

The ride home was always the same. Cheerful and pleasant. But not today. Today, a sadness hung in the air. Leaving Gran in the retirement home was the hardest part. Harder than seeing her in month old clothes or finding a telephone in the fridge instead of butter or eggs. ‘We’ve done the right thing.’ Dad said as we hopped onto the train, and again when he ordered coffee. It sounds less convincing every time.

When we were leaving Gran gave us gifts. Maya, my older sister, opened hers first. She got a necklace, delicate and beautiful, just like her. Gushing and sighing, she clasps it around her neck. Gran hobbled with us to the village’s entrance and Gran pulled me away from Maya and Dad, she held me close and then pushed something into my hand.

When I started unwrapping it something brown and ugly emerged from the paper. Flipping it over, I saw that it was a watch. It was old and rusted and from out of it came long slow ticks. “This was Olivers. He was my best friend, he passed when we were children. Remember, people need freedom to breathe.” Grans voice echoes in my head.

In the train I curled up into a little ball, I took the watch out of my pocket and began trying to make sense of what Gran had said. A pounding, against the window turned my attention to the weather. The rain was turning rapidly into snow. Everything was happening so fast, the room was spinning and I felt myself sinking into a sea of blackness.

Suddenly I’m awake and staring at a frozen river of ice. It’s cold and quiet, Where am I? A hand grasps my arm and I am pulled swiftly up a hill into a cluster of trees. I frantically scan my surroundings. My nostrils fill with the smell of pine trees and cold.

“Please help me. They are looking for me and I escaped.” says a small voice from the darkness.

“Who’s looking for you? Escaped from where? Who are you?” My voice gets higher with every word, as I panic.

“I am Oliver. I escaped from a kind of jail, I guess, just not a public one, my parents are looking for me.” a small boy emerges from the shadows, frightened and alone.

I calmed down and sat. We talked there for a long time. A strange, instant connection. He stands up and pulls me to my feet. We walk towards the edge of the trees and down the slope towards the ice.

“Two shillings to go on the ice ladies and gentlemen! There’s more chance of me turning into King George than this ice cracking.”

### **King George?**

“But King George has been dead for 10 years?” I asked Oliver bewildered

“You’re going crazy Eleanor. King George was crowned in 1937. This is 1938!” he laughed

“What?!”

And then I realised. This is the Oliver Gran was talking about! In 1937?!

“Oliver? I think I-

He pulled me to the ground, coughing and spluttering as he cut me off. His face assumed that terrified look from the forest. He looks over his shoulder at a man walking purposefully through the crowds.

"Sorry. I'll tell you what's going on. I have breathing problems, my parents refuse to let me out of the house but people need freedom to breathe."

Shocked, I sat there gaping at him. We stood up rushing away to a nearby churchyard. A girl is waiting there, "Oliver!" she cries, they lock in a quick embrace.

"I had to get out, Audrey, the Doctor said I haven't long left. The medicine isn't working. They're taking me tomorrow to the infirmary in London, I needed to see you, I needed to be free." Tears fill his eyes as he hands her a note and brown paper parcel. "Remember me"

And with that Oliver and I were off running through the snow. We got about 200 yards and had to stop, Oliver collapsed. The man from the crowd hurried over and picked him up. Oliver limp and pale in his arms.

"Now look what you've done. You should never have left" The man spoke angrily. Oliver replied.... "I needed freedom to breathe" and then they were gone.

The wind roared and my head spun, a familiar wave of dizziness washed over me. When I next opened my eyes I was back on the train, Olivers watch in my hand.