

## THE ACCIDENT - By Audrey Goodwin

“Now then young man, how are we feeling today?” said the nurse as she took hold of his wrist and looked at her watch. Mark opened his eyes and stared at her blankly. As he opened his mouth she popped a thermometer into it. He tried to sit up but his head ached so he flopped down again.

“Here now let me help you” said Nurse Joanne as she gently eased him into a sitting position plumping his pillows behind his back. “There now, we’re ready for breakfast” The food trolley was already on its way down the corridor he could hear the rattle of dishes. Simon didn’t really feel hungry in fact he still felt a little sick, his headache didn’t help and there was a funny kind of buzz in his ears.

“You’re down for toast with a little marmalade and a bowl of cornflakes. You try and eat that Simon and we’ll soon have you out of here” said Milly the Ward Maid as she moved his table towards him. He looked at it and sighed, perhaps he could just manage the toast and maybe a few spoonfuls of Cornflakes. It would be great to go home, how long had it been since the accident? A week or was it longer than that, it seemed like forever especially now he’d been transferred to an adult ward. He disliked hearing the moaning coming from the old man in the corner, he never seemed to stop and Peter in the next bed had been having nightmares. The doctor thought it was the medication he was taking but he did not change it. It was ok in here when Nigel was in the bed opposite, he was fun but once he’d got over his shoulder operation he gone home. It was so boring here now; he couldn’t concentrate on the television, radio or even reading one of his favourite comics. Perhaps he would go to sleep. He closed his eyes and drifted off only to be awakened by the Ward sister and a doctor. Notes were studied, questions were asked and a finger was moved in front of his eyes. The doctor consulted x-rays taken the day before.

“Another day or so Simon and you’ll be ready to go home” Doctor Grainger turned to the Ward Sister “Get him up and see how he goes, he should be ok for the bathroom now.”

Pamela and Thomas Blake walked into the ward carrying a small suitcase. Simon’s smiling face greeted them. At last he was going home. In no time he was dressed and following his mum and dad out to their car. He shivered, the air felt quite cold after the heat of the ward and he could still hear that kind of low buzzing in his head. He was thankful to be seated in the back of the car at last. As dad put the parking ticket into the machine to get out of the car park and onto the road home he realised that the funny noise in his head had gone. With a sigh he closed his eyes and leaned back dozing away the time till they got home. “Here we are Simon, back at last” said his dad as he pulled up outside number sixty three Lime Avenue. Simon stepped out of the car and looked around. Mr Macdonald at number sixty five was still weeding in the front garden. Had he cut his privet hedge or was it like that before the accident? Simon couldn’t remember. Old Mrs Watson across the road lifted her net curtain a little and was peeking at them from behind it. Her cat sat on the wall washing its paws; he could hear it purring to itself as it licked first one then the other. That’s strange, thought Simon, I’ve never heard Mrs Watson’s cat purring like that. He turned and looked across at it again frowning.

“Come on lets get inside.” His mum put her arm round his shoulders and ushered him in. As he walked through the door he realised he could hear the buzzing noise again only it was louder now. What was causing it, would it ever go away? He shook his head hoping the noise would go away but it didn’t.

“Sit down Simon you look all in, how about a drink of hot chocolate”, his mum fussed around him.

“I think I’ll go and lay on the bed mum I’m feeling a bit tired”

“Right you are son take your drink with you.”

As he made his way into his room the noise seemed louder, he put down his drink on the bedside table and clapped his hands over his ears turning his head this way and that hoping for relief but as he walked towards the window the sound almost became words in his head. He stood looking out into the street listening to what he thought a cry for help. He dropped his hands and gripped the window sill wondering if

he was going mad. Glancing up near the top of the window he saw it. . . . a large bumble bee. It flew towards him then back to the window again buzzing frantically trying to get out. Swiftly Simon flung open the window and ushered the bee outside quickly pulling the window closed. He turned to his bed and with a huge sigh of relief sat down and drank his now nearly cold chocolate milk. Swinging his legs up on the bed he lay back on his pillows and closed his eyes.

Pamela came into his room later that afternoon and stood for a while watching her sleeping son, his face looked so much younger than his fourteen years, the frown lines he seemed to wear since the accident had dropped away. She prayed that he would be alright now he was home.

“Simon, time to wake up, your tea’s on the table.”

He opened his eyes and looked at his mother not yet quite awake “I’m coming mum” he mumbled as he sat up and stretched. Then he smiled at her as he realised that there was no noise in his head. She turned and walked lightly down stairs.

“He was sleeping like a babe” she said as she walked into the kitchen.

Thomas looked up from his newspaper as Simon walked into the room and smiled at him. “That sleeps done you good lad, sit down and get your tea down you. You need building up, either you’ve lost weight or you’ve grown an inch or two while you’ve been in hospital”.

It was an hour after tea that the doorbell rang. On the doorstep stood Billy and Jimmy, they were invited inside and into the kitchen. After a short while Pamela left Simon with his friends having a glass of lemonade and a biscuit and joined Thomas in the front room to watch her favourite programme.

“So what was it like being in hospital, did they stick needles into you?” Jimmy enquired.

“Yes, but it was ok I was unconscious at the time so I didn’t feel it. “

“Cor, fancy waking up in a hospital bed with things stuck in you, bet that was awful” said Billy admiringly.

“It was ok really, anyway there were lots of other kids in there worse off than me, and some had bags of blood dripping into them and heart monitors beeping away all the time.”

“Ugh!” said Jimmy pulling a face at the mention of blood “that would make me sick just to think about it.”

“Me too” agreed Billy.

“Well you make sure you don’t do what I did. It’s not funny tipping over your handle bars and almost fracturing your head. Dad’s going to buy a helmet for me to wear so it don’t happen again.”

“Ain’t it only sissies that wear them?” said Jimmy.

“Chris Hoyle the Olympic champion biker says everyone riding a bike should wear one, he and the other racers always do, they aren’t sissies and neither will I be. Any way my dad’s taking me on Saturday to a get smashing one.” said Simon.

“I’m going to ask my dad if I can have one then, ‘cos I’d rather wear one like you Simon than have an accident and end up in hospital” replied Billy.

“Yeah well, maybe you’re right” agreed Jimmy reluctantly”

“When you back at school then?” asked Billy.

“I’ve got next week at home `taking it easy` so the doc says.”

“Oh so you won’t be coming out to play then?”

“No not for a while.”

“Well we’ve got to go, it’s good you’re ok now, see you” said Billy as they turned to go out of the house.

“Bye, call for us when you can play” called Jimmy from the garden gate.

Standing at the door Simon suddenly felt very tired. He had a bit of a headache and that noise was back. He was just about to turn and go in when Mr Jones from down the Avenue stopped at the gate.

“Hello Simon, home at last I see. You haven’t seen my Jackie have you? The little devil slipped out of the back yard hours ago and I’ve been all over looking for him”.

“No I’m sorry Mr Jones, I’m sure he’ll come home when he’s hungry.”

“I expect you’re right lad, I just hope nothings happened to him” with a wave Mr Jones walked off shaking his head worriedly.

Simon closed the door and walked into the front room realising once again the noise in his head had vanished.

“What was up with Mr Jones then? You were having quite a conversation with him.”

“His dog’s gone missing. He’s been searching for him all day.”

“He’ll be back when he gets hungry”

“That’s what I told him dad but he is very worried”

As Pamela turned to walk out of her mother’s house the following day, she put her arms round her son and hugged him.

“Bye love, see you tonight, I may be a little late if I decide to call at the shops.”

He stood at the front door and watched her drive away. He had started to get a bit of a headache and a low buzz in his ears. He shut the door and went to find gran, he knew she would be making a cup of tea, they always had tea and biscuits when he came from school to wait for his mum or dad to pick him up. He was pleased dad had not insisted he stayed a week with Nana and Granddad Blake. He usually loved being with them but at the moment he just did not feel like tramping over the moors or hill climbing or any other outdoor pursuit they could come up with to keep him occupied. He could tell they were disappointed but he would be going in the summer holidays anyway.

“Sit you down lad, teas just ready. Have a biscuit or two.

Gran put his tea in front of him and sat down at the kitchen table opposite him. As they sat alternately supping tea and dunking ginger biscuits Simon let his gaze wander around the room. He liked this house, yes, it was smaller and older than theirs and not at all modern, but it was cosy and welcoming. The kitchen was old fashioned with a deep white sink and scrubbed wooden draining boards either side. There was a black iron fire surround with an iron mantle shelf draped in a brown velvet cover with tassels dangling over the edge. It housed the Aga stove which was old and a little worn but worked perfectly well. The table they were sat at was also scrubbed pine. He liked the deep drawer in the front where gran kept her kitchen tea towels. In the winter gran usually had sheets draped steaming over a big wooden clothes horse in front of the Aga. When the weather permitted the washing flapped on the line, her whites shining in the sunlight and her coloureds bright as they ever were. He loved the smell of the sheets as he helped her fold them ready for ironing. The kitchen table covered in an old army blanket topped with an even older bed cover was her ironing board. She resisted all attempts to have a modern folding ironing board like his mum `what was good enough for my mother and her mother before her is good enough for me` she told them.

“Are you daydreaming Simon” interrupted gran.

“What! Oh, yes I think I was gran.”

“Been doing a lot of that lately have you?”

“I don’t know have I?”

“Enough of it to worry your mum and dad” answered gran.

“I’m ok gran”.

“That’s as maybe; but something is worrying you. Come on Simon you know you can tell your old gran anything.

“Well there is something, but you’ll think I’m bonkers.”

“Start at the beginning then when you’ve finished I’ll tell you whether I think you’re bonkers.”

“It’s this noise in my ears or is it in my head, I don’t really know gran. Only it’s strange. I first really heard it when I came out of hospital. Then when I got into the car it sort of went. When we got home it started in my head again. I went for a lay down but when I got to my bedroom the noise got much louder. I thought I would go mad. I went to the window and saw a bee trying to get out, by now the sound was so loud I felt my head would burst. The bee flew towards me I was afraid it would land on me and sting me so I opened the window and it went out. As I closed the window the sound faded till it was no longer there. I

think I got on the bed, because the next thing I knew mum was waking me up." He looked at his gran dreading she would laugh at him and call him quite mad.

"Well who'd have thought it, fancy it passing to you, missing two generations."

"What do you mean gran?"

"Acute hearing, that's what I mean, my mum could hear a pin drop ten paces away."

"But gran I didn't used to be like this, and I don't like it."

"Yes well that's as maybe, for now you'll have to put up with it, but seeing as you weren't born with it like my mum was, it will probably vanish in time."

"I hope so gran; at least now I know I'm not going mad."

They settled down to a game of draughts and by the time they had both won an equal number of games Simon had almost forgotten about `acute hearing`. After lunch they decided to take a trip outside just to test the water, gran said.

"You've got to go out sometime, maybe if you try not to listen to the noise and just concentrate on talking to me it might fade into the background, that's what your great-gran did."

They stepped into the garden and Simon began to point out the various butterflies resting on the flowering bushes. One such bush had a number of bees buzzing around it and Simon quickly walked passed it shaking his head trying to block out the sound of them.

"Keep calm," advised gran putting a hand on his shoulder "try to think of some thing else."

"It's hard to do that gran." answered Simon walking towards the back fence.

They wandered around poking under plants looking for Henry, gran's tortoise. She had not seen it for a few hours and was worried it had disappeared. They were startled when a face popped up over the fence. Mr Jones looked at them.

"Hello Doris, hello Simon. You haven't seen my Jackie have you?"

"No I haven't sorry Frank, but I'll keep my eye open for him."

"Would you look in your shed just in case he's got himself shut in like."

"I should think I would hear him barking if he was in there Frank, but Simon will look anyway."

Simon walked back towards the house, the wooden shed served as a repository for the lawn mower and various garden tools. It was very dark inside but he took the torch from its hook by the door and shone its beam of light slowly round. There was nothing live in there but the odd spider sitting in its web. Simon latched the door and walked down the garden shaking his head at Mr Jones who turned miserably away, his shoulders drooping.

"Thanks Simon, bye Doris."

"Sorry Frank, see you."

They watched him as he walked disconsolately to the end of the passage stopping every now and again to look into gardens.

"Poor soul, he's lost without Jackie." said Doris as she turned to look at Simon but he was halfway down the garden crawling under a large laurel bush. He backed out carrying his gran's tortoise.

"Here we are then" he lifted it up "I thought I heard him scrabbling around, the silly thing had got caught in some old branches, either that or it fancied climbing up the tree."

"Well done Simon! You found Henry with your acute hearing."

"Yes I did and once I started to focus on Henry every other sound seemed to vanish."

Simon stood in front of his gran deep in thought, "Gran, I think we should go on a Jackie hunt, if he is still alive and somewhere around here I'm sure I could find him."

Twenty minutes later armed with knapsacks stuffed with lightweight jackets, a bottle of water and carrying walking sticks they strode out into the street. The plan was to start at Frank's house then search avenue by avenue in a kind of circle till they reached the green fields on the outskirts of the houses. After an hour they began to feel tired, gran's knees were aching and Simon's head felt as if it would burst. They stopped for a drink leaning against a wall.

"This is thirsty work gran."

“Are you alright Simon you look a bit pale? I don’t want you to collapse on me you know.”

Simon suddenly cocked his head to one side and held his finger over his lips. He turned round concentrating on a faint sound he could hear. It was a whimper, yes there it was again. He walked round the side of the brick wall. A fence had been built to replace part of the wall near the gate, there were notices pasted on it saying `Keep Out`. A missing bit of fence left an opening a small dog could get through. Simon stood for a moment and listened then called out Jackie’s name. He heard a muffled scrabbling sound and a whining sound.

“Come on gran, he’s in here!” Simon pushed open the gate and strode in looking around at the jumble of demolition rubble workmen had left. He clambered over a pile of bricks straight to a high stack of timbers and stood still listening. Moving round he walked to a pile of tiles and listened. He called the dogs name and the answering bark was louder this time but he fancied it was underground. He spied a broken pipe running alongside a ditch at the back of the plot and moments later was pushing the hook end of gran’s walking stick into it. Gently, he moved it around till he could feel he had caught Jackie, slowly he with drew it. As the stick came out so did the dog its back legs caught over the hooked handle. The dog was ecstatic to be free and wriggled around in Simon’s arms trying to lick his face. They walked along to Lime Avenue and as they neared Franks house Simon put the dog down, with a bark of joy Jackie sped to the gate, leaping over it he ran up to the front door barking. The sheer delight on Franks face was all the reward Simon wanted.

“Well done lad” said gran “I knew you could do it.”

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