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workshops

I like a view but I like to sit
with my back turned to it

by MaryPat Campbell

On sunny days they wheel me out to the garden and park me under the trees in the dappling shade. To the south, where the garden drops down steeply, you can look out over the sea from this place at the top of the hill above Torquay. To the east is the building itself, a grand old house once owned by the cigarette people Wills, converted into a hospice fifty years ago.

Tall silver birches wave their leafy canopies and throw pools of shade beneath them, creating shadows on the lawn when it gets too hot. Wrapped in my dressing gown, warm socks and slippers, with a wool blanket tucked around my knees, my friend Paul chats a bit too loudly as he wheels me out on fine sunny afternoons. He likes to have a smoke, so after a bit of conversation, if I'm up to it, he parks me so I'm facing the sea, and I always ask him to turn me round so I can face the garden and the house.

He protests, saying "But you won't be able to see the sea!"

I like a view but I like to sit with my back turned to it, preferring to feel the sea air and the sun at my back. This house is my refuge, when I'm in the garden I like to look at it from the outside, admiring its big glass doors which let the light in on quiet wards, sleeping people and more peacefulness than I've felt in all my life.

Gulls cry and the summer weekend traffic hums in the distance. I get to watch Paul as he wanders around the garden slowly, ponderously, smoking and looking serious and a bit dishevelled. A few years younger than me, he's getting older too. We had a tricky relationship over the years, Paul and me. He has his demons, as I have mine. He often took offence and didn't like me seeing other people at the same time as him. He would become jealous, walk out, and not speak to me for weeks.

Even now, if I have other visitors when he arrives, he always leaves quickly saying he will come back another day. He comes to see me regularly, brings my favourite ice cream, which I'm not able to eat anymore. I'm pleased to see him, I enjoy watching him enjoy the ice cream for both of us, double chocolate chip. We chat a bit but not that much. I don't have much time left and don't want to fuss.

This view of the sea and sky and trees wraps itself all around me. I lean back into its arms high above this seaside town. I'm ready.