



## Missing George

Rachel was irritated. She had not been very attentive throughout the whole service, but that was not entirely unusual. She was not sitting with the choir this morning. 'A sore throat' she had whispered to Marion at the organ. Marion had nodded without looking away from her music, so as not to betray her suspicion that a sore throat was rather convenient after Thursday's choir practice and that difference of opinion about this morning's anthem. However, that was only incidental to the main object of her irritation. She was sitting in her family pew for the first time for quite a while and from there she had a full view of the offending window. It had been her pew from her earliest days in the church, although she would often be heard to comment that in her day children were not brought to church until they knew how to behave and keep quiet. There were changes in church and Rachel was convinced they were not for the better. Church was not the same. Her great grandfather wouldn't recognise it. He had been one of the founding elders and the family had had this pew ever since. The window was in his memory. That's why it was so important to her. But try to get the minister to see that! Rachel's father certainly would have had something to say about it.

Many in the congregation were familiar with her outspoken views: 'This new minister bull-doses his way through everything with no thought for the older members,' she complained. 'It's everything for the young ones. He doesn't appreciate that it's our generation keep the place going.' She would then go through a long list of things which had not met with her approval since the minister arrived. The new song books full of those awful choruses which the organ can't play; the children roaming around in the services; and now talk of taking out some of the back pews. It was clear to her that it was all part of a general decline in church life. Her generation used to dress properly for worship, now these young ones came in all sorts of casual wear;... and the cleaning! 'That Mrs. Sims hasn't the pride in the church that mother had.' She would speak to her about the cobwebs under the bookshelf. And the window! That was the last straw! It was still missing. The minister said they were having to get a grant for it. A grant! Rachel's grandfather gave that window, 'and when I think of all my family have given over the years !'

She forced herself to look again at the plain sheet of glass, and that grotesque hospice building outside, that was now clearly visible through it. Rachel had vehemently opposed the selling of land so close to the church. The plain glass was temporarily filling the space taken by Granddad's memorial window. To Rachel it was beautiful. A stained glass picture of St George with his sword raised above a cowering dragon. She determined once again she would go on making a fuss until that window was restored. But now as she looked, the plain window was almost blinding her. A beam of light had broken through the white robed figure of Jesus at his transfiguration, in the window behind the choir, and shone direct on the St George window. Rachel fumed. She had only witnessed it a few times before. When the sun was in that position, the light would turn St George's cloak blood red. Now she was angry, and when Bob Andrews behind her gave one of his long loud sniffs, she turned a thunderous glower on him.

Fortunately, Bob did not notice. He was watching the same beam of light. It seemed to him to flow from the radiant figure of Jesus right through the clear window pane. It meant something to him that he couldn't put into words. Bob had never been very good with words. His hands were his gifts. He used them well with wood and with growing things. Throughout his life he had been one of the gentle, humble people who are content to just get on with living. He never thought of someone like Rachel being his equal, nor did it greatly concern him that she lived in another world. Bob was happy with what life had given him. It was only in the last year he had taken to church again. He had stopped attending services regularly when he realised how his faith in God and commitment to Jesus didn't seem to fit with all he read about in the church magazine. Now, however, the prayers and the music on Sunday were comforting. It all topped up his sense of God being with him, especially since Rita had gone.

Bob's gaze followed the beam of light, although it was almost too bright for his eyes. He thought how good it was to have that clear glass now. He hoped it would be a while before it was replaced. He'd never liked it much. He used to say to Rita that he wished St George would get on with the job and kill that dragon, because the poor maiden on the rocks must be tired of waiting to be set free. He followed the light beam from Jesus across the church. It seemed to pass straight through the window and reach out to the hospice. He had not been in since Rita died there. Perhaps it was time now to go back. They said they would be pleased for him to visit. Maybe he could help in the garden. There would still be people there who remembered him.....

After the service Bob thought he would like to tell the minister how he felt. He waited a while and spoke briefly to one or two others of the congregation, but even then Rachel was still engrossed in an animated one-sided conversation with the minister. Bob slipped past un-noticed and heard the distinctive voice say, 'I'm still missing St. George.'