



## THE MIDDLE CLASS DREAM

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**THE SUNDAY TIMES**

# Harry Horse: The man who loved his wife to death

It was said they died peacefully in each other's arms. A suicide pact. But the truth about what Harry Horse did to his wife is only just emerging. Here, revealed for the first time, is the horrific ending to their fairy-tale romance

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Shetland, on the island of West Burra. A cemetery occupies a grassy slope in the loch-side settlement of Papil. Among the headstones is what appears to be a fresh grave cut into the turf. There is a pebble-shaped boulder engraved: "In loving memory of Richard, our brother and uncle." Below the cemetery, the grey surface of the loch is ruffled in the March wind; above, rain drifts across the bleak hillside. This place marks the end of what has been cast as a deeply poignant tale.

In January 2007, Richard Horne and his wife, Mandy, were buried here after dying at their bungalow in Papil in what was widely reported to be a suicide pact. Horne, under his adopted name Harry Horse, was a writer, illustrator, cartoonist and musician whose versatility and originality touched genius.

Mandy had been stricken by an aggressive form of multiple sclerosis and they were said to have died in each other's arms - "like Romeo and Juliet".

Yet there is much that is curious about the grave. First, 18 months on, it has no permanent headstone. Second, there is no mention of Mandy. Third, only Horne's family knew him as Richard. To everyone else, including Mandy, he was Harry. Beyond that, the grave guards a chilling secret. Until now, most people who knew the couple believed they must have taken large quantities of Mandy's painkillers, and saw their deaths as the end of a deeply moving love story, a tryst culminating in death because they could not bear to be apart - or, as the Daily Mail put it, "the final expression of the great love story that was their life together".

In fact, when police from Lerwick arrived at the house on the morning of January 10, 2007, they were confronted with a scene utterly at odds with the media stories. Far from a suicide pact, these were deaths of horrifying brutality. Because Scotland does not operate the same system of inquests as in England, the gruesome details have never been officially released. Many of the couple's closest friends did not learn the truth for months after the deaths. Those who did know, mostly the couple's immediate families, have been profoundly distressed by what occurred and uncertain about how much they should reveal.

The quest for the truth about what happened at Papil, and why, means confronting unsettling aspects of Harry's life. He was charming, witty, versatile - a polymath who reached creative heights in his art, writing and music.

He was a tall, handsome figure with a winning smile and a beguiling interest in the people he met. "His eyes would widen and there was a smile on his face - all his interest was in what you did," recalls the musician J J Jamieson. But there was a dark side too: he was volatile, unpredictable and prone to a volcanic anger.

The immediate problem in recounting Harry's life is that there are competing versions. His mother, Jo, offered hers during a six-hour interview in February. It conflicts in crucial respects with accounts related by Harry in interviews. The most significant disparities hold clues to explaining what happened at Papil. For much of his life, Harry was on a quest for identity that he could never resolve, contributing in large measure to his and his wife's deaths.

We met Jo and Derek Horne at their home in Warwickshire, a cottage in the grounds of an elegant farmhouse. The Hornes lived in the farmhouse for 35 years before downsizing to the cottage in 2006. Harry and Mandy lived in the cottage for five years during the 1990s, and Jo still regards it as her son's home. Mementos abound: his drawings adorn the walls, and his art work is neatly stored away. "All his stuff is here," she told us. "We're living in his house." Soon after we arrived, Derek agreed to Jo's proposal to spend the day at his golf club, leaving her to present her account. As Jo tells it, Richard had an idyllic childhood. She and Derek, a second-world-war pilot who became a prosperous chartered surveyor, married in 1959. Richard was born in May 1960, followed in three years by his three sisters, Kay, Mary-Anne and Emma. Richard displayed his artistic talents from the age of two. "We'd go on walks and he drew the animals we saw." He was fond of animals and a keen sportsman. "He had a great knowledge of birds by the time he was 10 or 11. He loved cricket and rugger. He was just a lovely little boy."

Richard displayed an early talent for play-acting, riding a horse to church and tethering it in the style of Clint Eastwood, and pretending to be a car-park attendant when his parents held Christmas parties. However, he did not fulfil his parents' hopes in one crucial respect. After he attended a local prep school and boarding school, they hoped he'd be accepted at Malvern College. But he was weak at maths and they settled for Wrekin College - where, his mother says, he flourished. "It was just a happy time for him there and he said to me so many times, 'Mum, that was the best thing you ever did for me.' "

His parents were soon disappointed again. They were delighted when he joined a local firm of solicitors, but he drew caricatures in court instead of taking notes. "He looked very nice in his suit, but his heart wasn't in it," Jo says. "He came home one night, threw everything down and said, 'I'm not doing that any more.' "

At the age of 18, Richard moved to Edinburgh - according to Jo, to follow a woman he had fallen in love with. He later said he left home because his parents wouldn't let him go to art college - and for him, at least, it was clearly a watershed, the moment when he attempted to write his early life out of history. The journalist Alan Taylor, who first met Richard in 1983, says: "As far as we could tell, he was an orphan." Soon afterwards he disowned his family name, calling himself Harry Horse (Harry was the name of his grandfather, who was to feature in his children's stories). "I think he felt that by giving himself a new name and going to a new place, it was like burning every bridge with the past," says Taylor. The artist Paul Bloomer, who knew Harry in Shetland, believes he was ashamed of his "upper-class background... He didn't want anything to do with that". Harry reversed the story when he told a Shetland gallery owner, Dorota Rychlik, that his parents had disowned him "and did not approve of his career choice".

Part of the genius of Harry Horse lay in the fact that he was self-taught, both as an artist and as a musician. At first he hawked his portfolio around publishers without success, but then, as he told it, drew on his play-acting to make a breakthrough. In 1981 he called the publishers Canongate, who had previously turned him down, pretending to be his own agent: his client was in Edinburgh and they should see him. The ploy succeeded and he won his first commission: to illustrate a children's book. He next wrote and illustrated his own children's book, *The Opopogo: My Journey with the Loch Ness Monster*, which was published in 1983. It was followed by a series of captivating stories featuring animals, illustrated in exquisite detail and displaying all Harry's talent for relating to children. "Kids loved him," J J Jamieson says.

"He knew how to speak to them and he loved making them happy." He won copious prizes for his books, the last three of which were published by Puffin, as well as in the US and Europe.

Harry used his skill at role-playing to launch his career as a musician. In 1987, Jamieson went to see a new band named Swamptrash in a bar in Edinburgh. The lead singer and banjo player was "a tall, skinny American with confidence like I had never seen before", Jamieson relates. The "tall American" was Harry, who had reinvented himself as Billie Joe from Louisiana and introduced his fellow musicians as his brothers - "all a hoax", he said later. He secured gigs by claiming that his band had been stranded in Edinburgh after the festival and needed money for the flights home. "He had such bravado," says Jamieson. Even though he had little formal musical knowledge ("He knew a few chords, that was it"), Swamptrash helped spawn a new genre of Scottish folk-rock and Jamieson formed his own band, the Critter Hill Varmints, soon after.

His friends have countless examples of his role-playing: posing as art dealers, forging antique diaries, sending journalists on wild-goose chases. While it kept them entertained, they could be taken aback by his anger. In 1983, Alan Taylor was working at Macdonald, publishers of *The Ogotogo*, when Harry, whom he had never spoken to before, called. Harry was "incandescent with rage" over the meagre returns revealed by his first royalty statement. Other targets included the Edinburgh cultural elite, London, mediocrity, large corporations, and - above all - politicians, whom he lacerated in scabrous cartoons evoking Gillray and Cruikshank, which he contributed to several Scottish newspapers. Taylor recalls his "incontinent unreasonable anger" towards politicians. "His sheer animus towards Thatcherism was driven beyond all rationality." The first words he spoke to Dorota Rychlik, a Shetland art dealer, were: "I hate f\*\*\*ing dealers." They were, he added, "the parasites of the art world, profit-margin-obsessed, greedy individuals with no true understanding of art".

During his time in Edinburgh, Harry displayed an ambivalence towards his family: despite seeming to have disowned them, he did stay in touch. His mother tells how she visited him in Edinburgh, sent him money and paid his bills. His sister Mary-Anne became exasperated by his calls to their Warwickshire home. "I used to say, 'Mum, it's Richard. He obviously wants money.'" But Jo insists: "He wasn't a scrounger. It's what mothers do... He always used to say how proud he was of me and how he loved me."

Harry and Mandy met when Swamptrash went to play a gig in Shetland in 1989. Mandy, then in her early twenties, came from West Burra, where her father, George Williamson, was a fisherman. It was, say their friends, a fairy-tale relationship. "Harry was besotted with Mandy," says Jamieson. "She was his beautiful flower." Alan Taylor saw Mandy as a "centre of sublime stillness", the counterpoint to Harry's volatility. Harry's sister Kay adds: "Mandy was a special woman to be able to live with him. She knew how to handle him." The one person who didn't take to Mandy was Jo. She points out that in contrast to her son's previous girlfriends, Mandy had almost no qualifications and had worked as a fish-packer and nursing auxiliary. She was also a goth. "She had these big black boots on and black hair... She didn't get a job, she wasn't a nurse, she was nothing... My son, of all people, fell for this girl. All the others had been so well educated; all the others had degrees."

The wedding, at the Church of Scotland Kirk on West Burra in March 1990, can best be described as a culture clash. There was a gale blowing, with horizontal rain; one Shetlander recalls an English woman clinging on to her pillbox hat, and Harry's family doing their best to dance to the Shetland reels and two-steps. Jo felt discomfited by Mandy's family, who, she recalls, had not arranged flowers for the church and did not invite her family back to their house afterwards to see the presents. "Her father shoved them all into the garage," Jo recalls, adding that these were "really strange people, really strange".

The newlyweds set up home in an Edinburgh flat. They were inseparable, visiting editors together, Harry in a long black coat and hat, Mandy in a miniskirt and Dr Martens. Mandy Suhr, Harry's editor at Puffin, sees Mandy as vital to Harry's success: "She was a collaborator; she played a big part in what he did." They had one enduring sadness: they couldn't have children. And so a dog named Roo, who they found in a dogs' refuge, became their surrogate child, accompanying them to meetings and even becoming narrator in Harry's children's stories.

Despite his successes, Harry never achieved financial security. He was reluctant to illustrate others' work, and resigned from Scotland on Sunday following a customary display of anger when one of his cartoons was cropped. He and Mandy had to leave their Edinburgh flat after falling behind with the rent. Then a house they were buying in Kelso was repossessed. In 1995, at his parents' invitation, they moved into the cottage in Warwickshire. While Jo was delighted to have her son close by, she did not relent in her view of Mandy. "She couldn't make friends, she criticised everything: his cricket, his upbringing, going away to school. We had to be careful what we said... She would sulk. We had nothing in common." Worse still, "She wouldn't wash his cricket whites. She didn't like him playing cricket because she didn't like the wives."

In 2001 they returned to Scotland, living first in the southwest Highlands, then near Perth. In 2004, Harry sent his mother a postcard that read: "Just a line to let you now we've moved again - to Shetland this time... There are lots of seabirds, Roo thinks she is young again..." His cheerful words concealed the true reason for the move: Mandy had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and wanted to be near her mother. The couple moved into a bungalow 100 metres from her parents' home, renting it from her brother who had emigrated to New Zealand. Only later did Harry's family and friends learn what lay behind the move. J J Jamieson, who had moved to Shetland in 1989, recalls seeing Mandy limping soon after she and Harry arrived. "She was a bit defensive and said there was nothing wrong. It was the first sign of MS. They knew but hadn't told anyone."

Harry's family viewed his move to Shetland as an unmitigated disaster. He told one sister he was "in a living hell". In another call he lamented: "I can't stand this place. Get me off this effing island. I'm stuck in this godforsaken island. There's no conversation." Edinburgh, says Kay, "was the place he loved to be. He'd put himself in a place where he was totally out of communication with people". But others found him far more positive about Shetland. The landscape painter Paul Bloomer, who moved to Shetland in 1997, met Harry after he had been walking on a nearby beach. "We instantly made a connection through art," says Bloomer. Harry "tried to get into the Shetland way; he wanted to be part of it. I only ever saw him praising Shetland." Bloomer sees other virtues in Shetland. Compared with a big city, "there's nowhere to run... No distractions. You just have to confront yourself head-on".

Some forms of MS are slow to develop, but Mandy's was particularly aggressive. She was soon confined to a wheelchair and her speech became impaired. Harry was distraught, asking friends to imagine how it felt attending to the bodily functions of the woman he loved. Her mother organised a rota of neighbours and relatives to help care for her, while Harry tried to work in the next room. He was immensely distressed when Roo died in May 2006.

As his predicament worsened, Harry was given to ever more disturbing bouts of rage. He berated a Shetland art gallery for its pretentious paintings. He punched a hole in a wall at home during a row with a social worker who was disputing Mandy's right to disability benefits. Meanwhile, his relations with his family were reaching a terminal phase. In a series of cataclysmic rows, he broke contact with each of them in turn. He told Derek he might have been a good businessman but he was a lousy father. He accused one sister of being an alcoholic, another of marrying for money. Jo says: "He would berate me so much, I used to be in shreds. It took me days to get over it, then he'd ring up and say he was so sorry, he didn't mean it."

Finally there were no more phone calls. His last conversation with any of them was with Emma in August 2006, five months before the deaths on Papil. At the same time, he appeared to be searching for an alternative family in Mandy's parents. George Williamson has said Harry once embraced both him and his wife, Grace, saying: "You're my family now." But Harry's bid to cast Williamson as a surrogate father was fraught with problems, stemming from their strong, competing personalities and Williamson's misjudgments about Harry. He once proposed taking Harry on a rabbit shoot - when killing furry animals was anathema to Harry. "He was deeply offended by that," confirms Bloomer.

As they look back on the final months, Harry's friends believe he was distancing himself from them in readiness for what he was planning to do. Bloomer last spoke to him in Lerwick in

September. "He seemed to be quite detached," Bloomer says. "He said everything was fine." But then Harry apparently paraphrased William Blake: "Hell is here on Earth, it is written on the faces of the people in the street." Jamieson was finding Harry ever more volatile and unpredictable: "You never knew when you called what kind of reception you'd get - whether he'd say 'Hi' or put the phone down."

Meanwhile, Harry was confiding his thoughts in a journal, which his sisters read after his death. They report that he was raging at the "absolute abortion" of a proposed book cover and was incensed by a proposal that Penguin should make a bulk sale of one of his books to Virgin Atlantic, netting him what he considered a pittance. He had also been hit with a tax demand for £10,000. "He was desperately worried about money," says Jo. "He wanted to sack Penguin, he wanted to sack his agent... [he felt] they were all screwing him, they were all taking their bit."

As Christmas approached, his mood seemed more tranquil, as if he had achieved some kind of acceptance. He painted pictures on a child's bedroom wall to thank her mother for caring for Mandy, and sold or gave away some of his paintings. He gave Jamieson a rabbit poster for his son. "He'd never have done that before," says Jamieson. At other moments he still appeared to be looking ahead. On New Year's Eve he called an aunt - his father's sister - to tell her, according to Jo, that Mandy didn't have long to live and that he was looking forward to "coming home". By now the rupture between Harry and his family was so profound that his father was incensed that his sister had even talked to him. A few days later, according to his journal, Harry bought new tyres for his car and arranged an MoT test.

There are differing accounts of events on January 9. Mandy's mother, Grace, has said she visited Mandy as usual that morning. Mandy kissed her goodbye and said "See you tomorrow", referring to a planned trip to the dentist. Jo says she and Derek were told by the police that Harry had a bitter row with Mandy's parents, and suspected that this was over whether Mandy should be transferred to a hospice.

That evening, Harry and Mandy had their last visitors: two brothers from New Zealand. As relayed by Williamson, Harry was in a demented state, roaming the house and proclaiming: "It's a wonderful night for a killing." Mandy was distressed, and did not want the friends to leave. At 9.40 the next morning, January 10, the friends came back to retrieve an item of clothing. The front door was unlocked, so they pushed it open. Inside they saw the bodies of Harry and Mandy lying close together on Mandy's bed. There was blood on the floor, windows and walls. Harry, so it proved, had butchered Mandy to death with a knife. By the medical examiner's count, he had stabbed Mandy more than 30 times, fetching a second knife after breaking the first inside her. Then he turned the knife on himself, crisscrossing his arms with cuts and mutilating his genitals, 47 wounds in all. The death certificates record that both died of "exsanguination": because he'd failed to deliver a lethal blow, both had bled to death. As a final token of horror, he also killed their dog, a chihuahua Mandy liked to cuddle, and their cat.

To the local police, this was an unprecedented event: there had not been a murder in Shetland in 15 years. The bungalow at Papil was cordoned off and forensic examiners were flown in from Aberdeen. It is one of the Horne family's grievances that days passed before they learnt how Harry and Mandy had died. According to Jo, the Shetland police telephoned to ask permission for the two to be buried together; from that call, and from another from the undertaker, who said the couple died "like Romeo and Juliet", they gave their consent. Only on January 15 did a police liaison officer come to spell out the hideous details. "She said, 'I have to tell you that this was a horrific ending. The doctor who attended hasn't returned to work - it's the worst thing he has ever seen.'"

Even now the full details of the deaths have never been officially revealed. Since Lerwick's procurator fiscal, in tandem with the Crown Office in Edinburgh, ruled that there was no need to hold a fatal-accident inquiry, these details have not formally been made public. Even friends such as Jamieson and Bloomer didn't hear for months what had happened. It was Jo who told us, saying she did so because Mandy's father had been telling people in Shetland. Her decision provoked a row in her family, who then withdrew any further co-operation with our research. Meanwhile, Williamson agreed to an interview and then changed his mind. Even so, he relayed

graphic details of the deaths through intermediaries, along with the message that he wanted it known how his daughter had died.

Williamson was motivated partly by the bitter dispute that erupted between the two families after the deaths. There had been no love lost between Jo Horne and George Williamson, but trench warfare now broke out. Jo and Derek did not attend the funeral after being told, Jo says, that they would not be welcome. As there was no will, there were arguments over how the couple's possessions should be disposed of, now being conducted through solicitors. Harry's family eventually visited Papiil to fetch his art work. The latest point at issue is whether the two bodies should be exhumed and buried in separate graves - the reason there is no headstone at the Papiil cemetery.

Needless to say, the manner of the deaths has caused intense anguish to both families. Jo tries to deal with it by saying Harry was no longer the son they'd known: "He was unrecognisable."

She believes that he was consuming "a cocktail of drugs" and that "drugs paraphernalia" were found at the house. Friends believe Harry had been a consistent user of cannabis, and that he and Mandy took ecstasy - which helped relieve her symptoms - but nothing else. But was there a suicide pact? The evidence is against it. Harry did tell people, including the local postmistress, that when Mandy died he intended "to go too". But once when he said that in front of Mandy, she scoffed at the idea. Besides, his frenzied attack was clearly no suicide pact.

Harry's sister Kay suggests he had planned to kill both Mandy and himself with her painkillers, but when the attempt failed and he woke, he decided to finish the job. But the postmortem found no traces of painkillers in Harry's body. George is adamant that his daughter was murdered, and points to defensive wounds on her arms as evidence of her terror. The ferocity of the attack clearly speaks of a cataclysmic anger: his friends are perplexed that Harry managed to continue mutilating himself after 30 or 40 cuts failed to deliver a coup de grâce.

So what can have fuelled that rage? Was it the aggregate of everything that made him angry, from the alleged meanness of publishers to the fate that deemed he should watch his beloved wife die? If that is not enough to explain the scale of his anger, further clues may be disinterred from the conflicts between the accounts of his life related by Harry and his mother. In contrast to the idyllic version Jo presented, Harry gave glimpses of a very different story. In 2003 he told Vicky Allan of the Glasgow Sunday Herald about a "traumatic childhood", including beatings and deprivations at school. His journals confirm that he hated being sent away and hated his school. To Allan, he gave a further detail: his mother had left his father when he was three, returning when he was seven. "It was just a lot of breaking up and coming back together," he said. He added that his mother was "a bit like Stalin, in that she rewrites history".

There were assertions in several obituaries, including one by his agent Caroline Sheldon, that Harry's parents had "separated" when he was two. As we neared the end of our interview with Jo it was she who raised this issue, claiming that accounts that she and her husband had separated were a mistake. She embraced Derek, who had returned from his golf club, saying: "We've never been separated and I love him to death." Yet in separate telephone interviews, their daughter Kay - who lives in the US - confirms Harry's account that his parents had separated more than once: "My mother left my father several times. They made up their differences. They're where they are now and they're happy together."

By itself, her parents' separation need not have proved particularly harmful. But the damage was aggravated, according to Kay, by her mother insisting that nothing of the kind had occurred. Kay confirms it was this denial, more than the separation, that so angered her brother. "He used to harp on about it. He was very upset Mum had left, and it came out in his interviews. I pointed out to Mum and Dad that you can't rewrite things that have been put in place by Richard, otherwise it makes him look like a liar." Harry used to call Kay and plead with her to help persuade their parents to admit the truth. But Kay told him to "let it go".

It is well established that the damage suffered by victims of psychological trauma is liable to be intensified if they also find their experiences are denied, above all by the person who caused the

hurt. Harry had always felt ambivalent towards his parents, writing them out of history yet calling on them when he needed them, while Jo attempted to compensate for her perceived failings by showing love and support. In the end, it can be argued, Harry's struggle to reconcile these contradictions became too much, and he tried to resolve them by cutting off from his family, even attempting to replace them with Mandy's.

It can also be argued that his struggle with his feelings of abandonment and betrayal ran in tandem with the search for his own identity, reflected in the new beginning he created for himself in Edinburgh. There, he found his skill in acting out a range of roles entertained his friends and brought him rewards. But in Shetland he was on a less forgiving stage; one where, as Paul Bloomer remarked, "celebrity means nothing" and you have to confront who you are - another battle he ultimately lost.

Of course, his failures may not have proved so catastrophic had he not also had to watch the slow death of his beloved wife, partner in his fairy-tale marriage. For a man already struggling with demons, it was the ultimate disaster, tipping him into what can only be described as madness, so that he killed the person he loved the most, leaving no other recourse than to turn his knife upon himself. The ferocity of his attacks spoke of an anger and hatred that could only be assuaged through death.