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## Your Family's Never In Your Past

by Rosalyn Hurst

*At the end, people cluster around in small groups, the dismal light of the late winter afternoon reflecting their thoughts. The few men stand hunched while the women are fastening the buttons on their coats, searching for gloves, wrapping scarves around their necks to keep out the chilly wind, while estimating how long it will take to reach the cars in parked some distance away.*

*Jane patiently helps her mother with her stick she had somehow got caught up in the maelstrom of a woolly hat, gloves and scarf.*

Well what a turn out, didn't expect so many, I counted twenty, and the celebrant spoke so well.

What a celebratory? I didn't see no one famous in there.

Celebrant Ma. Remember Gwen said she didn't want any pious vicars at her funeral.

They're joined, hesitantly by a woman who gives no verbal greeting but a nod.

Funny choice of hymn though, fancy Dolly Parton at a funeral, but takes all sorts.

*Jane is annoyed for the music had been Gwen's choice, agreed in her last days as they planned the funeral together.*

Dolly Parton she the celebratory?

Don't be funny Ma. Thanks for coming Daisy. Ma you remember Daisy, married cousin Ethan?

Good afternoon Daisy, where's Ethan?

He passed last year.

Passed, passed what?

Forget it ma.

*Daisy realises she has blundered and tries to make amends.*

I suppose you knew Gwen all your life, how the years fly by?

Since we were five; me and Gwen went to school spent weekends at her house. God, she had kittens, lambs, guinea pigs and rabbits and most seem to live in her bedroom.

I remember every parent let the kids run free back then. You were only six cycled across the marsh, no cars. Gwen's mum and me were pals too, never forgot the day we all went on the electric, 1975 I think.

What in 1975 you only went on the electric I don't believe it!

Well there's a lot of things you don't believe and more you don't know Daisy Martin. Isn't that right Jane?

Take it easy Ma, Daisy didn't know the marsh back then, always lived in Eastbourne didn't you, girl?

You might be sixty and some more if truth be told, but you don't know what it was like back then. I speak the truth, it was just oil lamps and the kitchen range, life was hard for the women before washing machines, you don't know you are born these days, Daisy Martin. The cottages on the Marsh were the last to be connected. Never forgave her Mum, poor Gladys, she had done her best.

Why? What happened?

*Jane looks sadly back at the "family Room" they have just left, the doors firmly closed to prevent anyone returning to see what went on behind the closed curtain.*

Well Daisy, to this day I am convinced it was that Betty Coppard, she was at the secondary school with us, nasty little sneak back then and still is right now. I think she dropped a hint and the next Saturday night when the mum and dad were down at the Ram, Gwen went through all the papers locked in a drawer in their wardrobe and found she was adopted.

You don't say.

Yes true. I remember that night me and Jim were having a drink and she came screaming into the pub like one of those marsh witches my old gran used to speak about. They had to take her home, then she turned up at our place around midnight didn't she Jane?

That's right Mum, Uncle Jethro said they all talked about it for weeks. Said Gladys should have had a word with her earlier, but people were very tight back in them days. We all knew the lanes back then and Gwen was sixteen so she had raced across the marsh to ours at midnight. But what made her really mad was that everyone knew, we kids had been sworn secrecy. Made it worse for her somehow.

Gladys came round two days later on the Monday I remember well, crying her heart out, said Gwen had packed her bags and just left.

How sad. So how did you meet up with her again?

Well out of the blue, me and mum got an invitation to her wedding, not in the church on the marsh, but in the Town Hall in Eastbourne. Married Jim, remember him a lovely man from Newhaven, worked on the fishing boats.. He died only three years ago. Quiet fellow.

No children?

Well Daisy I suppose that's one secret I can tell now. She told me so didn't want children so when Jim was off at sea she had a sterilisation operation.

Well I never!

Its true and she was only twenty. But when she made up her mind....

And Jim, never guessed and you...?

For god's sake Daisy Martin how could I tell Jim! I know Gwen searched for her birth parents, all she could find out was that her mother had been a young maid in a big house in Winchester, no mention of the father but I expect he was some lord of the manor.

That's what it was like back in the day, no one thinks anything of it now, country riddled with single mums and not a word about the single fathers!

You're right Mum. But it is sad isn't it, Jim was a single child too and neither had cousins and lot so the people from the marsh have gone, no old families left.

Or else they're in Eastbourne or Seaford, not so wet and cold there.

That's just typical of you Daisy Martin, we Marsh people love the place. But she did carry a stone didn't she, hung around her neck like her past she could not forget, couldn't really find it.

So where will you scatter the ashes?

Well Jim's are up on the Downs, she hated it up there, so Mum and me will put them on her mum's grave, in the churchyard on the marsh. Gwen did forgive her many years later, so I suppose its fitting they should rest together.

Right looks like we are all moving back to mine for a nice cup of tea and some ham sandwiches. Got some fish paste too, Gwen love a fish paste. And Daisy brought in some scones this morning. You alright Mum?

Fish paste? Love a fish paste in the afternoon.