

# **TAW U3A CREATIVE WRITING GROUP**

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**JANUARY 2021**

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## PREAMBLE

A BELATED HAPPY AND HEALTHY NEW YEAR TO YOU ALL!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

The members of the Creative Writing Group are delighted to say that we are all well and in full creative mode and intend to remain that way for the next decade or so of writing under lock-down.

To start 2021 many of us have prepared two stories for your entertainment and delectation. The subjects are

- Crossing the Bridge, and
- I really wish I hadn't

The respective bridges and what we each regret(?) will become apparent as you delve into the pieces which follow.

Our aim is to entertain, nothing more than that, and we hope that you think we succeed in that aim. If any of you would like to join in and send in a piece which you would like to see in the booklet then please email Bob Beattie at [kane@hadleyville.co.uk](mailto:kane@hadleyville.co.uk) with your piece as soon as you can. The subject for next month is "The Old Man and his Parrot" so get thinking and writing, although there are no prizes to be won, only the achievement of seeing your work published.

Best wishes

The Creative Writing Group[

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## CROSSING THE BRIDGE – Robert Beattie

The three Bill Goats Gruff lived in Northern Italy in the land of the Hundred Valleys. They had all moved a bit south for the sun but mother and father lived near Locarno and required visits as parents do.

So, one Easter, being good Catholic boys, they set off to share the holiday with their parents. Big Billy Goat Gruff took the lead, as usual, with Middle and Little, as they were called for ease of identification, in line behind him.

To get to Locarno they had to cross the bridges of the Hundred Valleys, a not unduly onerous trip for tough, fit, young goats but somewhat dangerous. At first, all went well. They crossed twenty or thirty bridges without too much difficulty but then, oh! Well, but then!! Big Billy got distracted by a lady – well, it turned out she wasn't much of a lady – just before they got to the longest bridge on the route. He said he would catch his brothers up in a while and for them to go on without him whilst he spent some time with her.

So, the other two trotted off, clip clop, towards the next bridge. Then Middle was suddenly taken short. "I knew I shouldn't have had that curry last night," he said "But it was so delectable. Look, I may be some time here, just making myself comfortable and then presentable."

"Too much information," cried Little.

"Alright, but you know what I mean. You go on and I'll catch you up over the bridge."

So, off Little went whilst Middle retired to a quiet spot for a while.

Little was half-way over the bridge when he heard singing. He looked over the parapet and there was an enormous troll.

"I'm a troll polderol and I'll have you for supper" he sang.

For a moment, Little was frightened but then he thought of his brothers and said, "But I'm only Little and won't hardly be a mouthful for you. Middle is behind me and he's much bigger. Why don't you have him?"

The troll wasn't overly bright, just big and fierce. He thought for a minute or two and then said, "Alright. On your way, youngster"

So, off Little trotted.

Soon Middle turned up and began to cross the bridge. He heard the same song. "I'm a troll polderol and I'll have you for supper".

Middle was as quick thinking as Little and said. "But I'm only a few mouthfuls for you. Why don't you let me go so you'll have plenty of room for my much bigger brother who'll be here in a minute."

The troll thought again. "How big is he?"

"Oh! Gigantic and full of lovely tender meat. He doesn't exercise and is very fat and tender"

The troll thought again and his mouth watered. "Oh! Alright. Get off," he said.

Middle trotted off and met up with Little over the bridge. They settled down to wait for Big Billy

Now goats who are related can communicate over long distances so Middle and | Little were able to tell Big Billy what was ahead of him. Far from being lazy and fat Billy was trained to a "T". He exercised every day and was an expert in goat martial arts. In addition, he was not in a good mood, the liaison with the lady goat not having worked out too well. He'd had to leave her smartly when her partner and his three brothers had turned up at an inconvenient moment.

He approached the bridge and began to cross it, quite slowly, just to keep in character. He, too, heard the singing. He, too, saw the troll.. He said "Are you the bloke who threatened my two brothers just now"

"Oh yes!" Said the troll. I'm a troll polderol and now I'll have you for supper."

"Oh no you won't," said Billy and he lowered his head and charged. The troll was completely taken by surprise and met the charge with the full extent of his large stomach. He rebounded from the charge and flew into the air only to be tossed up again as he fell to earth.

"Go on Billy. Give him one for us", shouted Middle and Little. So, he did and then again.

The troll dived off the bridge into the water and was never seen again.

The three brothers went on their way singing their victory song "Men of Harlech".

They came to another bridge and there stood Horatio.

"Hi Horatio", said Billy. "Everything alright?"

"For the moment, yes but I'm waiting for the hordes", replied the hero.

"OK. Give us a shout if you need help," and on their way they went.

Eventually, they reach the last bridge before Locarno

It was blocked by things. They didn't like "things" so

"Is this a Bridge too far?" asked Little.

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**"You've been reading too much, Little" said Billy. "This is Italy, not Holland. We have only one bridge to go and I can see Mum and Dad over there. Let's forget the bridge and swim over to them. It will cool us down, wash us off and make us more presentable for them."**  
**So, that's what they did.**



**EYE! EYE! WHERE'S THEM GOATS**

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## I REALLY WISH I HADN'T – Robert Beattie

I really shouldn't have drunk so much last night but we were having such a good time! Bill was over with Fred and Jim and we went out on the town. Now, I feel like death.

What time is it?

Oh God! It's 8.30 already. At least it's Saturday and no work to do. It is Saturday, isn't it?

Yes, of course it is because it was Friday yesterday – wasn't it. Lord! I can't remember.

My head's hot. What's this on it. It's someone's knickers! They're red and rather sexy and

– Oh my God! There's someone in bed with me. Is it male or female. Ah! I can see now, it's female,. At least that's something.

But who is it? She's dark haired but that doesn't help. She's fair skinned and snores but that tells me nothing; in my experience most women snore like buzz saws. Oh my head. I need water.

What happened last night? I remember going out with the boys but not coming back but, hang on, where's "back"? This isn't my pad. Whose is it? Is it hers? And for goodness sake, who is she?

I need the loo. I'll just slide out of bed and, perhaps, get dressed and leave. She'll never know. Slowly does it. Don't wake her. You never know what she might do.

That's it. Now, quietly across the room. Where are my clothes? Oh Lord! They're all over the room. Quiet now. I'll just put them together.

Where are my shoes? I can't find my shorts. Here's my shirt. What's that all over it. I can't wear that – but I've got to.

Softly does it. Turn the knob carefully and I'm in the bathroom. Oh! What a relief. There's nothing like a good pee when you need it. Now to get dressed.

There, that's done. Now to leave the place. Open the door, carefully now. Has she stirred? Oh no, she's up and putting on a dressing gown. This must be her place after all. She's turned around and seen me.

It's the wife!!

"Hello darling" she says. "That was night wasn't it? It's as well I caught up with you at Mario's just as you were ordering yet another round. You don't remember do you. I knew you were completely gone and that's why I booked this hotel room. You would never have got home. And in case you were wondering, it was me who put those knickers on

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**your head. I found them in your pocket when I undressed you last night. Now, darling,  
just whose knickers are they?**



**THIS IS CLOSE ENOUGH!!!!!!!!!!!!**

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## CROSSING THE BRIDGE Sue Boyd

The day of the Move arrived and Lesley was filled with both excitement and trepidation. She'd lived with her Mother for the last ten years since her Father died. Mildred was that breed of woman who had entirely relied on her husband to take care of the money side of things, had never worked except, of course, as a housewife and mother, putting 'her Frank' first and having no life outside the home. When he suddenly died of a heart attack, she was not only heartbroken, but completely unable to cope with the household accounts, had never written a cheque, paid a bill or organised anything but the weekly food shopping. On top of this she couldn't drive and had never been on a bus –

"How common dear" she said to Lesley when she suggested a trip into town to get her hair permed. "I'll have to sit next to those people from the Council Estate".

Her two brothers were both married with children and as Lesley was a spinster of the parish, she was the obvious choice. Consequently, except for going to work in the local bank, Lesley had no social life and her boyfriend at the time, soon lost interest when he realised that 'Mother came too'.

Now ten years later and in her mid-40's, Lesley found herself on her own after Mildred died very suddenly from pancreatic cancer. As Lesley was the main beneficiary under Mildred's Will, she quickly put the bungalow up for sale. It had been snapped up and now she was moving into a cottage in a village just a few miles out of town. She'd changed the dated Ford Fiesta for a nippy bright pink Mini and today felt as if she was crossing a bridge from one life to a newer, brighter one, hopefully.

Lesley had fallen in love with Honeysuckle Cottage from the minute she arrived to meet the estate agent. She hadn't even stepped over the threshold, when she decided that this was IT. It had a real cottage garden wrapped around the house, honeysuckle (obviously) growing over the porch and a stream at the bottom of the garden with a bridge leading into a wood. It reminded her of The Enchanted Wood by Enid Blyton which had been one of her favourite books as a child. There was the sound of water gurgling over stones on the riverbed, the birds were singing in the trees and Lesley was almost sure that she saw a couple of squirrels playing chase up a tree trunk.

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“Is the bridge part of my property?” Lesley asked the estate agent.

“I think someone lives over the other side in the wood and it’s shared between the two properties,” he replied, but quickly moved onto another part of the garden and Lesley thought nothing more about it.

The removal men had driven off with all her furniture etc the day before and Lesley set off bright and early the next morning having spent the night with one of her brothers. When she’d seen Honeysuckle Cottage, the sun was shining and everything in the garden was beautiful. Today, however, the sky was heavy with rain and the garden looked wet and bedraggled. The grass was knee high, the rose bushes were overgrown, needed de-heading and there were no birds singing in the trees or squirrels playing tag.

The cottage smelt distinctly damp, there was no wood in the basket beside the fireplace, Lesley hadn’t got any matches anyway and when she flicked the switch on the Combi boiler – nothing happened. The removal men had put the beds up for her, but she couldn’t find the box with the bedding in that she’d so carefully labelled and didn’t have the energy to try and locate it. Consequently, after eating the now curled up sandwiches she bought with her and having a drink of milk out the bottle, as she couldn’t find the kitchen boxes either, she wrapped herself in an old blanket she kept in the car and fell into a fitful sleep on the sofa.

Tomorrow she’d go over the bridge and find out if someone did live on the other side, but at the moment the last thought in her mind was “I do wish I hadn’t ..... been so rash without finding out more about this cold, damp, uninviting house” and a tear slid down her cheek

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## I REALLY WISH I HADN'T – Sue Boyd

The next morning Lesley woke up freezing cold and aching all over. She was starving hungry and with nothing in the house but a bottle of half-drunk milk, she decided that first on her list was a visit to the local shop she'd passed as she drove through the village the day before.

The shop was crowded with people chattering away to each other, but they all turned to stare at her and stopped talking as if someone had turned down the sound on the television. Lesley could feel her cheeks burning so ducking her head down, she grabbed a wire basket and scurried down the nearest aisle. However, by the time she'd grabbed a few essentials and made her way to the till, they had all vanished except, of course, for the lady behind the counter, who must have been left with the task of finding out all about the new owner of Honeysuckle Cottage. Questions came out of her mouth like bullets out of a gun,

“Where do you come from dear?”

“On your own, are you?”

“Are you a gardener? Because if not our Fred will come and give you a hand. It's a lot of work for someone of your age.”

Lesley mumbled a few answers, but then became irritated by the woman and said

“I'll be fine, thank you very much. Could I just pay for these please?”

The smile disappeared from shopkeeper's face and she snapped back,

“Suit yourself, but just one piece of advice, don't go over the bridge. Mr Jenkins isn't exactly the sociable type. That's why the last owner of Honeysuckle Cottage left.”

As she drove off, Lesley suddenly had an uneasy feeling about what lay over the other side of that bridge. Surely if there was friction with her nearest neighbour, this should have been mentioned when she purchased her cottage. However,

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nothing had been said either by the estate agent or her solicitor, so perhaps it was just local gossip. Now even more than ever she wished she ‘really hadn’t’ purchased the damn cottage.

When she got back to Honeysuckle Cottage, she unpacked her shopping, found the boxes containing her kitchen utensils etc, put them away in the appropriate drawers and cupboards and then found her bed linen and made up her bed ready for that night. Grabbing herself a sandwich, she flung on an old fleece and wandered down the garden towards the bridge. When she viewed the property there were leaves on the trees and that was all Lesley could see over that bridge. Now, however, the branches were bare and she could see quite clearly what looked like a cross with a stone slab in front of it. Was that a grave? With her heart pounding in her ears, Lesley put one foot on the bridge, but it was slimy with leaf mould. Her feet skidded on the wet surface and the next moment she found herself sitting in freezing cold water.

“Goodness gracious, my dear woman, we must get you out of there quickly” roared a voice and looking up startled Lesley could see a gentleman in plus fours and wellington boots with a couple of golden retrievers, standing on the bank looking very worried.

“Have you broken anything?” Lesley blushed scarlet, more embarrassed than hurt and shook her head.

“No, I’m fine, thank you” and she tried to scramble to her feet, but her right ankle gave way and she ended back on her bottom.

“Don’t move” he shouted and scrambled down the bank closely followed by the dogs who thought it was some sort of game and splashed around in the water, making Lesley wetter than ever.

“Stop it Beano and Dandy” he shouted and unceremoniously hauled Lesley to her feet, putting her arm around his neck and supported her injured ankle as he helped her up the bank. He deposited her on a nearby tree trunk saying,

“Won’t be a minute we’ll soon get you out of those wet clothes” and he disappeared between trees, reappearing pushing a wheelbarrow. Lesley burst out

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**laughing and felt like a child again as the mysterious man wheeled her back to his house nestling in among the trees of The Enchanted Wood.**

**His name was Edward, the grave belonged to his favourite dog called Bouncer, his wife had died from cancer a few years ago and evidently the old woman who'd lived in Honeysuckle Cottage before Lesley, had been a right 'harridan' and caused him nothing but trouble. Lesley learnt all this in the space of about half an hour while he helped her into bathroom, gave her warm towels, bought her a dressing gown that had belonged to his wife and made her a cup of hot, sweet tea.**

**It was several hours later that Edward drove her home to Honeysuckle Cottage, having washed and tumble dried her clothes. They had chatted away like old friends and as Lesley waved goodbye to him from her doorstep, she thought to herself**

**"I'm really glad I did buy Honeysuckle Cottage".**



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## **Across the Bridge- June Liddy**

There in front of me was a bridge. Beyond it, in the distance, I could see a trickle of smoke rising in the mist. Habituation - my heart flipped. I willed my legs to move and shuffled towards the opening.

The last few days had been horrific and my health and mental capacity had diminished to such an extent that I was like a zombie on auto-pilot. I had been on my way to America as a pre-Christmas holiday and to meet my penfriend. However, well into the journey the aircraft developed a fault and after a short time we were advised to go into the brace position as the pilot calmly announced he was to crash land!

I remember an almighty bang, metallic scrapping and screeching as the plane hit the rock on top of the mountain and broke up. I was thrown out of the back of the plane and landed, luckily for me, on a bed of moss. Debris was strewn over a vast area. Bodies were all around me and I checked all just in case there was a glimmer of life. But alas, there was not, I was alone. How could it be that I was the only one that had survived? I shouted and searched all day until night fell. I managed to retrieve water and food and packed it in a backpack that I found. I also retrieved a blanket and slept by the plane reassured that a search party would soon arrive.

I had a fitful night. It was chilly and I heard strange noises. I trembled at distant growling not knowing what it was or even what country I was in. The nearby noises, I prayed were not from crawling, poisonous creatures and I kicked out my legs and brushed my head and shoulders with my arms frequently. At dawn I was woken by monkeys swarming on the aircraft debris. That was when I decided I would try to trek down the mountain to find a river to follow. Surely it would lead me to civilisation.

The descent down the mountain was painful and my legs and arms were scratched to pieces along with my clothes. How I could have done with a machete! Being terrified of spiders didn't help as with every-one I saw, my heart lurched a beat. The heat was rising and sweat on my forehead was dripping into my eyes. My water was fast disappearing.

I fell into a track mid-way down and decided to follow it to the right. However, after half an hour it began to rise and I cursed myself for not going the other way, which probably would have been downhill. I looked back and was sick to see a huge beige cat loping towards me. I guessed it was a Mountain Lion. I went with my instinct and ran

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like mad up the slope. Looking back I could see he was gaining on me. I could feel my heart pounding in my chest. Within minutes he was about six feet from me. I stopped running and started screaming at the top of my voice, 'Go away, go away, go away' I shouted. I bent down to pick up rocks and lobbed them towards him, one after another. He stopped, sat down and stared. I threw more, sobbing to myself that I didn't want to be eaten. In a frenzy I picked up stones in both hands and bowled them towards him and screamed. One hit him on his shoulder and he turned and skulked off back down the track. I ran like mad until I reached the top and collapsed in a heap, not noticing the bridge!

I drank the last of the water and shook the dregs onto my face. I then noticed the bridge. It was made of rope with wooden slats as the base, many of which were gone or broken. The hand rail was frayed and missing in a number of places. It looked extremely fragile. The bushes rustled behind me and I spotted a head peering out. A dilemma – fall to my death on the ancient bridge or be eaten alive by the Puma. I braved my first step and heard the disintegration of wood as my right foot fell through the slat. Retrieving it I spread my legs apart and managed to reach the ends of the slats which were slightly more robust and slowly shuffled my way along. Luckily I could reach the handrail which I desperately clung on to.

At half way there was no hand rail and I had to jump across a gap. The structure was shaking as much as I was but I bridged the gap and began to go quicker, willing the end to come closer. I was concentrating so much that I did not notice uniformed rescue men crowding around the end. They were shouting and gesticulating to me. I gathered they wanted me to stop. There was no way I was spending another minute on this contraption so I ignored them and continued regardless. There was such a commotion when I safely left the bridge and I wondered why a man kept pointing to where I had come from. I followed his finger and saw the biggest, fattest, longest snake I had ever seen in my life wrapped around and sliding along the hand rail. I must have passed my fingers along it without realising. I found out later that it was one of the most venomous snakes in South America.

I survived and had a most extraordinary tale to tell my penfriend and family but not one I would ever like to experience again.

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## I Really wish I hadn't – June Liddy

It was my shopping day and as Tesco was 12 miles away it usually took most of the day.

It was a fine sunny day so I put out Salt and Pepper (the guinea pigs) in their run along with their food and water. I also lifted in their house just in case it rained and was surprised to hear them squeak with delight. I then put on the wire roof and turned to get in the car and drive off.

Several hours later I returned home and unpacked the shopping.

It looked like rain so I went out into the garden to bring in the guinea pigs. I was very surprised to see only one in the run. Surely the other one hadn't escaped? I checked the wire and all was intact with no holes. I then looked furtively at next door. I knew the boys could be a bit naughty but surely they would not have gone in my garden and stolen one. Then I looked around for fur just in case the next door's cat or indeed dog had somehow got hold of the guinea pig and killed it, God forbid.

After scouting around for clues I resigned myself to removing the run and house to the garage for the night. I lifted the house and was absolutely horrified to see my poor guinea pig, swollen to twice the size having been squashed under the house. Did someone come into the garden and do this for a joke? The realisation that I had done it dawned on me and I felt the most profound sick regret. That is why the guinea pig squeaked that morning not through excitement but through being trapped under the house. How could I have done this horrendous deed? As the house had legs and an indentation underneath the guinea pig was still alive. I gently carried him in and phoned the emergency vet who advised me to not stress him any more by bringing him to her but to keep an eye on him.

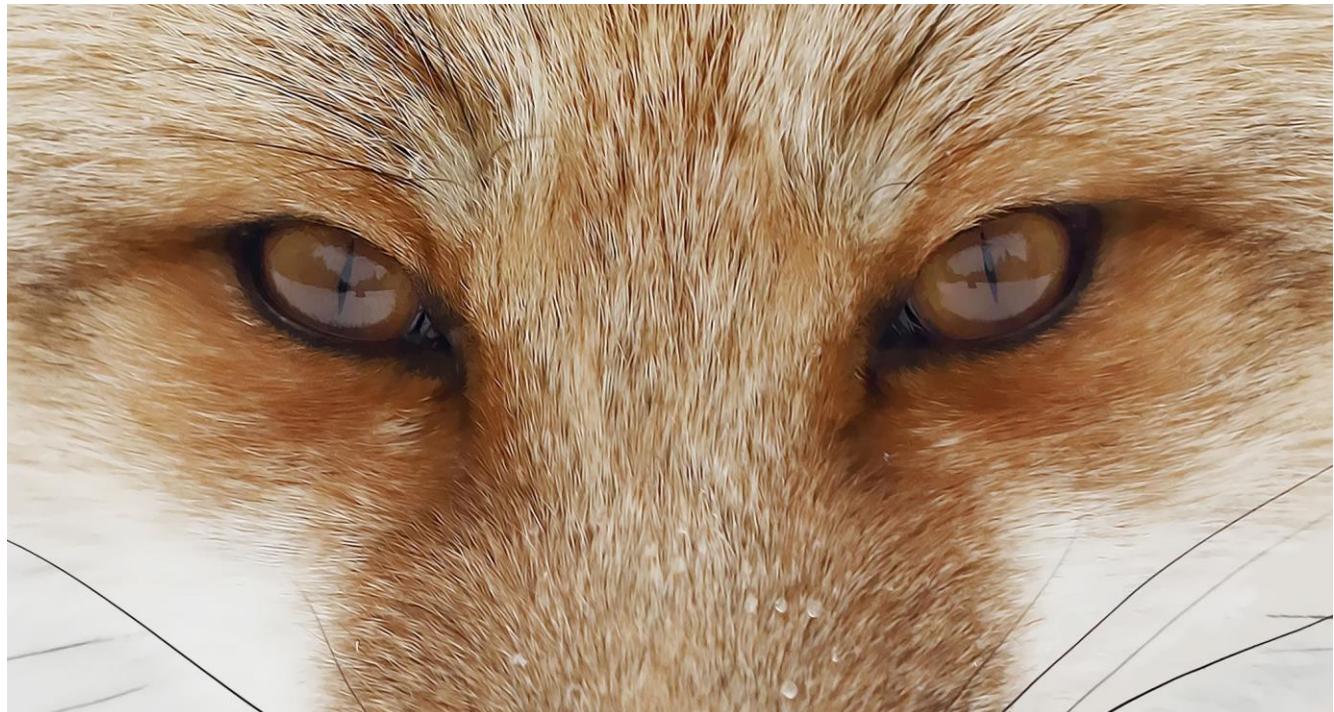
It was with great distress I informed my young son who came in for tea what had happened and that he perhaps should say goodbye to his pet just in case he would not survive. A little later that evening I noticed Pepper was nibbling a piece of hay which I thought was a good sign. I relayed this information to Tim crossing my fingers. We both said a prayer for Pepper and went to bed.

The next morning I ran down to the garage expecting the worst. What a relief to see Pepper back to his original size and eating and looking very perky. But I really wish I hadn't been so negligent as it is the worst feeling in the world and I was so lucky he

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survived and my guilt was slightly assuaged.

**DID SOMEBODY MENTION GUINEA PIGS?**



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### Crossing the Bridge – Wendy Pentling

The light was beginning to fade and Jenny drew her coat closer to her shivering body, not sure if she was cold or if her anxiousness was causing these feelings. She peered ahead expecting any moment to see the headlights of Tony's car as they had agreed to meet on the bridge at nine o' clock, when both of their families would be at Mass.

Jenny's parents would attend the village church, a small wooden construction just large enough for the local population to stand inside. Tony's family, however, would worship at the Saint. Magdalene cathedral in the city on the other side of the river.

Looking at her watch again she had an uneasy feeling. Where is he? Its nearly nine thirty. Surely, he wouldn't let her down after all they loved each other and had planned their elopement for months, keeping it secret from family and friends. Maybe his parents were late leaving for the service? Jenny moved to the more sheltered side of the bridge tucking the suitcase behind her, just in case someone came over.

They had met at the local hop, held in Farmer Williams' barn. A few city lads had driven over to partake of the free cider and food on offer and to see if any village girls were up for a good time.

Tony had approached Jenny at once and pulled her up from the straw bale where some of the local lasses were sitting, spinning her round on the makeshift dance floor. She loved him from that moment, but the news that she'd spent the evening with a city boy angered her dad. Too many young people were leaving the village to work or set up home on the other side of the waterway. The population was dwindling and the older age group were worried soon most of the young adults would have moved away. Jenny had, therefore, been forbidden to see Tony again.

"Plenty of nice boys here in the village" stated her Dad, "Farmer Williams has his three lads on the farm and Tom Brown the Smithy's son seems quite bright, you've had your head turned my girl. You're staying put".

Tony too had been made aware he was expected to finish university when he would join the family law firm and a liaison with a farm girl would impede his career.

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Tony sent messages via his cousin the postman who deposited the notes in an old milk churn, which had been discarded at the gate. Jenny would then meet him at the relevant time, usually after her shift at the bakery and they spent those fleetingly precious moments together, flooded with euphoria.

Continually checking her watch Jenny became more afraid he had chickened out and then to her relief, she could see a vehicle's headlights coming towards the bridge. A feeling of happiness swept over her then puzzlement. Why was Tony in a post van? The vehicle pulled up beside her.

"He's not coming" called out his cousin and passed an envelope to her before quickly reversing back over the bridge.

Jenny crouched down in the shadows, too panic stricken to move and the note slipped from her hands, the breeze carrying it into the trees.

"SO SORRY". Nothing more. She couldn't go home as her parents would have read her note by now and at eighteen years old, they knew she could leave if she so desired.

Several weeks later in the cemetery with rain pouring down upon them, Jenny's family laid her to rest. She had taken her own life unable to accept the shame of being rejected by Tony.

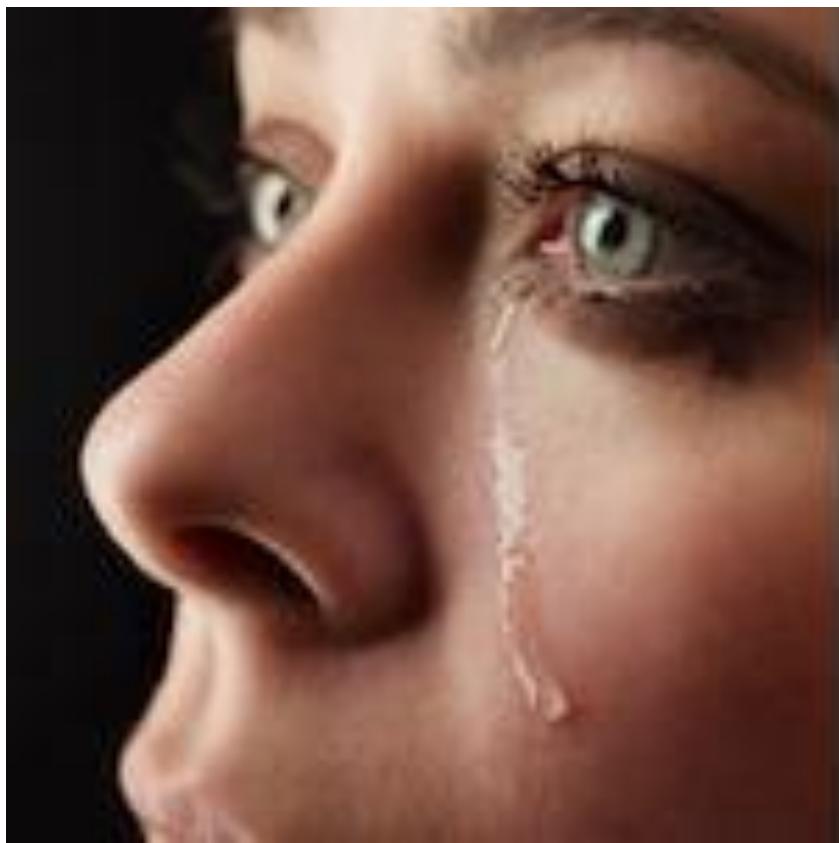
The headlines caught Tony's eye as his father tossed the local paper onto the table,

#### ANOTHER JUMPER OFF THE DAVENTRY BRIDGE

A young girl took her own life on Sunday .....

Then realization. Jenny!

"Oh, what have I done?"



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## I REALLY WISH I HADN'T - Sylvia Wiseman

"I really wish I hadn't" Henry drew a bejewelled hand across his forehead.. "I had to, she left me no choice"

It was a fateful day when he glimpsed the young woman going about her daily tasks as Matron of Honour to his wife Catherine. He could not take his eyes off her beauty and demure countenance and as the days passed he found he needed to be nearer to her. So obsessed was he with her allure it was not long before he dared to suggest she came to his chambers discreetly to service his requirements.

Knowing him to be a married man and she of virtuous nature she would not succumb to his advancements without the promise of marriage. But so desperate was he to have her he hastily made arrangements to dispose of Catherine and have her as his own.

Henry and Anne were married on the 14th November 1532 and it was not long before she bore him a daughter Elizabeth in September 1533. But after three further pregnancies each producing a still born baby, one of which being the longed-for son, Henry began to look for a substitute to cater for his needs for a son and heir and Anne became frustrated at the string of young women being entertained by her husband especially at his interest in Jane Seymour who had been a Matron of Honour to Queen Catherine.

Anne was a good-looking woman, men found her attractive and it was rumoured around the Court that she was having extra marital affairs, one of which was with a handsome musician in her Household named Mark Smeaton and another called Henry Norris. Accused of adultery and incest Henry ordered Anne to be sent to the Tower but the accusations could not be founded until she unguardedly spoke whilst there of conversations with these men. We cannot be sure whether they were just conversations or more but it was enough to convince Henry and more than he could tolerate and he quickly decided that she too would have to go, and so on the 19th May she was taken to the scaffold and suffered the most horrendous death still proclaiming her innocence

The gloomy winter was over at last; spring's new sunshine spread through the windows bringing relief, and optimism for the coming summer. But the sunshine also brought with it the sight of the streaky windows, dusty furniture, and dingy paintwork. *What?* Well, I didn't notice it until the sun came out.

So Spring Cleaning was the first item on the agenda. I made out a long list of "to do" jobs, and stared at it, my heart sinking. Did I really want to do all those tedious tasks? *No, I didn't.* Then I decided that I'd *decorate* the rooms instead. It would be fun to choose new colour schemes and furnishings, and the end result would be much more satisfying.

The bedroom was my starting place. I headed off to the DIY store, and after a long time perusing the colour brochures and samples, found a suitable wallpaper which would go with the white paint that I had in the shed. The wallpaper was pale, with attractive dark pink and blue flowers, and bright green, ivy leaves, so white would set the paper off nicely, I thought.

I visited a flooring supplier and, even though I was tempted by a *bright-yellow-with-orange-swirls* carpet, I picked out an oatmeal-coloured one, which would go with anything. The fitter agreed on a date to lay it, by which time the decorating should be finished.

Raring to go now, I cleared the smaller items out of the room. Then, with much puffing and panting, I dragged the larger furniture into a heap in the middle of the room and covered it with a huge dust sheet.

Then I started: I stripped off the old wallpaper, and hoovered and dusted, and sanded down, and washed and scrubbed, all in preparation for the new decoration. (Much like spring cleaning, I thought wryly.)

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At last it was time to move forward. I retrieved the paint from the shed and opened the lid. Oh, no! It was rock solid! With downcast feelings, I threw it out, and then made another trip to the DIY store.

Arriving home, I found that it was time for other chores, so the decorating would have to wait until the afternoon. Finally, suitably protected with overalls and Marigolds, and armed with a brand new paintbrush (I wasn't taking any chances with an old one in the shed) I set about the job. In fact, once I got down to it, I found I was quite enjoying the monotonous task.

Later, as I tidied up for the evening, I couldn't help feeling proud of my handiwork. The first coat seemed promising and I even looked forward to continuing with the task the next day. Bright and early, the following morning, I managed to add the gloss, and this really did look good – not just clean and bright, but shiny as well. I hoped it would dry quickly so that I could get on with the papering. And it did! Nice, gleaming, tough-looking smooth white paint! *Brilliant!*

So now I could get on with the papering, which I knew would be relatively quick; the pattern was easy to match up, and the walls were straight and even. And it was quick; in two days I had finished – and my goodness, *was I pleased with the result!*

The carpet fitters arrived on their due day, and, looking at the room, asked who I'd had in to do the decorating. I replied modestly that it was "someone I knew". They set to work and it wasn't long before the carpet was laid and the furniture back in its place. I bought new curtains and some ornaments to complete the look, and all through the summer I enjoyed the fresh, bright bedroom.

Then autumn came. Autumn, bringing darker evenings and cooler nights and, of course, the creepy crawlies that seemed to come from nowhere. One evening, going upstairs, I found a huge, black, hairy-scary spider on the carpet, staring up at me. Grabbing a glass tumbler and a piece of card, I managed to dispose of it through the bathroom window. The same thing happened a couple of nights later and both episodes quite unnerved me, but I told myself that I was being silly, and that spiders

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were quite harmless. (I placed the card and tumbler on the cupboard in the passage outside – *just in case.....*)

Then one night I went in and, strangely, had the feeling that I was not alone. I looked around but could see nothing. I started to undress, but suddenly noticed an *enormous* arachnid on the wall above the bed. Feeling vulnerable in my state of disrobing, I snatched up my glass and card and grabbed the monster and flung it out of the window. Then my knees gave way and I sat on the bed and looked around me. *The wallpaper! My beautiful wallpaper!* It was just an amazing camouflage for spiders! The dark blue flowers looked like a body, and the leaves, with their swirlly brown tendrils, easily passed for the horrible spiders' legs! Feeling slightly nauseous, I stared at the wallpaper and imagined I saw *hundreds* of spiders, all ogling at me and waiting to pounce.

Now, on these dark winter evenings, I creep into the room and stand in silence staring around, seeking out the inevitable monster among the flowers and greenery on the walls.

Oh dear! All my hard work and satisfaction - the lovely “new” room, the pretty wallpaper - now spoilt by my fear of spiders. Decorating? Why, oh why, did I choose such a spider-friendly wallpaper? *I really wish I hadn't!*

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**IF I HAD A CHOICE I'D A PREFER A SPIDER**



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## CROSSING THE BRIDGE – Shirley Thornhill

Putting it bluntly, Peter wasn't naturally sociable! This didn't appear to be by choice, it was just 'him'. Fortunately, he was only in his very early twenties when he met his bride to be, sweet, kind, younger and perfect for moulding into his ideal wife. This union gave him the power, shall we say control, he yearned for, however subconsciously. Children quickly arrived keeping the young mother busy at home and totally dependent on her husband who, perhaps unwittingly, was becoming an even bigger control freak.

Any money bequeathed to them came from Mary's family and went straight into their joint bank account although she had neither a cheque book nor credit card. He had total control, not that this appeared to bother the still very young and still besotted Mary,, who was ever loyal. His fathering skills weren't the best either and their sons left home at the first opportunity, married and had children, all the time drifting further away physically and emotionally. They could see what outsiders had witnessed for years and decided their lives wouldn't be ruined by 'that control freak'. This meant, much to Mary's sadness, she had very limited and ever diminishing contact with her sons and grand-children

In her early 50s Mary fell prey to cancer leaving Peter alone and still lacking basic social skills. He just couldn't communicate and, to make matters worse, the selection of Merry Widows dried up. None of them had any intention of being compliant, let alone controlled. So Peter felt the cruel draught of loneliness and had to make great, unnatural effort, to stay 'in the swim of things'. He also had a problem with money. That is to say, parting with it. Meanness isn't a characteristic ladies of any age find attractive, a detail he was oblivious to! Things were about to get even worse with the onset of Covid 19. Social restrictions came into force, families retreated to very tight knit permitted groups. Peter's sons had made their own lives which tended not to include their father and his sparse social contacts just vanished. He didn't have the ability to 'reach out' and people had never warmed to him anyway. He was alone both physically, mentally and, more important, emotionally. He was reaping the rewards of his attitude, lack of ability to relate to others, even his family. The 'phone didn't ring for hours, days, weeks, months. The isolation was intolerable.

Eventually he made a call only to hear the chatter of family life at the other end of the line. 'How nice to hear you. How are you' came the polite response. Peter tried desperately to make small talk but it wasn't long before he heard 'So sorry, I have to go, it's bedlam here'. Click, the line went dead leaving Peter feeling even more desolate. 'A walk, that's what I need, the fresh air will do me good' he thought to himself and donned his warm jacket. The park was full of couples and families. Peter smiled at them but they couldn't see, as he and they were wearing masks. It was all becoming unbearable.

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A few days passed and the 'phone remained silent, but at least the sun was shining and a walk seemed a good idea. This time perhaps somewhere 'more general' where he wouldn't feel such an odd ball. He made his way to the Taw Bridge, a structure he had always admired, and he gazed in wonderment at the sun glistening on the rippling water. The face of Mary, his now deceased wife, smiled back at him through the sun dappled water and he remembered his sons and grandchildren, the social events Mary had arranged during their long marriage and the faces of the people they had met along the way. Tears ran down his cheeks as he climbed the railings and jumped - he had crossed the final bridge.

May he now have the peace and generosity that eluded him in this life.

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THIS DOESN'T RELATE TO ANYTHING THAT'S GONE BEFORE BUT IS IN  
BECAUSE **ENGLAND WON!!!!!!**

