

Waiting

Edith closed her inner door quietly, double locking it while she listened to the alarm complete its routine, ending with one long beep then silence. Exiting to the porch she closed and double locked the storm door, noting again that the black paint was peeling. She had tried to get a painter to come to re-paint the house but because of Covid, they were busy on bigger projects.

Sitting in her small car she took stock, wondering for the hundredth time if she should make this trip.

Does Colin really remember me?

He had seemed friendly enough when responding to her emails, confirming that although Graham was in a care home, lost to dementia, there was still a few from primary school around, still alive and kicking. Although he had not actually agreed to put her up, he had not actually said no.

Was it right to surprise him after a gap of nearly sixty years?

It was a long way to Inverurie and she was not a confident driver, not since she had been shunted at the traffic lights at Bearsden Cross when she slowed to turn right. Her previous car had eventually been written off. The taxi driver had been abusive, swearing at her, reducing her to tears. Had Brian still been alive, he would have dealt with it. With Evonne living as a nomadic hippie somewhere in Spain and Philip driving road train lorries in Australia, she had had to face the legal paperwork and whiplash recovery alone, but at least the girl at Direct Line had been supportive, even sending her flowers on three occasions.

Edith reversed down her drive and onto the road heading for Torrance, aiming for the M80 beyond Kirkintilloch. This was the part of the journey she knew well and as she drove along, she relaxed and switched on the radio to catch the end of the four o'clock morning news:

"Drivers in central Scotland are warned there is black ice with patches of fog to contend with this morning."

Waiting at the lights, Edith switched off the radio, put on her headphones, connected to her iPad by Bluetooth and selected the compilation that her choir friend Irene had made up for her to help her through the grieving process after Brian's death. The first track up was *Only in Sleep*, composed by the Latvian Ēriks Ešenvāldis and sung in English by the Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge, featuring Rachel Ambrose Evans as the soprano soloist.

The lights changed to green. . .

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Two weeks later, Neurology Intensive Care, QUEH, Glasgow.

Clare Duncan read the clinician's summary on her patient's notes:

Edith Brownlie, DOB 23-10-1951, widow, road accident, prognosis, unlikely to recover. No known Next of Kin or Power of Attorney.

The nurse opened the locker and sifted through Edith's possessions, looking for any clues which might have been missed. Nothing new. She checked the iPad, plugging it in to recharge.

Waiting while it came back to life, she studied the woman's face. Under the closed lids, she thought she saw a flicker. She checked the monitors; there was nothing to confirm her observation but she noted it in the log, just in case. A thought occurred and she found the cable for the headphones and plugged them in to charge then moved off to check her other patients.

Just before going off shift, Clare remembered Edith and returned to check on her, scanning back through the monitor records for signs of activity. None. She fiddled with the iPad and was relieved it was not password protected. Switching it on, she went first to her patient's emails. Disappointingly, this app was password protected, as was her Facebook account.

Clare studied the iPad again and noted that the last App to be used was a music player. She went to this and selected the last file played, connected the headphones and listened to the opening bars of *Only in Sleep*.

"Okay, Edith, why not?"

Clare reset the file, eased the headphones into place and pressed 'Play'.

At this point, Clare's phone alarm beeped softly, reminding her she was due to pick up her grandmother and take her to Silverburn to a 'Covid Christmas Shopping Spree' at Marks and Spencer.

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It was the first day of the school holidays. Next year we would be moving to secondary school. Colin and his twin brother Graham were the leaders of our small tribe. They each had old wooden golf clubs and some tatty old golf balls. Myrtle, whose father was the local minister, had an old leather shopping bag with our picnic of home-baked biscuits, apples, oranges and two bananas. There was also a bottle of Limeade and another of American Cream Soda and two old tin mugs. I had a fishing net that had been my big brother's and a red bucket we used to take with us to Granny's at Stonehaven for our summer holidays.

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The other person in our gang was Samuel, a tall, serious, quiet boy whose mother was a district nurse. Samuel's father was a mystery man. He wore a soft felt hat and drove a large black car.

Colin told us he was a spy for the British Secret Service. Myrtle said he was a different kind of dentist who helped sort peoples' teeth, to make them straight and that he owned a fancy clinic in Aberdeen. Graham said he was a pathologist cutting up dead people to find out why they had died, to help the police find the killers.

By mid-morning we were down near the river. It was boiling hot. Myrtle pulled a new bright green swimming costume from her shopping bag. She went behind a bush and re-appeared complete with a white bathing cap fringed with her red curly hair. She waded in and said the water was quite warm. The twins stripped off. Dressed only in underpants, they ran down the steep bank and jumped in, 'bombing' her. All three were strong swimmers and they set out for the far side of the river, about thirty yards away.

Samuel sat beside me and took out a pocketknife and started on a piece of wood he had found, whittling it into a y-shape.

"I'm going to make a catapult. I have a roll of strong rubber my father got me from a shop in Glasgow."

"Why was your father in Glasgow?"

"Sorry, it's confidential."

"Samuel, is your father a spy for the government?"

"Sorry, its confidential."

There was a loud shout from the opposite bank. The swimmers stood side by side on a huge rock and, after a countdown, they dived in.

Only two heads re-appeared, both boys.

"Where's Myrtle", shouted Samuel. Then he turned to me, "Edith, run as fast as you can back to that farm over the hill and tell them what has happened."

It was a week before they found Myrtle's body but I did not learn this until I returned from Stonehaven. Samuel seemed to know all about it.

"Her body was snagged in the remains of a sunken tree. She died from a blow to her head, probably from hitting the bottom when she dived in. It is a very common form of drowning. She would not have suffered."

After the tragedy, our little gang split up.

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Myrtle's parents moved away from Inverurie. We got a new minister, a much older man, a widower.

Samuel and his parents moved to Manchester.

Colin and Graham were sent off to a private school in Edinburgh.

I made some new friends, but it was never the same.

After secondary school I went to Glasgow to university to study History. I met Brian during freshers' week. He was set on a career as a Civil Engineer.

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The music player reset automatically; *Only in Sleep*, began to play again.

It was getting dark. The door opened and a girl with red hair glided across to Edith's bed, sat beside her and took her hand.

"Edith, do you remember the day we went up the hill to the high woods to gather bluebells?"

"Yes, you brought a picnic for us and we stayed the whole day. And the baby hare, the leveret we called Harry, Harry the Hare."

"Edith, let's go now, back to those woods. I have a picnic outside. We can get there in no time at all. Come on lazy bones. Up you get!"