

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

The Time Machine

by Sho Botham

Bert was still independent at eighty-five and a half. He was happy with his carers who popped in twice daily to check on him. After a life of constantly moving around, he felt settled in his small, one bedroom, flat. His carers, Angel and Milly were always cheerful. He loved hearing his front door opening as the two of them of them piled in, laughing and joking together. Once a month, he had different carers when Angel and Milly were off duty. But as they always seemed to be jolly too, this didn't worry him.

Life for Bert was pretty good. His breathing problems restricted him getting out and about. But he kept himself occupied. He loved his collection of psychological thrillers and detective novels. A copy of Gideon's bible that he had picked up from the drawer of a hotel he'd once stayed at, looked out of place next to tales of murder, rape and violence. A large TV sat diagonally across one corner of the room. But Bert rarely switched it on, preferring to lose himself in the worlds of his books. All but the Gideon's were well thumbed.

On Friday the 3rd of October, Bert heard his front door opening. He was expecting his replacement carers as it was Angel and Milly's week off. Sure enough, laughter and light-hearted chatter filled the air as two smiling ladies arrived in his sitting room. The smaller of the two women introduced herself and her colleague as Bo and Jane. Bert looked alarmed and started to wheeze, signalling to the ladies where his inhaler was. Bo grabbed it off the sideboard and gave it to Bert. Two puffs were usually enough but this time they had no effect. He took two more puffs but his airways were closing up and his wheezing continued to get worse. An ambulance was called and the carers busied themselves with finding Bert's medications ready for the paramedics when they arrived.

The paramedics checked Bert over and couldn't find anything wrong with his breathing. The anxious breathing seemed to have resolved itself. Bo sat down next to Bert and took his hand as the paramedic asked him questions. Once again the wheezing started and the paramedic noticed the anxious look in Bert's face.

When Bert was calm again, the paramedics told Bo and Jane that they could go as it was likely that Bert would be taken into hospital for some tests.

Bert asked the paramedic to open the window. And almost immediately, his breathing calmed and he visibly relaxed. After an hour, the paramedics decided that Bert didn't need to go to the hospital. With the current lengthy delays due to the pandemic, they wanted to avoid causing Bert further anxiety.

Once Bert was on his own, he could allow himself to remember. He didn't want to remember. He had been purposely forgetting for well over 40 years. But now, that distinct smell of Anais Anais perfume, brought it all back. The evening. The young woman. The alcohol. The fight. The blood. He'd never been caught. But just a whiff of that scent was enough to bring it all back as if it were yesterday. The paramedics were right. Something had caused him anxiety and it wasn't something that a trip to the hospital could cure. Bert turned his head and looked out of the open window with a relieved look on his face. Inside his anxiety had already been replaced with an internal, thumbs up, to himself.