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Margaret's Marbles

by Zoé Carroll

"I heard a rumour," Nancy moved closer to Mabel on the bench inside the bus shelter and leant her head towards her friend conspiratorially, "that Margaret is losing her marbles."

"Oh?" Mabel was used to her friend's gossip, but this time had also heard something intriguing about their friend Margaret

"She was acting very strangely at her niece's wedding on Saturday. She kept looking at Milly Morris and pointing up at her head and shrugging her shoulders. It was as if she was trying to tell Milly something, but Milly had no idea what she was on about. It was very odd."

"Well," Mabel sat up straighter on the bench and folded her soft arms across her bosom, "Dorothy Adams said that she had seen Margaret talking to herself and walking backwards and forwards in Marks and Spencer's last week. Muttering away she was, walking over to the hat and scarves section and then turning around and walking off into ladies' shoes before muttering something else and turning round. Dorothy said she was watching from the queue at the bakery counter and saw her do it three or four times. She went to say hello to her once she'd paid and said Margaret had seemed very distracted and confused and wandered off without buying anything."

"Well I never. You know that she answered the door to Ethel last week wearing her best dress and carpet slippers don't you?"

“Very sad,” Mabel shook her head to demonstrate to Nancy just how sad she thought Margaret’s mental demise was.

“Of course, they always start to go downhill once the husband goes.”

“Indeed, and it’s been almost a year since Albert left her.”

“Mmmm,” the two women nodded in agreement with one another until the number 12 arrived and they shuffled on for their twice weekly trip into town.

Once the bus had disappeared out of view, Margaret emerged from her hiding place behind the greengrocer’s. She knew that Nancy and Mabel had been talking about her. It had all been so awkward and now she felt that everyone was talking about her and she would never be able to step outside in public again.

Her niece’s wedding had been the first social event she had attended since her Albert had left her for a younger woman last year. She had felt so uncertain about what to wear that she had tried all of her fancy dresses on repeatedly in the days leading up to the big event. She had always asked Albert to choose what she should wear and felt adrift without him by her side. She had finally chosen her navy dress; smart but stylish and not too showy for a woman of her age, but couldn’t decide which hat to wear with it. She had wanted to buy a new hat but couldn’t really justify the expense, she had talked herself in and out of it again so many times in Marks and Spencer’s that she probably had looked bonkers.

She had ended up choosing between her red hat that she’d worn for Ascot last year or the white one she had worn to a garden party with Albert some time ago. On the day she had turned up and seen that Milly Morris had the exact same hat on. She had tried to make a joke with Milly about it but she didn’t seem to get it. It was only in the toilets after the service that she realised why. She was wearing the red hat. Milly’s was white, she had forgotten what hat she was wearing. She had felt such a fool. Maybe she was losing her marbles after all.