

## WEATHERING THE STORM

The sun shone through the large window creating mini rainbows from the droplets after the sudden spring shower. Violet Miller sat in the chair by her bed feeling invigorated. It had been a glorious storm with an almost black daylight sky, lit constantly by the various forms of lightening.

She closed her eyes and imagined she was outside inhaling the freshness from the trees drying in the afternoon sun.

“Violet! How are you feeling today?”

Vi opened her eyes and nodded her head towards Lucy the young registrar, as she turned in the chair, which felt, difficult and slow. She tried to sit up straight and grimaced in a smile.

“Your son David has just phoned, he said he is fetching your friend Bill in to see you today.”

Bill Walker had been Violet’s friend for years. He had once been her husband Jack’s, best friend, and had taken care of Vi and her son David when Jack had been taken hostage as a soldier. Jack never really recovered after his ordeal, his capture had taken its toll and he died from his injuries a few years after his return.

Lucy put Violet’s notes back after checking them and moved over to the next patient.

Violet turned her head back towards the window and closed her eyes.

The sun was now blinding and the light was penetrating her eyelids; it was white just like the brightness of snow. Just like Switzerland, all those years ago on the tour bus with Jack and Bill, staying in a chalet and learning how to ski. It was a magic time

She drifted off to sleep, switching off from the background hospital noise, which was never silent even at night.

Her eyes opened again when she heard her son’s familiar voice.

“Hello mum! Look who has come to see you?”

Violet’s eyes brightened when David sat on the bed with her new young granddaughter Katie. Janie his wife stood to the side, with Bill standing behind her. Katie’s eyes were wide open, not yet focussing but she appeared to be taking in her surroundings. Janie smiled at Violet and then sat next to her husband and child on the bed. Bill moved Violet’s chair nearer to the bed.

“Isn’t she gorgeous mum, Janie say’s she looks like me, but thank the lord most people thinks she looks like Janie.”

Violet knew she had indulged her only son but his exuberance for life had now been channelled towards his young wife and his daughter.

Janie picked up Katie and cradled her in her arms for a few moments before gently placing the baby on Violets lap. Everyone held their breath, as Janie settled the baby into Violets good arm.

Violet wanted to yell thank you for her trust, but her words were still a little slurred, so she looked down at her granddaughter, and smiled an almost straight smile.

“Hello Katie?” She whispered, and their bond was created as the child’s wide eyes stared back.

Bill placed his hand on Violets shoulder, she flinched a little, as he was to blame for the shock she had had.

“Hello everyone,” Lucy James had finished her rounds and had dashed back to see Violet’s new granddaughter.

“Dr James has been treating mother and she says she is making a remarkable recovery.” David introduced the young registrar to Bill and Janie.

“Would you like to hold the baby for a few minutes?” He looked at Janie, who smiled and nodded.

“Oh yes please, I love babies they’re so resilient.” She smiled at Violet as she picked up Katie.

“You know you have to hurry up and get well they’re going to need a babysitter soon!”

Lucy stayed until Katie became fractious and needed feeding. Janie and David went into the visitors lounge with the baby to feed the baby. Bill stayed behind with Violet and he pushed the chair back near the window. The sky was blackening again and there was a low grumbling sound of thunder in the distance.

Bill spoke, his voice was low and careful.

“I’m sorry Vi, I love you dearly, you were not supposed to know, ever. I feel so awful, please let’s continue the way we always have.”

He sat down on the bed and rested his hands on his knees. She viewed him dispassionately, his shoulders were bent over his tall frame and his coal black hair was now grey and thinning.

As her husband’s best friend Bill had been a great support for her and a wonderful father figure for David once Jack died. They both looked up as the rain began lashing the windows, someone put the ward lights on and they sat and waited as the tea trolley came around. Bill was offered a cup of tea, which he declined, and Vi was given a plastic lipped cup in her good hand. She sipped the tea as the storm got louder, then it abated as quickly as it came, minutes later the sun dazzled on the rain soaked windows. Nature’s drama matched her inner turmoil, she was still angry.

“Vi,” Bill didn’t look up as he spoke. “I consider you and David the nearest thing I have to a family, and now there is Janie and Katie, I love David as a son. Please forgive me and let us continue the way we always have. I know the shock almost killed you, and oh my god we nearly lost you and it’s all my fault.” He looked at her and she wanted to jump up and punch him, but she couldn’t. She turned from him and shut her eyes. He said nothing else and didn’t move until David and Janie came back, Katie was asleep in her carry chair.

“Mum we have to go now, we’ll get Bill home and then we’re going to grab some food and have an early night. Lucy has told us you are doing really well so once they get you a place into Spring house convalescent hospital, you can recuperate until you are ready to come home.

We’ll move back in with you, until you feel able to take care of yourself and of course Bill will be around as usual. Anyway give us a hug, oh come on mum no tears we’ll see you soon. Love you mum.” Janie hugged her and Vi’s body tensed when Bill did the same.

Four months later, Violet was left in charge of Katie as David and Janie popped out for a quick pint in their local. They were gone no longer than forty-five minutes, and they had their mobiles with them, but Vi felt useful again.

She now felt well enough to be left to her own devices. Bill had been around but they had never been alone since the hospital. She now wanted to talk to him and the opportunity arrived that weekend.

David and Janie had agreed to leave Vi for two days and as long as Bill was available they were happy with that.

She asked him to stay for lunch on the Saturday, and he arrived at twelve fifteen, with a small bunch of freesias, her favourite flowers.

“Thank you Bill they’re lovely, I’ve made some sandwiches, they’re on the kitchen table. I’ll just go and get a vase and put these in water.”

They had their lunch and discussed the garden, which she thanked him for maintaining for her, then they washed the few dishes and went to sit down in the lounge.

The room was comfortably decorated in cool pastel shades, lilacs, blues, lemons and greens, there was a mish-mash of collectables accumulated over the years, with odd chairs and tables adorned with photographs. It was comfortable and the only sound was the whirring of the oscillating fan trying and failing to alleviate the humidity of the hot summer temperatures.

She was no longer so angry, the last few months had given her plenty of time to think. She waited for Bill to speak.

“Violet, I need to thank you for being so gracious and accepting me into your life again, and I regret having to cause you such distress.

You know I do love you and if there had been anyway that I could have agreed to your proposal I would have done.

Jack and I had been lovers, as well as friends in our youth. He had difficulty with our relationship and needed to conform to what was acceptable as normal, and truly once he married you he denied us that love and remained true to you. I had to remain content with his friendship as long as the truth was never revealed.”

“I’m a little embarrassed and I don’t really know why I asked you to marry me Bill, I think I never even considered the sexual side of the relationship. It was probably because I now felt ready to move on from being just David’s mum, and him so often saying that we carried on like an old married couple. That probably put the idea into my head. He had his own young family and I was feeling a little lonely.”

Bill smiled, “Do you think we can still carry on like an old married couple, because I do love you, only not in the biblical sense. I’ve been so lonely without you in my life.”

“Bill I’ve missed you too but I wish I had never found out the truth, I’ll never be sure that Jack really loved me.”

“All I know is that he remained loyal to you until he died, and I know if he had to choose between us, he would have stayed with you. I stayed because I needed to be with the people I love and that was Jack and you and young David.”

The wind blew the voile curtains open, “At last we may be getting the promised storm, this humidity is so oppressive.” Bill closed the window over,

“Perhaps the air will clear now!”

“Yes I do believe it will!”