

EXTRACTS FROM
MY LITTLE BROTHER, MY LITTLE LIFE

But today. Today was different. Mainly because Douglas was at home. He'd never been left alone without Mum before. He was sitting on his bed with his legs crossed, the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle in front of him. He smiled at me when I went into his room. "Fifty pieces."

Something was wrong. "Where's Mum?"

"Fifty pieces."

"Yes, Douggie, but where's Mum?"

"Fifty pieces."

It was no good. As Mum put it, he wasn't "right in the head". So I just said "Good boy" and went on a hunt for food.

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"Dad gone to see Jesus and the Angels." The acceptance was almost scary.

"Yes, Douggie."

"How many millions of light years away?"

"Too many to count."

"Will he be a skeleton?"

"Not if he's with Jesus."

"Will he be dust?"

"Not if he's with Jesus."

"When will Douggie go to see Jesus?"

“No one knows.”

“Is it a big mystery?”

“Yes.” I could taste the salt of my tears as they reached my mouth, but Douggie didn’t notice.

“A big mystery.”

“Guess a date. Go on. Guess.”

“Guess? 2032.”

“2032. Douggie will be eighty.”

“Yes.”

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First, Douggie and I had a bracing walk on the pier. He liked walking when it was windy, as it was today. The downside was that he asked “How many miles per hour is it now?” - the wind, that is - every few minutes. The wind was of far more interest to him than looking at the view over to Kent, the fishermen, the boats, the surf board enthusiasts, the sparkle of the sea when the sun came out. What excited him most of all was the fact that it seemed to get windier the further out you walked from the shoreline. I would rather have been spending time in the Pier Museum, but Douggie had never been that interested in the past. Perhaps someone would build a Museum of the Future one day.

We got back in time for tea and cakes in the communal lounge area. Only a few of the residents were around, and one of them, a blonde girl with very thick glasses, came over to me. “You don’t live here.” The tone was aggressive.

“No. I’m visiting Douggie. I’m his sister.”

“Douggie,” she yelled across to him. “You didn’t tell me you had a sister.” She smiled at me, sweetly now, and pumped my hand. “I’m Vanessa. I’m twenty nine. My Mum is coming to see me next ... month.”

“Pleased to meet you, Vanessa. And I’m pleased to hear about your mum.”

“Who told you about my mum?” Aggressive again.

Before I could answer, she pumped my hand again. “My name’s Vanessa. I’ll be thirty soon.”