

Somewhere Only We Know

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The Long and Winding Road

Caroline's eyes glanced up into the rear view mirror. The outline of the Tyne Bridge could clearly be seen, the lamps lighting it making it appear to be on fire on the wet, dismal October night. Caroline took a peep at the digital clock on the dashboard, it was just turned midnight. Another look in her mirror showed the shadow of the bridge fading into the background. 'Ironic', thought Caroline, 'the Bridge looking like it is burning, that's what I am doing, burning my bridges, well and truly burning them'. This was no flight of fancy, this was the culmination of the past 6 years. This was the only road open to her now, a road she was travelling alone. Everyone she loved was on the other side of that bridge.

The Satnav illuminated the car interior. She had 275 miles to go, 275 miles until she was able to breathe. 275 miles would take about 5 hours, 5 hours to do nothing but drive and think. Think about what she had done and the consequences of her actions.

The rain continued to fall and the windscreen wipers beat out a steady rhythm, tonight was not a night for music; that would be too much. Caroline knew that one familiar song, and that's all it would take, one song that reminded her of him and she would be done for. She would turn the car around and head back home and shit with the consequences. No, it would be safer to let the sound of the wipers and the engine soothe her.

The sign for A1 South came into view. Caroline hit her indicator and merged onto the slip road. Her breathe caught in her throat and her eyes suddenly stung with tears. 'This is it' she thought to herself. This was the start of the rest of her life, a life she was choosing to live on her own because she couldn't bare living her life the way it was. 'I could have done it if no one knew, but not now it is out in the open, I'm just not brave enough to do it by myself. I could have done it if he was with me, but that isn't going to happen, not now'.

273 miles to go. Caroline continued into the darkness. The night stretched ahead. 265 miles to go. A little bungalow at the end of her journey, hastily rented over the internet, cheap because it was out of season and the seaside town she had picked would be virtually closed down. A place Caroline had never been to before, a place where she had no job or family; no friends. For the first time in her 46 years she was going to be quite alone.

A new beginning? Maybe! Running away? Definitely! All this because she had fallen in love. She hadn't just fell in love with any old bod though, she had fallen in love with her son's best friend and he had fell in love with her. Or so she thought. Her chest tightened in the too familiar feeling that a panic attack was coming on. 'Oh God, what have I done?' Caroline said to herself. A long time ago she fell in love, it was all secrets and lies, but he was a temptation too hard to resist. But that temptation had led her to where she was now, her car full of her belongings. That wasn't much to show for her 46 years, but her real legacy was distancing itself by the minute. Shock, betrayal and the lies and secrets recently revealed of the double life she had been leading for the past few years.

The services at Scotch Corner were appearing in the distance. The Satnav showed 233 miles to go. Caroline slowed the car and hit the exit into the services. A cup of coffee and a cigarette was needed. As she pulled into the car parking space a thought ran through Caroline's head. 'What if I had turned a different corner? Would I still be a divorced mother of 3 grown up children, a new granny, a good daughter and a reliable friend?'

Throwing her handbag over her shoulder, Caroline made for the loo. 'If ifs and ands were pots and pans?' she said to herself - funny that old saying had never made much sense. 'Maybe there is more to it!' Well she would have plenty of time on her hands when she got to Helmsby to find the answer to that one out! And if that was all she had to worry about then life beside the sea would be plain sailing. She almost smiled, almost but not quite. 233 miles to go.

I Drove All Night

The lighting in the toilets was harsh. Caroline looked at her reflection in the mirror while she washed her hands. Was that her own face staring back at her? Or did the people who ran the services use some sort of trick lighting to make people look tired so they would stop off and rest, paying over the top prices for coffee and sandwiches in the hope that it might revive them to their normal looking self before continuing on their journey. She liked the thought of lighting trickery but knew in her heart that it was her own reflection staring back at her. The dark ringed eyes, the white face, the unkept long hair which was long overdue a cut. 'In what world could she ever have competed?' she thought to herself.

'What was it Ben used to call her, a MILF - a mother I would like to fuck? Well babes I don't think you would find me very tempting now if you could see me', Caroline thought. She didn't feel sexy, she didn't feel anything; maybe middle aged which theoretically she was. She was a grandmother for God's Sake. The woman staring back at her didn't have what Caroline had always had - a spark! The eyes; usually blue and vibrant were dull and lacked lustre, in fact her whole persona looked dull. The spark was out.

The need for a caffeine injection shook her out of her thinking, so she made her way into the swanky Costa Coffee area. For 1.00am there were quite a few people in, well maybe 5 or 6, but still for that time in the morning!! 'Was everyone running away?' She thought to herself as she waited at the counter for the waitress; who was cleaning at some stubborn stain, to notice her.

She ordered a latte and a chocolate muffin. The woman smiled broadly at her as she served her. Maybe this happened all of the time, thought Caroline. Women turned up and ordered latte and muffins at stupid o'clock in the morning, whilst on the run from their previous lives. Or maybe the waitress just wasn't interested, she just served her beverages, smiled sweetly at the customers and collected her wage at the end of the month, which probably wasn't enough for working the God awful shift she was on now.

Caroline took her overpriced latte and muffin to a table next to the window.

There wasn't any view out of the window, it was still dark and the rain continued to lash down, but the lights from the vehicles travelling on the A1 sparkled and it was a comfort to know that even though her life seemed to have ground to a halt, the rest of the world continued as normal.

The chocolate muffin was dry, perhaps it had been sitting on the counter all day. It broke and dropped crumbs all over her jumper and jeans. The latte was too hot, but the smell of it was lovely. With a jolt he was back in her head again. For fuck's sake will he never go away? That's what he used to say, she always smelt of coffee. Most women are told they smell of perfume and flowers, but her smell was coffee, coffee and sex. He loved the smell of her when she smelt of coffee and he loved the smell of her when she smelt of sex.

The young couple on the next table had their heads together laughing at something on a mobile phone. They reminded her of the kids and a pain shot across her heart. 'I hope they understand' she thought, 'I hope that they can forgive me for what I have done now that I have left them!'

She dug into her handbag and pulled out her own mobile phone. She had knocked it onto silent when she left, not wanting to be distracted whilst she was driving. But there were no missed call, no messages, just a picture of her beautiful Ava smiling at her. Ava, her granddaughter, so small at the minute, 'will she ever know me?' The tears that had threatened to fall earlier were back, stinging behind her eyes. She took a gulp of her latte, still too hot, but the burn distracted her and another potential meltdown passed.

The muffin was tasteless, but Caroline continued to nibble away at it. She needed something in her belly, there were still 233 miles to go. Not that she would keel over from starvation mind, she was a comfort eater, so the previous weeks of stress had laid lbs on her, she felt like a whale - 'all these weeks I have been preparing my body for a long and lonely winter, no wonder these jeans are nipping!'

A long and lonely winter!!! Well she had been lonely for a long time, maybe lonely wasn't the right word, maybe just alone. In fact alone was probably the perfect word, she had always been alone, even in the midst of her family. Or a

loner!! That was a far more appropriate word to use to describe her, she needed and loved her family more than anything, but no one really knew her, especially these past few years. She changed personas like most people change their socks, being a mother, being a daughter, being a friend, taking on each role with total commitment. Then there was the time she was with him.

Then what was it she became? A Mrs Robinson in the beginning, then towards the end more Norman Bates, a psycho!! Paranoid, jealous, insecure. And all the while being the same as ever as a mother, a daughter and a friend.

It was no wonder people were shocked - the majority of them didn't have a clue. Sasha and Scarlett, her bestest friends, well of course they knew! They were the ones that help pick up the pieces when it had all got too much a year ago. When a bottle of wine and a boat load of tablets seemed like a far better option than living a life without Ben. They were the ones that picked her up and made her see what she had and not what she was missing. They were the ones that were there for her when all hell broke loose less than a month ago and they would be the ones that would watch over her family whilst she abandoned them to live 300 miles away. 'I'm maybe taking the cowards way out this time but I'm certainly taking the next best option in running', Caroline thought to herself.

Surprise Surprise

Caroline sipped on her latte and despite trying her very best to concentrate on a leaflet offering discounted AA Roadside Recovery, her mind started to wander. Doubts about who she was and what she had become began to form in her mind. ‘Was there something amiss in my personality? Do I not have the gene that gives us morals? Is it something in my upbringing or in my choice of male partners that so obviously causes them to be doomed from the outset? What has made me become the blatantly selfish liar that I have become? Or is it simply falling in love with forbidden fruit and not having the will power to stop it?’ The thoughts buzzed around and around in her head.

She gave into the buzzing and let her thoughts race away. ‘If I’m going to crucify myself I may as well start at the very beginning and make a proper job of it!’

The sound of Cilla Black’s voiced boomed over the buzzing. ‘Da da - da da - da da da da da da da (What the hell Blind Date!)

‘Right contestant number one - what’s your name and where do you come from?’

‘My name is Caroline and I’m from Newcastle!’

‘Question number one for contestant number one’ went on Cilla. ‘Tell us about your childhood chuck!!’

Caroline shook her head. ‘I am seriously losing the plot here mind’, she said to herself. ‘Well Cilla, here goes!!’

I’m the only child of Margaret and Bill Burton. Born in the mid-sixties to Margaret, my real dad was already married when my mam met him, hence the blank name on my birth certificate. For the first five years of my life I lived with my mam at my Granny and Granddad’s small semi-detached council house, along with two aunties and two uncles.

Even at a young age I knew I was a bit different so to speak. I wasn’t really sure who my mam was. Margaret went out to work, she was very glamorous and though she was loving, I can’t remember her being very maternal. My Granny on the other hand showered me in love. There are photographs of me and her when I was little and even in the old black and white snaps, you can see our adoration for each other.

My Granddad was a different kettle of fish, he wasn't nasty to me or anything, but I got the feeling that I was a disappointment. He was old school, a pitman and a drinker, looking back I could see that what my mam had done by having me the wrong side of the blanket, would have been quite the scandal in the 1960's, especially in the little pit village we called home. Kinsley, where everyone knew everyone else's business. Funny this is that even today I am known as Margaret Hunter's daughter, which is ironic as most of today's children are born to unmarried mothers.

But my early years were happy amid the jumble of my family life. I think that I was a bit spoiled by all of the family. They made a fuss of me and spent time doing things that were fun, so it wasn't until I started at Infant School that I realised what was missing from my life - a dad.

On reflection I think that is when I learned to tell lies. Playmates would ask 'what does your dad do? Why doesn't your dad ever pick you up?' So I lied, 'my dad is in the Army!' I chirped.

What the hell! How could I tell a whopper like that at 4 years old? But I stuck to my story, though even with an imaginary dad, I was always on the outside looking in, never quite in with the popular kids, just waiting on the edge for someone to invite me in. Maybe that is where the rot had set, the tall gangly girl whose dad never materialised. So I started to live in an insular world, a world full of secrets and lies. A world which was blown out of the cosmos when Margaret announced she was getting married, but not only that, she and my new dad were moving 25 miles away from our village to a new town called Washington. It wasn't just them moving to Washington, they were taking me with them!

So at the tender age of 5 years old, I was wrenched from the only family home I had ever know, from the love of my Granny and my Aunts to live in a house with a mam I barely knew and a step dad I hadn't even met. Well that wasn't strictly true. I remembered an incident that happened not long before, while I was out shopping in Newcastle with my mam. We were in a big department store when out of the blue my mam pushed me into a rail of clothes and told me to stay still and not say anything. For the next few minutes I did as I was told, but the curiosity got the better of me and I peeped through the rail of coats. My mam was talking and giggling with a man. When,

after what seemed like a lifetime, she pulled me out, she was for some reason in a really good mood. She was in such a good mood she took me to Mark Tony's for a huge ice cream. If that had been my new step dad, he certainly didn't know anything about me when he first started courting my mam.

But Margaret married Bill and we moved to our brand new house in Washington New Town. My heart was broken. I missed my Granny so much. The damage done to both of us by the separation would affect us both for years to come. But my mam was my mam and at the end of the day she had the final say. I was going with them and that was that.

My biggest memory of that time was when I started my new school. It was a new build and for some reason my records from Kinsley Infant School hadn't arrived when I did for my first day of school. I was very tall for my age and painfully shy, how it happened I have no recollection, but instead of being put in a class with my age group, I was put into a class full of 10 and 11 year olds. And there I stayed, though I have no idea how long I was there. I remember going home and crying, but I think my mam thought I was crying for my Granny, which I was because she would never have let that happen to me in a million years, she would have known in an instant that something was wrong. I didn't make friends and I certainly couldn't do the work. Maybe my teacher thought I was a thick country girl, because she didn't notice anything either.

At the same time as this was going on I became a 'latch key kid'. my new dad didn't get in from work until an hour after I finished school, so I was given my own front door key which was attached to a piece of wool and placed around my neck. That hour alone in the new house was the most terrifying thing of all. I had never had to spend any time on my own before, I had never even had my own bedroom at my Granny's house, but here I was every Monday to Thursday left on my own in a new house that made lots of strange noises.

For those first few months of living in Washington, my life was a nightmare. School, home, new dad, missing my Granny and even having to get to know my mam. Every aspect was scary. I had no friends, which in a brand new school full of brand new pupils should have been the easiest thing of all to do. But my classmates thought I was babyish and cried to easy, which was not surprising really, I was half their age.

It wasn't as if my mam and dad weren't nice to me, they were lovely. I had a great bedroom and a playroom stuffed with loads of toys for me to play with, but for me it was the loneliest time of my life. The high spot of each week was when we went to my Granny's on a Sunday, but even in her comforting arms I didn't open my mouth about what was happening at school. It took something much more humiliating to happen to me for that to be brought out into the open.

Our permanent teacher arrived in the shape of Miss Johnson. She was a force to be reckoned with and handed out test papers for us to learn the moment she arrived on the Monday morning. Tables and spellings. I copied them and copied them all week in preparation for our test on Friday morning, but none of it made any sense, I was barely 6 years old. Every morning that week I woke up to find myself soaking in my own wee. Still I said nothing to my mam and dad. Friday morning came and Miss Johnson began shouting out the words she had given to us asking us to write them on the paper, spelling them correctly. I was clueless. I was terrified. I wet myself. I can still see the yellow water trickling around my chair. The class went into an uproar and Miss Johnson marched over and grabbed me by the arm and dragged me out of the classroom. I became hysterical and it took a slap across my wet legs for me to be able to breathe properly again.

My mam was summoned to the school. She was mortified at the state I was in and I can remember her shouting 'she is only a little girl, how did she get into this state?' As Miss Johnson began to explain, I can remember my mam say 'why on earth would a 6 year old be tested under these conditions?' And then it was out. The school in their wisdom had let me sit in a class with children 5 years older than me and no one had noticed.

The following Monday morning I was placed in with my right class, but everyone knew I had wet myself and I could hear all my classmates laughing and whispering about me. The wetting myself incident would follow me for the rest of my days in Washington.

I was on the outside looking in again. All the time I was in the wrong class, my real classmates had forged friendships. I was once again a loner, someone who made up stories to get their classmates attention. Not that they wanted to be my friend anyway, but that was my life for the next few years. One big lie after another, until in the end

even if I was telling the truth no one believed me. A release came when once again we were on the move, another brand new house 10 miles away. But this time, at 10 years old I was prepared and ready for it.

Swing Low Sweet Chariot

The new house turned out to be lovely, it had a nice garden and it was in a cul-de-sac so it was very private. My mam and dad seemed very proud of the fact that they were buying it, a first in our family, and they both worked very hard to make sure the house always looked its best.

I started my new school. I was in the last year of the Junior School and I started the way I meant to go on. This was a new me, confident and popular, I was going to act my socks off. At 11 years old I looked like a 14 year old. My body was fully developed and I used it to ingrain myself into my new class. A twang of my bra was never off limits to the lads and I had been known to show them my knickers if the mood took me. As young as I was I was very aware of sex, this was mainly thanks to Margaret and Bill; as I liked to call them if I ever thought of them and their sex life, and their night-time activities.

Margaret and Bill; the old dogs. Well I suppose they weren't that old really, but to me they were ancient. Anyway, I can remember clearly the first night I 'heard them'. It must have been the week of my tests at school and I had woken myself up in my wet bed. I remember as I lay there in the dark I could hear yelping noises coming from my mam and dad's room. I lay and listened with excitement, it was around my birthday time and I thought that God had heard my prayers and I was getting a puppy.

All of the next day at school I could hardly contain myself, I got in from school and went straight to my mam and dad's bedroom. I searched everywhere but there was no sign of a puppy. What I did find stashed under their bed were lots and lots of magazines and a few strange looking toys. I sat on the floor beside the bed and opened one of the magazines. It was full of naked women in all sorts of poses, and in some of the pictures there was naked men too. The men all had huge willies, much bigger than the boys at school whose willies I had seen when they peed against the school fence. As young as I was I was fascinated and can remember having a warm feeling in my tummy. I put everything back in its place, even the odd toys and crept out of the bedroom. Over the following years I would often have a rummage under my mam and dad's bed, the noises in the night continued but the puppy never materialised.

But it was after we moved to Wrekenton that my curiosity about sex was given a real

schooling. Life was settled and we were happy in our new home. I made friends and spent weekends and school holidays with my Grandparents. My mam and dad became keen members of our local Parish Church, they attended Sunday morning services and were often out at Church functions.

It was an unexpected stay at home one weekend that gave me a peep at what my mam and dad got up to when I wasn't around. Like I said most weekends I went to Kinsley, but I had developed a temperature at school one Friday afternoon and it was decided that I would just stay at home that weekend. I stayed in my room dozing on and off for most of Friday night and all of the Saturday, but a trip down into the kitchen on the Saturday teatime seemed to throw my mam and dad into a frenzy of whispering.

My mam fussed around me asking me how I was feeling and did I need anything? When I said I was feeling a lot better, she came up to me and felt my head. 'You are burning up!' she said. Funny, I was feeling quite cool, but as she rushed to the medicine drawer I got myself a glass of water and took the two small white tablets she handed to me. I took myself back to bed and for the next few hours slept like a baby.

It was dark when I woke, but I could hear the sound of laughter coming from downstairs. 'My mam and dad must have some friends in!' I thought to myself as I swung my legs out of bed. 'There might be something to eat!' At that moment I was starving.

I pulled on my dressing gown and opened the bedroom door, but something stopped me in my tracks. I could hear noises, but it wasn't so much laughter, it was more like the puppy noise!!! We had an open plan staircase as so many houses that were built in the 70's had, so I crept to the top of the stairs and listened. Yes, it was definitely the sound of puppies and some pigs too by the sound of it. Slowly I edged my way forward, inch by inch, until I was about 4 stairs down the staircase. I bent my head and peeped through the lattes. The sight I saw would remain with me for the rest of my life.

In our living room, and I mean our 'family living room' were two couples who I knew my mam and dad were friendly with at church. One of the couples was the deputy church warden and his wife, who incidentally ran the youth club, the other couple were the church organist and her dour husband, well I always thought he was a sour face, he wasn't so sour faced now, as well as my mam and dad.

What the six of them were doing beggars belief. Firstly, they didn't have a stitch of clothes on between them. The organist had my dad's organ in her mouth, while the youth club leader was licking away between her legs. My mam was taking it doggy style from the deputy

Church warden, whilst the sour faced man was doing something with his hand to the youth club leader. I was mortified and fascinated all at the same time. They were all oblivious to my presence, no wonder my mam and dad sent me away every weekend if this is what happened. I sat there for as long as I could, until the moaning and yelping became too much and I slipped back into my bedroom.

I lay in my bed listening until the puppy noises changed to laughter and I could hear people using the loo and the clinking of glasses.

Eventually I heard the front door closing and the sound of my mam and dad tidying up downstairs. I continued to lie in my bed long after I heard my mam and dad go to bed and I still lay after the house was silent. It wasn't just because I was shocked by what I had seen, I had seen the magazines under the bed many a time, but the reason I couldn't get to sleep was that I was turned on. The sight of the riving bodies, even in their middle aged state had turned me on. Sleep finally came, but only after I tentatively put my hand down my pyjamas bottoms and rubbed at the little nub until my young body had convulsed in pleasure. I had found a new favourite hobby.

Young Girl

Not long after I started senior school, something remarkable happened. I got my first ever best friend. I now had school friends but even with my new found confidence in myself, I still struggled fitting in, especially with the girls, the boys were easier, I think they looked at my developing body and thought it was worth me tagging along with them on the off chance I might let them cop a grope. Obviously the girls saw this as a threat and so I was never quite 'in with them', I was never invited to their girly get togethers outside of school.

But then there was Jenny and any hurt and rejection that I had endured faded into the background, Jenny was my guardian angel and my devil's advocate rolled into one.

Jenny lived in my street. I had seen her plenty of times as I made my way forwards and backwards to school. Her house was three doors away from ours, but where our house was a suburban 3 bedroom semi, her house was a huge 5 bedroom detached with a double garage and smart grassed lawns all around. I can remember her lawns vividly, one morning I walked passed her house to school and there has only been mud and rubbish in the gardens and on my return there was no sign of the mud and rubbish, just beautiful lush green lawns. I found this fascinating, my poor dad had been trying to grow a lawn in our back garden for months using lawn seed, but to that point it was still sparse and pathetic. My dad had tried everything to keep the birds off it but even with his attempts at pretending he was a scarecrow, the lawn remained feeble.

So I always took an interest in the 5 bed roomed detached house down the street. Jenny lived in the house with her older sister and her granddad, or so I thought. One day as I was wandering passed I happened to glance into the open garage and was shocked to see Jenny's sister kissing her granddad, not a friendly peck on the cheek like I gave my granddad, this was a full on snog. I couldn't get into my house quick enough, I started getting the tea ready, all the while wondering what the hell was happening at Willow House. My family was dysfunctional enough, I mean I could be on my death bed and there was no way I would spend a weekend at our house. After the initial shock of the 'swingers party' with the good people of the Church, I put the thought of it out of my head, no way was I ever going to let on to my parents about what I had seen that night.

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