

An Isolated Event

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Jim gathered the tiny shells glistening like diamonds in the sunlight. He blew away the sand before placing them in the plastic ice-cream container to avoid breakages and smiled with satisfaction. Sally will be thrilled to receive more of the pretty shells to stick on the frames she made to sell at the Christmas market - and no grit in his trouser pockets to clog up the washing machine.

He absorbed the beauty of the calm sea while watching the incoming tide snatch his footprints. A wave of melancholy produced a rush of memories. Life impermanent and erased easily too. Is it only a year since Lily died? How often did they walk this way together? A daily joy after their retirement to the coastal retreat.

His deep yoga breath willed the sea air to rejuvenate his spirits as well as his lungs. He stared at the rising sun and reflected on how mornings disappeared more quickly now. He checked his wristwatch. Sal will be arriving soon with lunch; a dutiful daughter looking after him with characteristic good humour, 'No Wheels on Meals out here, Dad - except me!' True to her promise she delivered several meals at a time for the freezer.

The container clutched in his hand, Jim picked his way through clumped seaweed and grassy scrub creeping its way to the water's edge. He adored this rugged, untidy beach as much as Lily did, a reason they both agreed the location ideal. The cottage not pristine either, 'a little worse for wear,' the estate agent said. 'Like us,' they replied in unison. 'Lived in and loved,' Lily said with her infectious chuckle.

The agent right about the isolation making it unattractive to tourists and summer crowds. 'Our own private beach like those celebrities on the telly,' Lily boasted to her friends.

Jim paused and stared as a flock of squawking gulls flapped and wheeled overhead. 'What's up with you lot?' he shouted, 'getting excited because Sally will be here soon to clean out the fridge?'

He resumed walking, quickening his pace, mentioning food made him peckish. The effects of his usual breakfast of a boiled egg on toast and mug of tea, wearing off, although the fullness topped up by swigs of water from the water bottle Sally insisted he carry everywhere.

He searched for his daughter's car as he neared the house but the splash of red absent from under the giant gum where she liked to park her little Hyundai hatchback.

Jim smiled. Great! Time to sort Lily's jewellery and pack her silver trophy from the Masters' Games. It's only right Sally take the valuable stuff now. Her mother's possessions her inheritance and the trophy a constant reminder of a day best forgotten. Sally can put it with the scrapbook she made of all the newspaper clippings.

He shook his head but the black-lettered headlines of his wife's collapse and tragic death reported in the newspapers morphed into the horror movie often played in his head. The tragedy a ten-day wonder for the public who either marvelled or condemned a 75-year-old attempting a world athletic record.

Of course, they brought up all the past prizes Lily won at sprinting and one article made a point about her being descended from landed gentry as if she was a wealthy celebrity with advantages others didn't possess.

Jim swung the gate shut with a bang. Bloody gossip magazines and social media trolls tarred with the same fabricating brushes - Lily used to say New Idea should be renamed No Idea and what passes as journalism today, a joke.

Sally can take the only material wealth in the house, it's worthless to me without Lily. What the...?

Jim froze on the doorstep staring at the broken handle and partly open door. His eyebrows knitted into a frown as he hesitated.. the seagulls screeched warning too late as a muscly young man. in leather gear and motorbike helmet charged through the door knocking Jim over.

The elderly man careened into a deck chair, which collapsed. Jim's head hit the concrete slabs of the patio with a sickening thud. The sun's rays danced off the silver trophy jutting out of the bulging shopping bag in the attacker's hand. Jim blinked and as the pain in his head increased he saw Lily running over the Finishing Line in her last race. He lost consciousness as they embraced.

Two lovers entwined in Eternity.

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