding one solution.

Standing in the bathroom, he opened the medicine cabinet and paused for a moment. He didn't want to do this. The postcard meant nothing. Or if it did, he certainly hadn't grasped its meaning. It was most probably just a prank. Some idiot from his past trying to unnerve him in a way that wasn't obviously threatening. There would be a follow-up, he told himself. Within a day or two, some grinning fool would knock at his door and announce himself. The class joker looking for someone with whom to reminisce. The boy that nobody remembered. The accommodating girl that no one could forget. An explanation. Simple and in no way significant enough to justify the actions he now found himself considering. It was a step too far, even to

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

him—but the possible, relatively innocent explanations were not in the least bit convincing. There was more to this.

He didn't know what—

are you sure?

—but there was *definitely* more to this.

Moving aside some face cream and Samantha's tampons, he reached to the back of the cabinet and found the familiar box he was looking for. *Always use a new blade.* That had been one of the first lessons. Never take chances. Infection had to be avoided at all costs. *Until we can get you to a place where you can stop doing this,* his GP of the time had told him, *we can at least make sure that you do what you do as safely as possible.*

Barrett had not then believed that he would ever find the place that Dr Paterson had spoken of. It had seemed mythical—a fabrication to either make life more bearable or, he couldn't quite make up his mind, to simply torment him further. It had sat on the horizon, shrouded in cloud and mist, and the thought of ever reaching such an ideal had seemed at best absurd. But with time and support he had indeed got there, setting aside his chosen form of release and finding other, more appropriate methods.

Holding the box of disposable scalpels in his hand, Barrett wondered if he really was prepared now to give up that mythical idyll.

He must have stood there for quite some time. Still with the box in his hands, turning it over, feeling the way in which the once crisp and scalpel-sharp corners had, with time, softened and begun to lose their form, he felt himself again returning. From where, he didn't really know, but it seemed from a similar place to that in which he

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

found himself whilst writing. A place of reverie and escape, of pure thought and ease.

He breathed slowly—calm, now, and quite certain that he no longer needed to consider using one of the scalpels. The moment had passed. For now, he had succeeded in finding another way to avoid the hectic, nonsensical thoughts. Stepping out of himself—however inadvertent it may have been—had been enough. He thought of the postcard again, now, of Armdon Hills and their long shadows, and his pulse did not race, his thoughts did not crowd him mercilessly.

Placing the box back in the medicine cabinet, careful to replace Samantha's face cream and tampons, he closed its door and looked at himself in the mirror. He was by no means an old man. Still in his late thirties he hadn't even started thinking of himself as middle-aged. Nonetheless, age was starting to creep in. The hair at his temples was starting to grey noticeably and his hairline was receding like the water's edge minutes before the tsunami strikes. There was a tiredness around his eyes—a saggy, puffy pouch beneath each, the effect enhanced by the dark, underscoring lines. When he drew back his lips from his teeth, he was surprised to see just how discoloured they actually were. Had it been a full-length mirror, he was quite sure that there would have been further signs of encroaching decay. He didn't have to look down to know that his stomach was more prominent than it had once been, a little less willing to play the game when he—in those now so rare moments of vanity—tried to suck it in. It wasn't that he had let himself go. That suggested someone who no longer cared or tried, and whilst it was true that his mind had to a degree been elsewhere over recent months he believed it unfair for anyone to think of him in those terms. He had not neglected himself. His diet had remained as sensible as it had always been. He no longer exercised quite as religiously as he once had—there was no denying that—but neither did he vegetate in front of the television twenty-four hours a day. He

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

went to work, he helped Samantha around the house when he could—Christ, sometimes he had even been known to walk to the corner shop.

So why was his body turning to shit?

Downstairs, he heard movement—noise. The rattling of a key in the lock followed by the slamming of the back door. Samantha. There was no one else it could have been.

He found her in the kitchen, sitting at the table with her head in her hands. She'd know that he was home. She'd have seen his car parked out front. He was therefore unconcerned that he might startle her.

Standing in the doorway from the living room he said her name and she looked up.

Her eyes were red and inflamed. Her makeup had ran—his wife the Batman villain—and her fingers were busily working away at shredding a paper tissue. He could smell her. Barrett could always smell Samantha when she was around. Sometimes he thought he could read her whole history by the way she smelt, but now her scent seemed somehow alien, masked by something he couldn't quite identify. She gave off a smell that seemed almost feverish as he approached and only when he put a hand on her shoulder—looking out of the kitchen window, suddenly unable to look down at her—did he finally manage to penetrate a few of its multiple layers.

Illness. Too much heat. Unfamiliar surroundings that once *were* familiar. Sweat and tears. The dampness of outdoors barely covering the smells he was more familiar with; her perfume, the slightly salty smell that reassured and aroused him, the tanginess of her preferred brand of shampoo. It didn't take much to work out that something was not right. Her morning with Kendra, it was clear, had not gone according to plan. He didn't need to smell her. He didn't need to talk to her. One look

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

at her had communicated the seriousness of whatever it was that had happened.

“What is it?” he asked.

“I got a phone call,” she said. “When I was coming back from seeing Kendra.”

“Who from?”

“Gail.”

She waited a moment—giving him time to digest this, it seemed. Gail. Her sister. The woman who had threatened to come between them so many times. The woman he had never really resented, always easily able to understand her concern for her sister, but who he had nonetheless always liked kept at arms length. As genuinely concerned as she could be, she also had an all too recognizable cruel streak. It had always seemed to him that should it be required Gail would stoop as low as necessary to take Samantha from him.

“She’s ill, Barrett,” Samantha told him, her voice hoarse and almost too painful to listen to. “She’s dying.”

Barrett looked down and met Samantha’s eyes. She was afraid, that’s what immediately struck him. Afraid for Gail and her family, but also—and this made him want to go back upstairs to the bathroom and slash away repeatedly at his thighs—afraid of what his reaction would be. Had things really got that bad? Had he taken her to a place where his reaction had become more significant than the impending death

—
I’ll believe it when I see it

—of her sister? He didn’t want it to be like that. It *shouldn’t* be like that.

Samantha deserved better... having her looking up at him like that, *he* deserved better.

“Gail?” he said, stalling for time, desperately trying to remove any traces of

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

doubt from his voice.

“That’s where I’ve been.” She rested the side of her face against the hand he had placed on her shoulder, crying again. “Oh, Christ, Barrett, you should have seen her. She looks terrible. All teeth and eyes and... I don’t know. She’s changed so much, for the better and... not.”

“And there’s nothing they can do for her?”

Barrett wasn’t interested in her reply. He already knew the answer. This was merely his way of showing at least a degree of concern and, if he was honest, buying a little time so that he could better work out how he was supposed to behave under these circumstances. He didn’t want Samantha being disappointed by him—feeling let down by how he reacted. He remembered that look of fear on her face and found himself praying for help, suddenly quite desperate to be the man she wanted him to be. The realisation that she was at that particular moment thinking about Gail rather than him started to encroach and he quickly pushed it away. Now was not the time for that particular brand of selfishness. He wanted no part of it even as it wanted to possess him completely. Samantha brushed her cheek against his hand and, almost automatically, following an instinct that was deep-seated and yet which nevertheless seemed somehow alien, he delicately rubbed the ball of his thumb against the back of her neck—massaging gently. She needed him. That was truer now than it had ever been. It was equally true, however, that he depended upon her even more—especially now—and that it was fairly unlikely that he was capable of supporting her in the way she would require. But it was not within him to just abandon her when she needed him most. He might fail, it was more than likely that he would simply find it impossible to be as giving as Samantha herself was, but he would at least try.

Samantha looked up at him, putting a hand on his. “You’re home early,” she

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

said. “Everything all right?”

This was the moment he was dreading most. The kitchen grew ever more silent, only the fridge buzzing quietly to itself, and he realised that he still hadn’t come to a decision about how he was going to handle this—even without the added complication of Gail’s impending death. Samantha needed strength. She needed stability. However fraught her relationship with Gail had been a significant foundation had nevertheless today found itself significantly undermined. If he piled more weight on top of that, he thought, it seemed that there was only one possible outcome. But he didn’t want to lie to her. He liked to think (even if it wasn’t always strictly true) that their relationship, however unusual some might consider it to be, was founded on honesty. Neither of them were under any illusions about the other. They talked and they did so, by and large, with complete candour. Yes, Barrett withheld a significant part of himself at times—but he *always* told her what he believed she needed to know.

And however inopportune the timing, this was, indeed, something she needed to know.

“Not really,” he said. She sat a little straighter, taking her hand from his. He could almost have resented that. “They’ve laid me off. Made me redundant.”

“They’ve what?”

“I think the phrase he used was something like ‘shedding a good ten percent of the workforce’.”

“But that’s ridiculous,” she objected. “They can’t just do that—not without some kind of... was there no warning? Didn’t anyone see it coming?”

Barrett shrugged. “I couldn’t tell you. I’ve never really been a one for swapping gossip around the coffee machine.”

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

Samantha put her head in her hands and shuddered; her reaction made his teeth ache—set his nerves on edge—and so Barrett quickly pulled—

just like before

—his hand away, almost stepping back from her.

“Shit, Barrett,” she said—her tone about as close to being accusatory as it could be without him taking a knife from the draw and slashing his forearm. “What are we going to do? It’s not as if we had a fortune coming in to begin with but we’re still going to... we won’t be able to make ends meet—not the way we have.”

This was ridiculous and he told her so. His redundancy payment wouldn’t come to all that much but it would certainly put them over until he could find something else. “We might have to tighten our belts a bit, but we’ll get by,” he said—actually feeling rather proud of himself. “I’ll qualify for Jobseekers Allowance or something and...” he put his hand on her shoulder, again, “... well, in many ways we are really lucky, love. It could be a lot worse.”

She knew exactly what he meant and he wondered if perhaps he’d taken it a little too far. He wasn’t the one losing someone close to him. Who was he to say that the situation could be a lot worse? He’d only lost a job—and whilst that had been his point, that *they* at least still had each other, it now seemed tactless at best.

Before he could apologise for this or clarify in some way, Samantha looked up at him again and, after an uncertain period during which she seemed to be in some way measuring what he had said, she nodded sadly before looking back at the table.

She stayed like that for a very long time, turning down his offer of a cup of tea, something to eat—a more comfortable seat in the living room. Barrett stood in the kitchen doorway watching her, alarmed to see her exhibiting the kind of behaviour that was usually reserved only for him. Afraid to leave her, being so close

Tomorrow Will Come and It Will Be Just Like Today.
A Novel by Gary William Murning.

when she was like this seemed to shine a light on his inadequacies. This wasn't about him. And, yet, it was. He tried to approach, but Samantha held up a hand—promising him that she would be just fine. All she needed was a little time to get her head around everything that had happened.

“Let me run you a bath,” Barrett said, the exclusion, the uselessness killing him.

Nodding somewhat reluctantly—clearly just wanting him to go away and leave her be—she said, “That’ll be nice. Thank you.”