

Can you hear me Mr Harcourt?

by Lesley Dawson

At the edge of my consciousness I hear something that sounds like a wasp buzzing in my ear. I try to swat it away and contact something a lot more substantial than any wasp I had ever seen before. As my eyes begin to focus on what is in front of me I see a big goofy smile under a purple mass of what looks like hair, but I've never seen hair that colour before. As my eyes travel downwards I see a navy blue top straining to get away from a big bust, Ah, now I recognise Ursula my Polish carer. I would recognise that bust anywhere.

I know she is speaking to me because her mouth opens from time to time and I can see her silver fillings flashing and her big red tongue wagging up and down. I can't quite make out what she is saying because of the music from the TV. I know it must be about lunch time because there is a clatter of cups and plates being placed on the tables in the dining area. Just as I begin to come back to the present Mrs Jones from next door starts up with her blood curdling cries of wanting to go home and all the carers converge on her to calm her down.

Left to my own devices I close my eyes again. I want to get back to that beautiful time when I was on the beach at Blackpool with my family. We went every year to the same bed and breakfast place and the landlady had got to know all our likes and dislikes. On the beach the kids splashed about in the water and tried to persuade any adult who looked their way to build a sand castle. The women were all sunbathing with their skirts hiked above their knees and their skimpiest tops on. The men congregated at the beach bar drinking Guinness and cracking jokes. They were good times.

This time I find myself, not on the beach in Blackpool, but on the cliffs at Flamborough Head. The wind is howling and the rain sheets down in typical north east summer weather. At first I think I am alone and then I see my brother, Ed, standing beside me. Where are the others? There are usually at least three others in our gang. We called ourselves this when we were teenagers but surely we were now too old to use that childish term. And yet somehow it fitted us when we were out skulking around the caravan site. We were on the lookout for vans that were unoccupied whose owners were in the camp community centre listening to that terrible so-called comedian, Les Dawson. This was in the days before he became famous and was never off the TV.

Ed sidled up to a large caravan with a light over the main door but otherwise completely dark. We tried the door and it turned easily. We couldn't believe our luck. Everything went fine until we opened the door of the bedroom area and discovered a man asleep there. He seemed to register the waft of air that accompanied the door opening and shot awake.

"What are you doing here? Get out before I call the police" He lunged towards Ed who responded with a right hook to the chin. Preparing to run, I yelled "Come on Ed. Let's get out" Surprised that my brother had not moved I saw that his face had gone a khaki colour. "He's not moving, Bert" After a few minutes we decided he was dead. Now what were we going to do? We couldn't leave him for his family to find as they would send for the police who were bound to come looking for us as we had quite a reputation in the camp when anything went missing.

Unable to think of a better solution we dragged him to the cliff edge and tossed him over and then joined the rest of the family at the community centre. Suddenly I received a tap on the shoulder that made me jump. On opening my eyes I saw Ursula with behind her a man in a navy blue uniform. I squared my shoulders and tried to stand up. "Have you come to arrest me? I'm ready to go now."