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Grannie Goes Shopping

by Sue Hitchcock

Margie ran down to the shower block to see if Granny was there and had a pee before searching the laundry and the men's toilets too. She knew it was a waste of time because Bobby would have barked, if he were there with his mummy-owner. Margie called out for Granny and Bobby, just in case they were on site, maybe behind the warehouse, where there were secret hideouts she had played in when she was younger. Nothing – only her own heartbeat, beginning to race towards full anxiety.

Back at the caravan she phoned her mother, but could only leave a message,

“Mum, Granny has gone AWOL. Phone me if she turns up at your place or if you hear anything. M.”

She pulled on her anorak and hurried to the main road. Cars were racing by, driving spray onto her as she looked up and down. Few had ventured out on foot this dismal morning. Surely Granny wouldn't have headed for Chatham, which was several miles away, so Margie walked towards Rainham, where there were some shops. As she went she stared into each bus shelter, some resembling little wooden huts, but with no windows to the back or sides. Some were occupied by a sorry exile from a hostel, druggie or depressed, but no Granny.

Finally she heard a bark and called out, “Bobby.”

Outside Rainham Church Bobby was demanding her attention as loudly as he could and alerted Granny who had been sitting, half asleep, dressed in her nightie and dressing gown.

“Granny, why didn’t you say you were going out? I was worried.”

“Oh, darling, I used to come down here all the time. I wanted to get you some of those biscuits you like. Hobnobs, aren’t they?”

“But I try not to eat biscuits now.”

“It was just for a treat. But they wouldn’t let me.”

“What happened?”

“They said I had to wear a mask. They wouldn’t let me in.”

“It’s the Covid. You have to wear a mask to stop infections. You crossed over?”

“I was going to get a bus home.”

“Good idea.”

“I was on the other side, but the driver said ‘no’, he wasn’t going to the Star, to cross over.”

A bus came in sight and Margie waved her hand to stop it. The door clattered open.

“Got passes?”

Margie hadn’t, but a search of Granny’s bag was fruitful. Below sweets, cigarettes, old letters and, strangely, an old teaspoon, Margie found the sticky card and a few coins – enough, well almost, to pay for herself and the dog.

“Oh, get on, that’ll do.”

and they were homeward bound.

Margie was lonely, as she had never been before, perpetually in the company of her Granny, who no longer seemed like the entertaining woman she remembered. Best was when she watched her T.V. soap operas and Margie could escape outside and think her own thoughts or play with Bobby, but she dared not leave the site.

Conversation with Granny got more and more repetitive and although the old lady slept soundly, Margie was half alert for early morning shopping trips, which became a recurring event. Several times Margie had dragged herself out of bed at six when the sky was barely light, to delay a trip for two hours until the shop opened.

Pension day was the highlight of the week, when they would go to the Post Office.

“Granny, can I have a tenner? I need to top up my phone.”

It was a reasonable request, but the old lady no longer recognised one note from another, so sometimes Margie would take twenty. Shopping was mainly done by her Mum and Declan called in once a week with goodies from Spain. The pension money was not something Granny could use sensibly, her lone trips resulting in the cupboard filling up with chocolates and biscuits, which she would gorge just before dinner, spoiling her appetite. Margie found she had stored quite a bit of cash under her mattress, to which she helped herself, though she had little opportunity to spend it. At least she could afford the cost of the laundry machines, which were becoming essential.

At first she thought the stuffy, biscuity smell came from Bobby. Armed with body wash for herself, washing-up liquid for Bobby and two towels, she took the opportunity of an East Enders episode to go to the showers with the dog. She put a pound into the meter and locked the cubicle. It would probably be messy, so she stripped and hung her clothes with Bobby’s collar on the hook. When the water was warm, she picked up Bobby and they both soaked under the spray. Bobby thought it was great fun and tried to drink the water, poking his claws into her bare flesh. Not so much fun was the soaping, but he couldn’t escape. What was wrong with his doggy smell? Other dogs wouldn’t know him smelling of lemon soap. At last Margie rinsed it all off and stood back while he shook himself, then unlocked the door and let him out to go home. Finally she luxuriated in the peace of her own ablutions.

When she returned Bobby was warming himself on Granny’s lap.

“He’s all wet, Margie!”

“I bathed him. Doesn’t he smell nice?”

Margie was a bit unsure about how effective it had been. The smell lingered. It was Granny.