



Musing on Lost Things

By Margaret Whittaker

Thin air, disappeared into thin air. Is thin air good at swallowing things people are careless with? Is it an abstract archive within which lives every lost, unloved thing that no-one wants enough to hold onto?

Is it the repository for all items that disappear when moving home? Is it the store for all the words of dead people – except for the odd words left when revisiting “Granny used to say”, Or do we visit thin air to retrieve them momentarily?

It also takes people. There are those who vanished into thin air, never to be found. No-one puts on an oxygen mask and searches there, even though the phrase was use, the clue voiced.

It is never really visited to extract items or words, because it only exists at the top of mountains and mountaineers are too busy mountaineering to initiate searches except for their companions who slip off the edge.

As thin air is a scientific fact we must seriously think of penetrating this phenomenon. That is if you want to find that copper kettle lost between Manchester and Exeter when you moved house to become a teacher there, or the whole gamut of your father’s advice to you when you refused to see reason and became a merchant banker instead.

Don an oxygen mask and come with me. We will traverse the miles to the base of Kilimanjaro in search of all things lost but stored, all words spoken but forgotten. A guide will indicate the beginning of thin air and we will rejoice.

In a flash of clear vision, all tumbles towards us, an avalanche of things, people running delightedly to meet us and a cacophony of jumbled words; thousands of greyhounds missing from the world of racing, losers all, the unwanted children rejected before birth, crying forever.

There are rejected lovers who left to start anew and were forgotten; the hate words thrown at children who need guidance not anger and the words of love and endearment that were not heard.

There are bodies of birds and animals we never see die, and momentary sadnesses felt long ago. There are trillions of fallen leaves that never accumulated now in the final grave of unrecorded stuff. Everything lost and forgotten is in a wastepaper basket of unwritten works and fragmentary thought.

This is not what we expected. There is no order, no cataloguing. No keeper of thin air. We do not find what we were looking for, we are tired and assaulted, our initial excitement and resolve melt into thin air and we are lone and lost on a mountain.



The Boy Next Door

By Indu Kumar

The funeral was held in the local church. Sadly, very few people attended. Alas nobody knew the family. The vicar expressed his deep sorrow. Thankfully the church was filled with fresh flowers from the recent harvest festival.

After the short service the family left the church with emptiness in their hearts drained of all emotions, hollow and almost dead inside.

The outside world carried on. Young parents pushing babies in their pushchairs. Excited kids eating crisps and chocolate from the corner shop, after school. Exhausted workers relieved at the end of shifts looking forward to going home. The family did not 'see' any of this. They were in another world, their very sad world.

6 months earlier

Emily lay in bed staring at the ceiling. "Could she make it another day" she thought. Emily was at an all-time low. She reached rock bottom. Whichever way she turned, she could only see darkness. Not even a flicker of light. She had reached the depths of despair. "How did I get here" she pondered.

She had a highly paid job with good colleagues, a supporting family and a loving partner. She ticked all the boxes. But what happened. She could not explain it. It just happened gradually. Not overnight but gradually. It wasn't an event or an incident. Emily just lost interest in her job, her house, family and friends. She lost interest in her surroundings and then in life itself.

She tried a new look and holidays. The doctors put her on medication but nothing worked. She lost her job, her house, her partner and her family. She distanced herself from everyone. Now Emily was a recluse, physically and mentally, very far away from everyone in her life!

She got more and more depressed. On a good day she wondered reasonably why this was happening to her. She had everything and yet she felt so alone. She had plenty of money what was the value of money unless you spent it. Just paper, a number in the bank.

Why could she not think how lucky she was that she would not starve or have to walk miles and miles for a morsel of food or a drop of water?

Or why could she not think that she had warm cozy house at the end of a day and did not have to sleep on the street. That she did not have to leave her country, as her family was blown up and the streets were like a war zone.

It did not work that way did it. Otherwise we would all wake up every morning counting our blessings. Why did we not think that way? Why did she not have these thoughts in her head to make her feel how lucky she was. No, all this did not matter. "I am so lucky" she should think "compared to others in this same world." But no, it did not happen like that! When she felt low, so low she was in depths of despair she could only think she had nothing.

Yes she had nothing! Every other person in the world had more than her she thought.

Emily lay in bed staring at the ceiling. Could she make it for another day she wondered.

The doorbell was ringing. Emily had few visitors. She had few friends and the ones she had gave up as she turned them away. She tried to ignore it but it kept ringing. Reluctantly she opened the door.

"Please can I have my ball back". A little voice said.

Emily looked down.

For the first time in a long time Emily actually made eye contact with a person. A frail little boy stood in front of her. He had a pasty face with blond tussled hair but it was his eyes held Emily. They were deep blue warm pleading eyes. He wore a T shirt too big for him and baggy trousers.

"My ball is in your garden, can I get it?" repeated the little boy quietly as he sized her up. Emily nodded. "Thank you" he said and scampered off like a scared rabbit to get it. Emily saw him quickly disappear. Maybe he heard her reputation from the neighbours. She did not blame him. Probably thought she was a witch who would eat him alive!

The next day the little boy was back for his ball. This time he picked up his ball and saw Emily at the door, watching him.

"I am Sam from next door" he picked the courage and held out his little hand.

Every evening Emily saw Sam playing with his ball and very often it landed in her garden. Every time he knocked on her door and asked if he could get it. Emily should have been irritated

by this but surprisingly she looked forward to these brief encounters. After a while it became a regular event.

One day Sam was early.

“Summer holidays” he said “Shall we go to the beach today?” The beach was just a short walk from the house. Emily was surprised at the invitation. She could not turn down his eager offer. So off they both went. Sam said he had to be back by lunchtime.

It was at the busy beach Lots of kids on holiday were making sand castles. The water was warm and Sam splashed about under Emily’s watchful eye. It seemed very natural for Emily to do this. “Where did all this come from?” Emily always thought she did not have a single maternal bone in her body!

The following day Sam arrived at the crack of dawn.

“Can we watch the sunrise today?” he pleaded. How could Emily refuse? They watched the sun rise over the horizon illuminating the whole beach. The warmth filled the beach and lasted the whole day. Strangely Emily felt elated. The warmth lifted her spirits. The air was filled with birds chirping from the nearby woods and the cliffs on one side of the beach. She enjoyed the morning with Sam.

Their visits to the beach became more frequent.

“Except Tuesday” Sam said “I am not allowed on Tuesday”. Emily did not think about this. They watched the sunset too. The beach flooded with the moonlight. “It is so beautiful” Emily thought. She had never stopped to think about the beauty that surrounded her.

One day Sam brought a visitor.

“This is Spot my new friend” he said “We are going to the woods today”. Spot was a little Jack Russel whom Sam found. “He made his way to Sam’s life like me” thought Emily.

A small path led them to the woods. It felt safe with Spot there. He seemed to know his way there. Spot took them very deep into the woods, which sometimes worried Emily but Sam didn’t seem concerned and he was right. Spot brought them safely back on to the right path.

One day Sam found a secret path. Well, Spot found it.

They were all walking when Spot disappeared. The trees were thick and it was getting dark. Suddenly the path widened. Sam went running after him. Soon they both were gone. Emily tried to chase after him. Just as Emily was becoming really concerned she heard a soft bark.

“Emily come here quickly” she heard Sam say. She raced to where the sound was coming from. She had to scramble through some bushes which led to a clearing. There was just enough room for her to stand on the edge. Sam had his hand on Spot’s collar. Somehow they

had reached the edge of the cliffs. They must have reached higher than they thought in the woods.

Emily first saw the look on Sam's face. It was lit up and she soon found out why. The view that met Emily from here was breathtaking! There was a clear view of the beautiful vast beach below. The sand looked clean and white.

It was late and the beach was almost empty. There was a slight drizzle and nearly dusk. Sam's face looked very excited now.

"Emily look" he said. Emily turned to see the most beautiful rainbow stretched right across the sky. Could nature be more beautiful. Even the best artist could not paint this! It was paradise. Their secret she thought.

They sat there quietly. Even Spot sensed the breathtaking atmosphere and remained silent. Sam was mesmerized by it! Like it was heaven!

Finally, all three went home tired, Sam more than the others. They went to their very own paradise frequently. Spot took them there. He seemed to know the path well. Every time it seemed more magical!

They spent all summer visiting their secret path and Emily looked forward to these long warm days.

Little Sam had come into her life like a beacon. He led her out from a world of darkness.

She did not see Sam for a few days. His ball was in her garden but there was no sign of him. Not like him she thought.

Suddenly her thoughts were interrupted by the doorbell. She rushed to open the door. She could not see Sam. There was a young woman there Emily sensed something was wrong.

"Are you Emily?" she said. "I am Sam's mother.

"It did not make sense. Where is Sam" she thought.

"I am afraid Sam lost his battle with cancer. Sam died last night." She said "He wanted you to have Spot." As she handed him over to Emily.

Emily's world collapsed around her. "Was this a bad dream" she thought. It all seemed so unreal. Like one of her days when she could not tell what was real and what was not.

In the days that followed all that Emily could remember was Spot running into her kitchen like it was his new home. It was all a blur. Sam, her Sam had left her. It was all her fault.

If she had been a friendly person she would have known about this. She learned later that Sam had an inoperable brain tumor and his mother brought him here to spend his last days.

So the little boy knew all along and yet was so happy. He never complained about anything. Emily was heartbroken. What now she thought. She was rock bottom again. She had not said goodbye to Sam.

This time she was close to taking her own life. As she lay in her bed she felt something warm on her face. She opened her eyes to see Spot licking her face. He had a look of sadness but it also said pull yourself together. Spot fetched the lead.

She found herself getting dressed and heading to the beach with Spot. It was a warm sunny day. She heard laughter as children played. Life goes on, they say. She was reminded of the happy times she had with Sam. The little boy had taught her to value what was all around her. He had opened her eyes to the beauty that was always there. He had showed this to her. She would not let the little boy down. The sun had risen in her life and Sam had shown her that.

They went to their secret path. It was as beautiful as ever. Emily picked some wild flowers.

"Goodbye Sam. Thank you my friend" she whispered.

Emily returned home feeling strangely uplifted.

She would not go back to the black hole. Yes she would survive. Sam had not failed her.

Spot raced ahead.

Sam's ball was in the garden but Sam would not be back for it!



I'm Not Coming Back

By Ken Sidebottom

Entering the golf clubhouse after a lapse of three years didn't concern Eddie Clayton, even though he knew few members would welcome him. The steward was sitting behind the bar engrossed in the morning paper, unaware of his presence.

'Anybody working in here?' asked Eddie.

Jack Taylor's jaw dropped. 'Good grief, Eddie, where have you escaped from?'

'Very funny, I'm back, renewed my subscription and ready to start playing again. I intend to get a bit of weight off and take a couple of lessons from the pro. A changed Eddie Clayton stands before you.'

'What do you mean changed?'

'What I say, a new man. I've had a good run but a wise man knows when to call it a day.'

'Do you mean with that receding grey hair and expanding waistline, you're getting past it?'

'I'm a fraction overweight,' said Eddie 'and some women consider middle age and grey hair a sign of masculinity, and experience.'

'Who am I to doubt such words of wisdom?' said Jack. 'Is Helena aware of this transformation; I take it you're still together?'

'She will be, and yes we are. She's been very patient, and I'm going to try and make it up to her. I might not have been the best of husbands, I admit that, but it's not too late to make amends.'

'The best of husbands, that's a laugh. I don't know how she's put up with you all this time. You've been womanizing for as long as I've known you, and what about all the other people you've crossed? There's one or two in here who'd gladly wrap a nine iron round your neck – men and women.'

'That's all in the past, Jack and I don't intend to dwell on it. I hope you're not going to rake up that business with your wife again. It wasn't all one sided you know; I did you a bloody good turn in the end. You're better off without her.'

'Maybe I am but we were supposed to be best of mates!'

'Look, Jack, I've come here to renew a few friendships and move on from all that. If it offends anyone then that's their problem, not mine. I'm here and I'm staying.'

'You're welcome back as far as I'm concerned. This place could do with brightening up a bit, but stick to playing golf.'

'Thanks Jack.' The two old friends shook hands.

'When do you intend to start playing again?'

'Not until me and Helena have celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary on the seventh of May. I've booked a long weekend at the Sheraton Park Hotel, London. It's cost me a packet; three nights all inclusive, tickets for a show a ride on the London Eye and a trip down the Thames. There's not much change out of four grand.'

'Do you think that makes up for all your years of philandering?'

'It's a start. I've always looked after her and the kids. She's never been short of anything.'

'Except a faithful husband.'

'Oh, come on Jack, give me a break.'

Eddie left soon afterwards and called at the florist for a bunch of flowers. Helena accepted them and gave him a peck on the cheek.

'They're beautiful,' she said, 'how nice of you. 'What's brought this on?'

'Just a pre-anniversary present,' he said taking her hand. 'I've decided we should celebrate our thirtieth and booked a long weekend in London. I won't tell you all the details; it will be more of a surprise.'

'Well I'm in shock, are you sure there isn't something you ought to be telling me?'

'No, I can promise you that this is all above board. Something I've been thinking about for a long time.'

'You'll have to give me some idea what to expect, so I know what to take.'

Eddie pulled out his wallet and handed Helena a wad of notes. 'Here, there's three hundred quid, get your hair done and whatever else, but make sure you get a new evening gown and take your best jewelry. That's all I'm saying for now.'

The weeks went by and on the day before the intended trip, Eddie came home early to pack and prepare for an early morning start. On entering the house he realized immediately something was amiss. He called out for his wife and dashed upstairs, only to find an envelope on the bed. He ripped it open and read the following words.

Dear Eddie,

It was good of you to book us a weekend away. It was certainly a big surprise. Sadly though it has come much too late; I have suffered from your affairs far too long. Sometime ago I decided I'd had enough. It's taken me a long time to pick up the courage, but by the time you read this I'll be on my way to Tenerife. I'm sorry, Eddie; but I'm not coming back.

Helena

Eddie tore the letter into shreds. 'You bitch, you ungrateful bitch.' He picked up his own partly packed case and slung it across the room smashing it into the wardrobe doors. Then he started to drink. Eventually, still raging he rang his daughter.

'Karen, your mother's left me, did you know? Why didn't you tell me?'

'I couldn't tell you, dad, because I didn't know until this morning, but I'm not surprised. It's been coming for a long time. I'm sorry, but you've only yourself to blame.'

Eddie slammed the phone down and then immediately picked it up again. He ordered a taxi to take him to the club house, knocking back several whiskies while waited.

Lurching into the club house he made his way to the bar, pushing past several people chatting and laughing among themselves. He ordered a double Scotch. A young woman served him and he growled his thanks. 'Where's Jack?' he said.

'Oh didn't you know?' she said. 'He gave his notice in last month. He's gone to live in Tenerife with his girlfriend.'