

“Take me now!” he said. An urgency in his voice brings me back into the dim room. “take you where Dad?” I sound weary but I can’t help it. I am. I should be glad to visit, we were lucky to get him a place in this home but somehow the place drains me.

Looking to the left of me, his sharp grey eyes darting around “I’ll take you”. I inch myself up and the vinyl chair squeaks. “Sorry Dad, I must have drifted off, what are you showing me?” The knot in my stomach tightens. “I’ll show you where it is!” He starts to rise up, the sickly blue blanket slips away. Oh god he’s getting up, now the fun starts.

“Where are we going Dad?” Perhaps he won’t be up for long, best get it over with.

“The water. You know the water....” he says, eyes roaming, hands reaching.

This is a new one. “Come on” he says, no patience. No point trying to stop him. They tell you to go along with them don’t they. That’s all well and good in a leaflet isn’t it, but the man can’t chuffing see! And he can’t remember that he can’t bloody see so that makes it all the more difficult. I take hold of his thin arm, “Down here...” That look on his face, recognition that something’s not right. But we set off into the narrow hall. “I got a huge Pike, and our lad got a Perch I think” Praise the lord. It’s the river! We’re going to the River Holme. “Right I’m with you now Dad, come on then. We’ll sit on the bank when we get there” Relief in my tormented stomach. An awkward shuffle side by side.

We reach more wee proof chairs and perform the ‘sitting down dance’ as I call it. “That’s it Dad, we’re here” He settles back in the seat.

Only he’s not in the chair. He’s on the riverbank, and so am I. The water is light and clear, leaping over a crop of rocks. I kick my shoes off and dip my toes in. “It’s bloody freezing Dad!” A small laugh from him. My eyes close and I feel the sun wrapping its arms around me. “Can you hear it Dad? the river?” I ask “Yes I can. See that tree, hanging over the water” His voice is soft. “I hid an old penny in that tree when I was a lad.” I remember him showing me when I was younger. He was a giant then. The tree had grown around it and wedged it tight. “Hang on Dad, I’ll have a look” I walk a few paces down the darkening hall. I reach into my pocket and pull out a coin. “I’ve found it!” I say as I walk slowly back. “You never have” His eyes not seeing, but seeing everything.

I press the coin into his warm hand. “I could stop here all day” he says quietly.

Helen