



## The Secret Notebook

by Vera Gajic

Rosa died a week before her 99th birthday. Her four children had thought she'd make it, but only realised when the nursing home rang with the news that none of them had been to see her in the last six months, assuming one of the others would go. They weren't close but now they were united in grief, or at least in the task of burying their mother. Ninety nine was a long time to live, a quarter of century longer than their Father.

Rosa had been a strong force in all their lives in different ways. Peter had reacted by getting as far away as the thought possible, crofting in Scotland, not as far as Stephen who'd tried Australia but had come back after a few years and come to terms with his mother's attempts at managing his life by only telling her what she wanted to hear. He never told her he was gay, so there was a lot to hide behind his the life of a happy bachelor, a not well concealed facade.

Julie and Ann were the closest of the siblings but had argued about five years before Rosa died over whether she should go into a care home or not and were now only polite to each other.

They'd half heartedly tried to organise a birthday party for her but most of the people she knew were dead and the grandchildren were not too keen to come back from the far flung corners of the earth for a birthday party so they'd decided to have cake in the care home garden.

Instead of a party they now had the funeral followed by cake in the care home garden. They hadn't met any of the other residents despite Rose being in the home for five years, they didn't think many of them would join in but then they didn't know that funerals were the highlight of the elderly's lives, they would learn that all too soon.

Julie and Ann were being polite to each other when two of the “residents” joined them with their cake.

“Hello, you must be Julie and Ann, I’m Audrey, your mother told us all about you, what a wonderful interesting lady she was, so lucky to have had her as your mother,” said Audrey

They were both a bit taken aback. Julie answered first, “yes, well, I am sure she was like most mothers, what did she tell you about us?”

“Lots of things”, said Iris, “of course her life at Bletchley park was the most exciting wasn’t it? So many stories. She told us that she didn’t think that Alan Turing was really homosexual because she had a thing with him, she said she knows a homosexual when she sees one, I suppose she would with her son being one of course.”

Julie and Ann were speechless so the ladies carried on.

“Last year she told us that she wasn’t bound by the official secrets act anymore so she got out her secret notebooks and she used to read them to us.”

“What secret notebooks?” asked Ann

“Oh dear, I hope we haven’t spoken out of turn, she kept them locked up in her small trunk under her bed.”

“I know that trunk, she always said it was her private undies and things like that when we moved her here. I’d never seen it at home, it must have been in the loft.”

As soon the funeral was over Julie and Ann went to search for the trunk. There it was under the bed, solid steel locked. Where was the bloody key?