

## The Obedient One

by Lesley Dawson

I am infinitely strange to myself. I wonder if you have ever thought, or said this to yourself? Especially when you are doing something that you never thought you would do. Something that is completely out of character, or so you think.

It is possible, of course, that this “out of character” way of behaving is something that does not surprise you. You do not think it is “out of character” for me to try to stop a burglary or step out into the road in front of a speeding car. Perhaps you know me better than myself.

What I thought was a daring act, you smiled and said, “I told you so.”

I have always been obedient, or so I thought. My father was not around when my sister and I were growing up. By that point, on his return from the trenches with gas-seared lungs, he had left my mother and was living with a woman he had met in France.

We lived with my mother and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Oddy. You have not met them but if you look at their photo that has pride of place on the piano, you will recognize them as salt of the earth northerners, very committed to family and aware of what their neighbours thought of their daughter. They would not leave a man who had served his country and was now disabled.

My grandfather was every inch a good Christian man, one who served faithfully as a church warden and never missed confession and mass. These were the days when Sunday observance was kept and the most exciting thing to happen was a walk in the park, after church and Sunday lunch. It was the most boring day of the week, but there was no way that we could behave in any other way.

And by Sunday lunch, I mean the works. Maybe in your house you ate the Yorkshire puddings with meat and two veg. Not in my grandmother’s dining room. Oh, no. Yorkshire puddings are works of art that grace a plate, slopping with gravy, before you eat anything else. That way you will be half filled by the time you get to the meat and will need so much less to finally fill you up.

All this was preparation for adult life when I married a man who was used to his mother and sister waiting on him hand and foot. He was a warehouseman but soon had to give up his job to join the Royal Navy. Fortunately, he was away on the North Sea Convoys a lot of the time, but on his one leave he got me pregnant with my daughter. Because of this I couldn’t have the wonderful war that my sister had. She had a whale of a time working in the local munitions factory and going out on the town with all her mates. I was stuck at home with my mother and my baby.

When peace came my sister married her fiancée, who had been in North Africa and Italy during the war. She also had a daughter and we all lived with my mother in this dark ugly house until our names came up on the council housing list and we were rehoused on a huge estate on the edge of the city. This should have been a good time, we were lucky to get a council house, and we did our best to make it bright and attractive. My sister and her family also moved, so my mother came to live with us. I was grateful for this as it allowed me the freedom to work in an office in the city as my mother was at home when my daughter came in from school.

This went on for years; we even celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary with all the friends we had managed to keep from our school days. In fact, these friends were my salvation, they kept me alive in a situation that was slowly killing me. You may ask me, why did I not just leave. That was too daring for me. I could not face the upheaval and disgrace.

Eventually I met a man who was part of the group of friends we socialized with. He also had an empty marriage and asked me to leave my husband and go to live with him. You can imagine the stress I felt. I wanted to leave but couldn't face the storm I knew was bound to come. It almost destroyed me to make that decision but eventually I did. I could not believe what I had done and disappeared. Neither my daughter nor my mother knew where to find me.

When I finally started a new life, I could not believe that I had been brave enough to do this.

"It should have happened a long time ago," was my sister's comment as she accepted this new situation within the family. I wonder what you would have done in my place?