

Bria and Bob

by Sho Botham

Hedy gazed into the bright blue eyes of her best friend for the last time. Then she ran and ran and ran until her heaving chest would let her run, no more.

Forty years later, Hedy still missed her best friend. No one had been able to replace the close bond the two girls enjoyed. Friends had come and gone. Relationships had come and gone. Even husbands had come and gone. But no one had come close to Bria. No one knew about Bria. This had always puzzled Hedy. It was as if Bria had vanished on the day that Hedy last gazed into her eyes.

During the past forty years Hedy often wondered what had happened to Bria. And where she’d disappeared to after Hedy ran and ran. She had never told her parents about Bria. They’re long gone now. No one ever asked about Bria. She was Hedy’s secret. A perfect friend that only she remembered.

Some days, Hedy liked having memories of Bria. But then other times she felt something strange deep in her belly. A sort of nervousness that sent a chill up her spine and through her whole body. This intrusion of nervousness into her life would make her think back to what happened that fateful day. Hedy didn’t know if the nerves were telling her what happened. Or if they were a sign that she’d buried something in her mind, so deeply, that even she didn’t know what it was. She worried if she was remembering truly or if her mind was playing tricks on her. But then she thought to herself, someday the truth would come out. It always did.

As each year rolled past, Hedy still thought about her friend and why she disappeared. Sometimes, she wondered if she had done something to make Bria disappear. Was that the source of her nervousness that emerged from time to time?

Approaching her fiftieth birthday, Hedy sat on her satin bedspread and pummelled the array of cushions adorning it. She missed Bria. If she was still here, they would celebrate their birthdays together. Hedy remembered the day she met Bria. It was her fifth birthday and her mummy was angry with her. It was too long ago now, for her to remember why she was in her mother’s bad books. But Bria soothed her new friend and they very quickly became inseparable. Hedy felt she didn’t need other friends when she had Bria. And until the day that Bria disappeared when Hedy was nine, she was viewed by her mother as a troubled lonely child. She didn’t like lovely Bria. And took no notice of Hedy’s stories of what Bria and her got up to together.

The day her mother died Hedy had to grow up and look after her little brother Sammy. She didn’t have time to worry about Bria right away. For Bria disappeared the same day that Hedy’s mother died. Her father didn’t have time to find out what was happening in his daughter’s life. He worked long hours and at nine years old, Hedy became a substitute mother to Sammy. Her childlike qualities quickly disappeared, just as Bria did. She took on an adult role looking after Sammy and was diligent in mothering him. One day Sammy introduced her to his new friend, Bob and immediately she knew. Bob was his equivalent of her Bria. And one day, when Sammy started to grow up, Bob would disappear from him. But Hedy would be there to explain to Sammy why imaginary childhood friends only come into our lives for a reason and not for a lifetime.