

## My Dear Albert

There are many images of loneliness. Glance at the elderly lady around which this narrative is set. She is sitting at a table in the window of a café sifting the minutes of an empty hour, her mind alert with swirling creations of boredom. There is the single cup and saucer, and the single plate. She is seemingly pensioned and poor, and about her is nothing of significance.

As it is a Friday she has been to the cemetery and stood beside the grave of her dear Albert. She talks to him—and is certain he talks to her. And because of respect for him she wears her hat! There is a detectable dignity beneath this facade of grey decay and aged weariness.

The world leaves her alone.

But she was someone's child, never someone's mother—and once an elected town councillor.

Notwithstanding a natural decline her brain maintains its ability to record the disappointment of her twilight years.

'Is there anything else?' asks the waitress.

'No, thank you, dear,' she replies.

'Then I'll clear the table,' says the waitress.

'If you like, dear.'

Outside the café a young woman with a troublesome small boy is not having a good day. She is cluttered with plastic bags, and with her free hand she is endeavouring to control the boy.

'I'll get your father to wallop you one when he gets home!'

'He don't come home no more, so what do I care?'

The young woman lets go of the boy's arm and cuffs him across his head.

'Don't be so cheeky!' she screams at him.

Through the café window the elderly lady observes this drama. The distracted young woman lets drop a piece of paper, which the elderly lady watches as it floats down and comes to rest on the pavement. At first she thinks ‘litter’, then realises it is a £5 note.

A man walking close by, who is pleasantly dressed and of slender years, sees the note, picks it up, and makes as if to catch the attention of the young woman—then changes his mind and saunters off in the opposite direction stuffing the note into his pocket.

The elderly lady moves with a determination not usually accorded to her by her rickety old knees. At the door of the café she pauses, takes a deep breath and sets off in pursuit of the man. When she finally catches up with him she places herself abruptly and aggressively in front of him blocking his path.

‘I saw you pick up that young woman’s money ... and you’re going in the wrong direction to return it to her!’ she berates him.

The man, surprised, explains contemptuously:

‘She’s my wife, I’ll have you know ... and she left it for me!’

Rebuffed, our elderly lady counters:

‘Well now ... next Friday I *shall* tell my dear Albert about you.’

*All rights reserved*

© *Julian Thomas 2013*