

# Miriam's secret

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I was sorting through a pile of storage boxes from my attic when I found the old scrapbook.

My daughter Ruth has Power of Attorney and she has decided I must move into the new place in Bearsden, where I will live out my remaining years in a two-room suite, all meals prepared by a cordon blue chef.

"Ruth, why does it have to be Bearsden and not Newton Mearns?"

"Mummy, please don't start again. You know why it simply *must* be Bearsden. It is where Alan and I live, remember? Where we have the new practice, yes? Bearsden means I can pop in to see you every day without a trek across to the south of Glasgow. And really, who do you have left among your friends able to visit even if you were in Newton Mearns? When was the last time you had a visitor other than us and the care team? Use FaceTime on your iPad, why not? If it can work for my sainted brother Mark and his tribe in New Zealand, it can work for folk in Newton Mearns, surely."

"Of course, dear. Of course, sorry. It's just, well, I keep hoping Morag from the choir might just pop in. She would never find me in Bearsden."

"Mummy, *please*, Morag died two years ago, remember? She was the last of the choir crowd. They've all been dead for years, ten years at least, all of them. Look, Mummy, please try to be realistic, you are nearly immobile with arthritis and you need help with *everything* and, well, what with Justina in the thick of it cramming for her finals at St Andrews and being clingy, and Alan in traction again with his spine, I just can't cope either. This is for the best, isn't it? For you, for me, for everyone. So please, focus on those boxes and decide what you want to keep and remember, you simply *must* be realistic. You simply cannot take everything with you, OK? Now, I'll try to get over to you tomorrow, but it all depends. Oh GOD! Look at the time!"

Ruth is a good kind girl and I love her dearly, but she has always been 'certain', decisive, like her father, my dear Walter. They were partners in his dental practice. I was his dental nurse in the beginning and latterly took over as practice manager when we expanded into new premises in Shawlands. Ruth coped well with Walter's suicide, self-injected, to escape the coming trauma of incurable bone cancer. Then she met and married Alan and they merged their practices and expanded in Bearsden, his home turf.

I suppose that's when I started to regress, seeking comfort in my past, long before Walter and Ruth and Mark, in that far off time when I lived on the edge of the world, in North Uist with my Aunt Margo, after my parents were killed in an avalanche while they were on a skiing holiday, in France, when I was four years old.

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With my gnarled hands I lifted the scrapbook onto my lap. It opened itself at the centre page with my favourite childhood scraps.

For the first time in nearly eighty years, I saw Belinda my fairy friend from my first summer in Aunt Margo's cottage on the raised beach, on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean.

There was another scrap of a Collie I called Fetch, after my aunt's Collie.

My mind reeled back to the day when I met the sea princess called Belinda.

*I was building a huge sandcastle on the shore, well above the tideline. Aunt Morag, who was an artist, was beside the cottage, in the shade, standing at her easel with Fetch asleep at her feet.*

*I set off towards the sea, a bucket in each hand with my long-handled spade, intent on my mission to dig wet sand for the sandcastle nearing completion. It was a hot, still day and the sea was shimmering like molten silver under a cloudless sky.*

*As I approached the huge, smooth, odd-shaped boulder Aunt Morag called "The Mermaid's Rock" I saw what I thought was a butterfly. I squinted at it and then realised it was exactly like one of my scraps.*

*"Hello, you must be Miriam. Am I right?"*

*"Are you a fairy or are you a butterfly?"*

*"No, I'm an angel. Your Mummy sent me to check up on you."*

*"Is Mummy alright? Is she in Heaven?"*

*"Yes, Mummy and Daddy are both in Heaven and they will be there when it's your turn to go."*

*"When will it be my turn to go to Heaven?"*

*"Not for a long, long time. You will have a long and happy life, you'll see."*

*"Will I marry a Prince? Will he turn into a Prince from a Frog? Will you turn a pumpkin into a glass coach for me, for my wedding day?"*

*"Oh, sorry Miriam but you will find your Prince by yourself. I'm far too busy to look after you full-time."*

*"Oh, I thought Fairies always granted at least three wishes?"*

*"Well, Miriam, I am not a Fairy, I'm an Angel and I don't grant wishes unless. . ."*

*"Unless what?"*

## *Miriam's secret*

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*"Well, unless they are absolutely necessary. Even then I would have to . . ."*

*From behind me, I could hear Fetch barking as he raced towards us.*

*"Oh, no, here comes that barky dog. Bye-Bye, Miriam, enjoy your life. And remember, you must never, ever, share our secret."*

I opened my eyes and smiled at the dogeared scrapbook.

Belinda flew off the page and came to rest on my wrist and reached down onto my disfigured hand and began to apply a firm kneading pressure.

Under my gaze, my hand was transformed, becoming young again.

My face was tingling.

I reached across to my handbag and found my small vanity mirror and checked.

I was back to my wedding day best, twenty-two, ready to head for church.

From behind, a voice I knew well said, "My darling Miriam, come, everyone is waiting for us."

I rose and took Walter's arm.

With Belinda leading us, we walked down the beach.

The sea was shimmering like molten silver under a cloudless sky.