

## Living with Albert

by Martin Bourne

“What’s this?”

“It’s porridge Jim, we have it every morning.”

“I don’t want it.”

“OK, but its nice, I’ve put honey in it.”

Jim started to eat the porridge.

“There’s a man upstairs. He was staring at me.”

“OK, we’ll look for him after breakfast. Now eat your porridge.”

“Jim, where are you going?”

“I’m going to work.”

“But it’s Saturday, you don’t go to work on a Saturday do you?”

“Are you sure it’s Saturday. Show me the, err, the thing.”

“The calendar. OK, lets go into the kitchen.”

Betty pointed at a random Saturday.

“Here Saturday, you see.”

“Now lets go upstairs and get you out of those pyjamas and dressed for the day. Go to the toilet Jim. Good, now go into the bathroom, wash your hands and face and clean your teeth.”

She watched him.

“OK, now into the bedroom. No Jim, not downstairs.”

I’m going to work.”

“No Jim, it’s Saturday, remember?”

She grabbed his arm and immediately regretted it.

The punch came without warning, without provocation, and from a man who would never knowingly hurt her. That didn’t make it any the less painful.

“Albert’s really with you today isn’t he?”

“Who is Albert?”

“Never mind.”

In truth Albert was with him all the time and was sometimes manageable, sometimes not. She chose his clothes and Jim dressed with a little assistance.

“Now get yourself a jumper Jim, it’s chilly today.”

Finances were tight on a carer’s allowance and Betty turned the heating off during the day. She felt her lip slowly swelling.

Jim reached into the wardrobe and pulled out a jacket.

“No Jim, a jumper.”

She hung the jacket back in the wardrobe, went to a drawer and pulled out a jumper.

“Here, put this on.”

“Do you remember when we bought that jumper Jim. The assistant put it in a paper carrier bag and it was raining when we came out and the bag started to fall apart. When we got home Julia phoned and told us that she was pregnant with Chloe. Do you remember?”

“No.”

“Yes you do, Julia, your daughter, Chloe, your grand daughter?”

“What day is it?”

“Jim, do you remember the letters you used to write when you were working away for six months just after we got married. Lovely funny letters, all about the town and the people. We laughed so much about that. Do you remember?”

What is it that you miss when somebody leaves? The intimacy? yes for sure, but more than that. It’s the moments, watching telly, having a familiar joke, and knowing that at night you are there together.

Betty looked at her husband

“The letters Betty, I remember the letters.”

He pulled her close to him and she knew that Albert was gone. They kissed and hugged. He was there. Her Jim.

“This isn’t a letter, but my arms about you for a brief moment.”

His embrace weakened and when she pulled away Albert was back. A false dawn never a full day.