

Kate, My Bottom Draw Heroine



By Raymond Howell

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Authors Note

This short story is in the first voice and follows the narrators boyhood memories of a first love and how the memory follows him into adulthood.

But will the memories remain as memories, or might the ghosts evolve and take on flesh...

Section One

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**G**hostly memories of my childhood summer holidays visit often. But not as poltergeists. Well, mostly not. They are like trusted companions whose company I welcome and enjoy. It is happily confessed too that the child within the adult is not ashamed to embrace their once younger self. He with the runny nose, unbrushed hair who dressed deliberately in a way certain to embarrass the parents. How can I ever be ashamed of that? Besides, the adult me would not be here today without him. To a significant degree, neither would I be here in my present position if it were not for a special someone whose spell that younger self willingly and gladly fell under. Or as I recall those times with a smile, willingly threw himself under...

So, as for those memories.

Some of the holidays were good, while frankly, some were bad, although that was mainly due to the weather. While yes, a few I seemed to have passed through in a somewhat anaesthetised state because I simply cannot remember them.

From this happy and safer distance, smiles arise freely at the tortuous embarrassment I suffered as a young boy caused by the malevolent knitted trunks the parents forced upon me. Wickedly, every time I entered the sea they sagged horribly which raised peals of ridiculing laughter from any who noticed, which at the time felt like the whole of the UK. I suspect it even made God giggle because it was a few years before I was able to purloin a decent pair from the school's gym supplies cupboard.

There are fond smiles too, although not noticeable at the time, for the ice creams I dropped on the sand and the tantrums that followed. And the horrible crunch of sandwiches covered in windblown grit and my dad laughing, “Well son, what do you expect! They’re not called sandwiches for nothing!”

Yeah, right Dad, thanks!

There is a certain distant fondness too for the bully who insisted year in and year out on flattening my sand castles, but only because it allows the luxury of wondering now, did the buggler grow up and become a planning official? Or a Politician! Or might his name be Boris? But whatever his name, back then he was a mindless plonker, or so my dear dad muttered. But quietly, lest our moral barometer, otherwise known as mother, overheard and turned his ‘compliment’ back on him. She was good at that. Her tongue normally kind and friendly could become fearfully sharp when her need to get at one of us whetted its edge.

At each day’s end, having endured such mindless things along with endless hours of over-stretched boredom that was so tortuous that adding *tedious* into the description would have been a day’s highlight, in an odd mix of happiness, tiredness, or for my part, sheer relief to be doing something different - if only briefly - we wandered, or in my parent’s case after a tea in the pub, wobbled back to the lodgings. That was pretty much how each day went. Other than the odd dramatic encounter with one or other of our various stern and strict landladies. One, in particular, comes readily to mind, simply because her ghastly spectre has never truly left it.

She would hide like a sniper and scour the night for our return and once we wandered into her sights she would let loose a hellish tongue-lashing for traipsing sand into the B and B. As a boy I found her attitude bewildering. We were in a coastal town famed for its beaches. So, what else could we

bring back with us? To my boyish way of seeing the world, she should have been glad that our feet and clothing cared enough to bring in the sand and save her a trip to the beach! But oh no! Not her!

To avoid her further wrath we also learnt quickly not to bring fish and chips back to the lodgings, especially when me dad was over-heavy with the vinegar. That little treat of ours really set her tongue wagging, although noticeably not in tune with her teeth.

Reaching her full indignant spluttering phrase those plastic edifices, as if wanting to distance themselves from her view, would shift in the opposite direction to her fast-moving lips. How could sniggers not arise? On one occasion as she was reaching her voluble peak they escaped. Deftly mid-air she caught them and calmly with a hardly discernible series of little hand movements reinserted the things as if nothing had happened. I have to admit it was all neatly done.

In bored moments, desperate for something to wow me or just be different and dying to find out how the landlady might react when she fails to catch her teeth, I took to wondering. Do they fall to the floor? Or does some neat footwork come into play and she flips them back up? Or might she catch them with her pinny? Eager to know I would goad the parents, “Come on you two.., let’s take our fish and chips back with us... Come on... let’s do it!”

I never did find out.

And so, that was the ebb and flow of our annual holidays. All except for the last wonderful one that I was ever to share with my parents as an inexperienced naive small-town cloistered boy heading most likely for a future down in the dragon mines. Or consumed body and soul by one or other of the town’s factories. Or endlessly filling shop shelves, pumping gas or toiling gnome-like in the public gardens.

## Section Two

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Worse even than having to endure the landlady's teeth and wrath was joining the parents on the silly little train that ran up and down the promenade all day long. It seemed to my younger self as if they spent the whole blimbling day riding it.

Deny that as they have and still do, that is exactly what they did! I'm sure of it! And then there was their beloved bingo! Oh, what joys that so-called delight of theirs did not bring me..., except for one time when their silly game delivered a whole new exciting world into the hands of an otherwise bland existence. But before that wonderful moment could come other changes had to occur. After all, it is not possible to have a picnic without preparing the food beforehand - as boring a task as that might be.

Quickly outgrowing the simple joys of sitting with the parents wearing silly hats and sipping insipid fake coke, watching as they eagerly marked off their bingo cards, the then easily pleased six-year-old evolved into an enquiring and occasionally grumpy ten. While the parents happily played their games the child of ten began slipping away from their side to wander the one-street town and the boring endless sands, until one day, it all suddenly turned very interesting.

Having decided to explore further along the beach, my ten-year-old self to his delight discovered rolling swathes of dunes tucked away at the town's quieter north end. His imagination instantly fired and he claimed the land as an explorer might. Or ranged the rolling sands in search of pirate's treasure. The dunes were also frequented by lovers who did not take very kindly to

being interrupted by young aspiring pirates. On subsequent holidays as that self grew older, he was to discover those lovers did not like a naturalist with big eyes and a fledgling but obvious fascination with the mating habits of the local wildlife. Or his ever-quick camera! But that did not stop the adventures, it merely meant he had to crawl more stealthily, which simply added to the fun. As did being chased off, although my younger self was never scared of being caught because he had a loyal partner.

Lust...

It would take a right weirdos to prefer beating a young boy when they had a lover waiting in the dunes.

A few holidays on and I tired a little of the game because I guess, I stopped seeing the antics in the dunes as an alien world, but a new one that I was being inexplicably drawn towards. The growing feelings and sense of what that meant would spin me out from the centre of my existing world into a wider one. Where I found that life-changing holiday waiting for me. The one filled with treasured memories which I rarely speak about for fear reality will reach out and pop the bubbles that I have carefully wrapped them in for years and protected jealously.

Section Three

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**T**hat memory, *the memory*, expressed in capitalised letters and duly underscored and otherwise decorated with infantile strokes and fancy swirls of pen ink, originated in the same boring seaside town of sand, seagulls and ice cream.

Usually, the family stayed for a fortnight, but on that occasion thanks to a more kindly disposed landlady and some good luck it became a life-changing holiday of nearly seven weeks. Mostly spent without the parents and the reason had nothing whatsoever to do with them, other than they agreed to the longer stay. They also sort of forked out for the lodgings, though at a hugely discounted rate! We are after all talking about parents who could waste hundreds of pounds on bingo but argue all day long over the cost of beans on toast at the seaside cafe.

Anyway, a happy balance was finally arrived at. I was to wash the lodging's breakfast dishes and clear the tables. It was a worthy exchange, one happily complied with despite a healthy aversion for chores. Having duly rushed through them, from about 10:30 onwards the day was mine to do with as I liked - which on this particular holiday there was a lot to do and I liked it all very much.

But that comment has the ring of a conclusion and not the beginning, as it ought to be while bypassing the parts in-between which were deeply entertaining and interesting. As well as educating. Just as they still are today, both subconsciously and during the most private guarded moments.

## Section Four

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As always on the first morning of the family holiday the adults eagerly headed for the little train. Ignoring their chorused, "Come on! Get on with us Billy!" I watched them disappear in a stream of shrill but cheery toots and hoots. They liked it, but what can be said about that, other than they also liked silly hats and bingo? Oh, and yes, even today in their autumn years they are always the first to get up and dance to the Birdie Song! Parents, please note you can be so very embarrassing!

So, day one, thirty minutes in and the obligatory ice cream had been scoffed, the sand visited and a sighing thought sent into the gentle salt-tanged breeze - is this it until the fish and chips supper later tonight?

With a tut and a shrug the then fifteen-year-old self prepared for more boring days of standing on sand staring out at the sea when the tide was in, or down at the dark mud when it was out. Or dodging aerially delivered seagull droppings. So, faced with all that there was only one thing for a hopeful boy with an enquiring mind hindered or encouraged by unexpected flushes of hormones and that was to go off and sight-see the sunbathers. Well... *you never know you're luck!*

Then a sticky moment occurred - do I cross the sands north to south, or south to north? I was just struggling to decide when a pair of pale but more than OK-looking legs topped by a large round floppy hat sidled up and came to a halt beside the young me who, as if tender nostrils had just sniffed smelling salts, had suddenly awoken in every way.

“Hello,” the girl belonging to the hat said chirpily.

“I’m...”

where she then took a deep breath before rolling out a ribbon, no, it was more like a bunting of names.

“...Elizabeth Primrose-May Florence St.Montelin HYPHEN Burrudge...”

Then after another breath, she announced in plummy English.

“And I can trace my family back to 1066 and the Conqueror. I’m fifteen years old and I am here in this dreadful hole for the whole of this rotten summer. And I saw you here last year standing in exactly the same spot by this slipway, which needs repairing doesn’t it and we ought to start a campaign to get it done and I am bored!”

Wow... or so most of me thought, apart from my toes. Buried in the sand they were not then aware of her. With minimal effort, she had skilfully managed to declare everything proudly, surprisingly, bossily, compellingly and sulkily, all in the same remarkable breath.

I was quite taken with her verbal dexterity and the skilful way she spoke so quickly without mumbling or mispronouncing words like I do when I’m in a gabble. Although I confess for the briefest of moments I did wonder, is she bored because she had seen me before, or just generally bored like me. Only then for her to awaken fantastic fanfare. It was similar, although more tuneful than the brass band which plays on Sundays in the stand at the south end of the beach down near the kiddie’s paddling pool. A place my younger self rarely visited, because it was shut more often than it was open.

As exhilarating as the fanfare was, her introduction to it was casually off-handed.

“And you can call me Elizabeth..., AND... you can walk with me on the sand too... if you like...”

And yes, my toes did join in with the excited curling of my stomach...

Section Five

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**E**lizabth's simple statement changed everything.

The drab buildings running along the town's main street were suddenly reborn as colourful emporiums hinting at fun and mystery. While the breeze fell to teasing and playfully kissing me all over. The sun which had begun to irritate now felt wonderful and as the day brightened the far-stretching sands suddenly glistened with endless promise.

I even smiled at the train's ghostly toots, guessing it had reached the end of the promenade and disgorged the bingo players, namely my parents. With them out of sight for the best part of the day, my young heart swelled until she declared seriously.

“That is conditional that you are not a scruffy socialist like so many who visit this town are!”

Before I could deny it or wonder what a socialist is, or even ponder, does wearing my school trunks on a beach constitute being scruffy? She then stated boldly with a hint of frost.

“My father has said they are dreadful people with whom I should not mix. Are you a socialist?” She then asked. I fancied I sensed a certain, *please say no* lilt tagged on the end of her charmingly exaggerated almost sung ...socialist.

Obligingly, I replied in all innocence, “No... I'm not... and I'll call you

Liz, OK?”

That occasioned more frost to freeze the rays of that wonderful day.

“You must address me as Elizabeth, or this friendship is over.” She declared haughtily. Along with a tilt of her hat and the dropping of her right hip, which momentarily acted as a rest for her hand. Only then for it to rise and waggle in that space between us when working-class me immediately quipped.

“But it hasn’t started yet has it? We’ve only just met.”

“No! You are right!” Came her plummy very matter-of-fact reply, along with that admonishing hand waggle. “It has not started, and neither will it if you insist on calling me... Liz...”

She pronounced the cursed Liz with a wonderful nose in the air contempt.

As a liberal-minded fifteen-year-old - which incidentally mam suggested meant I was undisciplined - I had thought it extremely contemptuous. Or looking back I now wonder if I should have thought, pretentious? Anyway, I must have fidgeted because Elizabeth suddenly looked at me very closely, but not suspiciously, which was a relief. After all, I already had the sense that her tongue could be sharper than Mum’s. But then, clearly, not one to swerve from obstacles, she appended a severe nod to her scold, which was delivered inches from my face and followed with a strongly emphasised, “...Again...! OK...!”

Of course, it was all heard and noted, but distractedly so. At that moment I was charmingly caught by the play of freckles randomly arrayed along her neat nose. When she tilted her head back to get a better look at me

they seemed to dance across her face. As for Elizabeth's mouth. Well..., To be honest, I couldn't tell what it was like then because when it finally stopped working she sucked her lips in as if to hide them away. But regardless, being an inquisitive boy and of course, concerned that she might be walking about with seagull pooh on her I managed to fit in a quick toe to hat scan. And oh boy, was she pretty and yes, blessedly free of droppings...

I could not help thinking though, I bet your flipping freckles are the only untamed things about you because everything else is neat and in the right place. There was no doubting who this descendant of Norman's was. And I instantly loved her manner, or should I say her!

## Section Six

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I also spotted quickly that she liked to move random bits of her body about when she spoke.

During one animated moment, I caught a glimpse of her ponytail which was beautifully less pony and more stallion. It was so shiny and deep brown, long and thick, and was held loosely together by a hand-carved wooden slide which lent her an exotic air. It cost a lot too I figured. As for her skin, from what I could tell, it was unblemished without a single tattoo, fake or otherwise, while there was just the merest hint of sun-pink kisses running up the high spots of her slim arms. Yes, there were hairs on them, very fine ones, which surprised me at the time. I did not believe females had body hair, or at least not until they grew old and gave up sex sometime around 40.

Being a young lad and a prisoner to certain urges which had a bad habit of arising at the wrong moment, plus worryingly I was wearing those school trunks, I tried not to tarry too long on her legs. Or the splendid parts above, which lay tantalisingly below her softly dimpled chin, other than to think, thank you, Father! For the record, as much as I loved my dear Dad I did not mean him. He would never have thought to bother to find me such a fantastic friend, especially if the hunt interfered with his beloved bingo.

Even though we were standing on sand her golden sandals sparkled in the sunlight and not a grain of sand cared to mar them. As for her sky blue costume! Well... I was young... So I could not help returning to it, several times and regardless of whatever angle I sneaked a peep at the costume, it fitted her perfectly. Maybe too well, for it splendidly suggested a sense of

sheer transparency. As she looked away for a moment seemingly to gaze wistfully across the sand, or to pretend she had not noticed my scrutiny, or even to allow me the freedom to look for a little longer, which I did, her gauzy beach robe fluttered alluringly in the breeze. To my widening eyes, she had the poise of a movie star and my heart thumped as wide-eyed I traced the shape of her gorgeous slim silhouette and her deliberate but slight, you-can-admire-me-as-long-as-you-like, little tilt to her charming slightly pointed chin.

As for her eyes, I was unable to tell what they were like for they lay hidden behind a pair of huge sunglasses. But in the main, her voice seemed to be her most prominent feature. Once the sharp parts were removed. It was soft and longingly sing-song. She was well-spoken too and of course bold by nature. After all, it was she who approached me. So putting it all together I decided I liked her and that was not just the fidgety thing in my shorts speaking either. Though it did have its own opinion, which thankfully was similar to the rest of me.

With a nod, I happily agreed to her demand which I accompanied with a seriously delivered, “Elizabeth it will be then! And by the way, I’m Billy,” I declared. But having got her measure I added, “or William if you prefer, although I don’t much like it. But honestly, I won’t hold it against you if you use it.”

She did. And I loved the way she pronounced the *Will...* part in a sort of breathy extended whisper. It oozed with an intimacy that delightfully sent delicious shivers running down to my toes.

Section Seven

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**B**illy or William, Will or Bill, why would I care what she called me? I was a fifteen-year-old boy punching way above my weight who was struggling not to stare too hard at her puppies - my disgusting cousin's way of describing a girl's breasts which I picked up only to wish I hadn't, but such are the ways of youth.

As horrible as it was, the description was apt. To my hormonally fired eyes, those perky delights were eager to be out and playing. But then that could well have been my fancy. I smiled then as I thought, where better to let them romp than in the dunes which I hoped later, that is, if I don't slip up and accidentally call her Liz, I might steer her towards. Or so went the flow of my hastily created fantasy.

But, instead of me leading her across the sands as we set off she took my hand and from then on, she did all the steering. Where incredibly she headed us straight to the dunes! Yes. The dunes of all places!

I quickly discovered she was a local and not here on holiday. She knew all about the dunes. Even more thrillingly she possessed extensive knowledge of the kind I was more than keen to learn. And not once did I think of playing pirates, although I can say now with a smile, there was certainly an awful lot of exploring done.

## Section Eight

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Oh, yes, before I forget. Her eyes. She was wearing blue mascara! Blue! It was so delightfully rebellious. While the rest of her was conventional, the mascara shouted, this is who I am. Beyond the mascara, her eyes shone with humour and were underlined by a light puffiness that was simply charming and welcoming. Smiles came to them readily and at certain teasing moments their light hazel twinkled with little green flecks. As for her eyebrows. They were thin but expressive, especially when those eyes opened wide in pleasant surprise, which to my delight was often.

I loved everything about her. Even her pretentious boasts and teases delivered always by soft punches or a mouth that could convey so much even when silent, or otherwise deliciously engaged... In every way she was stunning. And clever too. I imagined that her mind was so full of ideas that it whirled like her hands did whenever she talked - actually... not just her hands.

Elizabeth's strictly *proper manner* was simply a shell cultivated to protect herself. Her animated way of expressing opinions was born from nervousness and insecurities. The more abstract her views and therefore open to ridicule, the more animated her actions became. It was not unusual for her arms, head, hips, legs, toes, breasts and even her knees to join in with our conversations. During intense but friendly debates, it was like watching her body working hard to pump words out of her skin. At other times, usually, after we fooled around some in the dunes, she was calm and more wondrous than ever.

But as beautiful and desirable as she was, I was stunned to realise that it was her brain which captivated me the most. And wow! There was I, a hormonal fifteen-year-old boy getting off on her brain. Try explaining that to a young teenager! “Remember always my son, it is the brain you’re making love to!” Yeah, I can see that being believed.

But it was true. I can still see and feel those moments. Elizabeth sitting and staring out at the sea lost in her mind’s inner workings. While I lay back to gaze up at her admiringly, memorising every detail. The fine hairs on her arms. A little moon-shaped scar on her right knee. Her dimpled inner thigh and so much more. Every delicious feeling, every tick of those seconds we spent together, every gesture, idea and word she gifted and we shared I rapidly and gladly stored away.

What was so appealing was that we were united by our differences, they seemed to have the same origin. I fondly recall that we both enjoyed the sea. Where as we watched its spumous play I might wonder about the other shore its lips nibbled at. She would nod and then in turn wonder where else it will visit. Or I would notice a flower and wonder how it must struggle to grow in the sand. Again she would nod thoughtfully before wondering, “Are its seeds wind-borne and if so, where might they fall and on windy days how far will they travel.”

Then after a brief reflection spent staring calmly but intensely out at the sea’s rolling caps of forever changing colour leaving me to gaze up at her, she would turn and ask with her alluring dreamy half smile. “And might the seeds also travel by sea?”

Then we got to talking about coconuts and the oceans they travelled and then on to wondering about early mankind and how they managed to cross the seas. All ideas were welcomed, even the suggestion they might have tied coconuts together and used them as floats. All silly stuff I know, but in our

way, together, like her pondered seeds, we travelled far and opened each other's minds to both the sensible and the ridiculous as we swapped ideas and experiences.

My interest in the arts grew from those moments. To this day, the teasing shadows on her delicate perfect body and its bold highlights and ever-changing shapes, the magnetic lure of its inner glow, her spirit and inquiring mind guide my hands in their work. If I'm being truthful, I guess I'm attempting to recreate those magical times when under her guidance I connected with the planet and my spirit - those very same feelings which bless me so much now.

I can clearly recall that my only wish then as my spirit grew was that I never wanted these times to end. Happily in their way they never did, even though we are not physically together anymore.

Section Nine

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**S**o, in that life-changing summer I discovered love, along with lots of other wonderful things.

I even swam *Au Naturel* with her many times while the moon looked on smiling. Or so we believed as we floated in the silvery glimmering sea. And yes, along with Elizabeth I did join my parents on the train and we also played bingo with them, but just for a couple of sessions mind. Where guess what, luck visited, for wonder of wonders we won! And the large weekly jackpot to boot! The winning bingo card, with Elizabeth's nudged blessing - she was already thinking ten steps ahead of me - I discreetly passed over to my parents.

Elizabeth had already worked out that we were too young to play in the main game, let alone win it. But there was something else at play too. She was not just streets ahead of me, she was waving from several continents away, where her animated eyebrows and little nods suggested, leave this to me.

With my parents newly enriched and happy and quite taken by Elizabeth they were easily persuaded to let me stay for the remainder of the summer. The clever girl! I would never have thought of that! I was even allowed to miss a fortnight of the new school term. My parents had seen what I instinctively knew. The things I was learning with and through Elizabeth were way better than any stuffy schooling. They have proven to be longer-lasting too.

Nowadays, I recall Elizabeth fondly and often, though I tend to call her Kate. Strange maybe, but I have my reasons.

Kate is my wife's name and I like to think Elizabeth if she ever knew, would understand why I do so. It's in case I slip up and whisper Elizabeth during an amorous moment. Although to be fair I am not sure which of them I am trying to protect. All I do know is that for twenty-three wonderful years, I have never lied to Kate, or physically been unfaithful. Nor do I want to start.

Fortunately, we are both wise enough not to enquire about each other's *hero*, or in my case *heroine*, who might care to stir and bless certain tender moments.

So, goodbye my Kate HYPHEN Elizabeth, for now at least, and thank you once again I smile as I prepare to return her perfectly pristine, naked, sun-kissed sea-washed body to my private sand-sprinkled bottom drawer. Where just before I do, can last this long?

Amazingly, despite our many differences not once did we or have we ever quarrelled, while wonderfully, neither have we displayed any inclinations to grow old. I like that and feel privileged. But in a stupid urge to poke a bear to see if it's asleep I cannot help asking, will our meeting of spirits ever end? And what if those spirits should ever take on flesh...

## Section Ten

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Happily, Elizabeth is still physically about in the present - just not in mine in the person.

I once read she is something big, in something large, that operates somewhere globally. In the interview, she put her success down to not being shy and her willingness to take chances on outsiders. Me? My heart flipped in wonder... And for an interesting and varied upbringing. She explained only to then truly snag my attention when she said.

“And of course, I must not leave out those wonderful people in my inner circle who keep me sane. And lastly, those long walks with my Labrador across the sands in the town where I grew up and where as often as I can, I try to visit.”

I smiled for hours after reading the interview. I knew exactly what lay behind her last two comments. In the dunes, she once purred.

“You William are in my inner circle.”

And then we burst out laughing silly because we were, you know learning about each other at the time in a certain way that needs no explanation. And as for the dog! It was a black Labrador with an enquiring nose whose dogged insistence on sniffing certain parts sent us spiralling into fits of silly and embarrassed giggles while we hastily readjusted our costumes.

As for the Billy side of me today, I became a welder, come blacksmith, come sculptor, come artist, come writer, and privately a poet, where happily I work out of an old dairy in the town I was born in. I also hit the newspapers once. I was interviewed about an upcoming exhibition of my work where I mentioned the one piece I was particularly proud of which I called, Dreams Arising (Holiday with E). And I'm certain she read the article for in the visitor's book was a simple message that sent tingles running through me as I read it. *Well done my William! Fondly E.*

It just had to be her.

I donated the sculpture to guess where... It is also where my wife, my son and I occasionally holiday. Yes, that very same town! Where the little train is still running and tooting and yes my parents ride it, except now instead of calling *ride with us* they wave proudly to my sculpture as they pass it by on that promenade which we, in all our different ways and moods, have strode. The dunes continue to embrace lovers as well and unbelievably, my son even met his future wife amongst them. It was said she was studying wildlife.

Hmmm, yeah, whatever..., they know best.

However, my introduction to her was a very sticky moment. Freakishly for me but happily for her, she revealed her mother had met her father in the same dunes!

Oh Yeah...!

Section Eleven

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I panicked..., *you know why...*, but thankfully her name is not Elizabeth, or anything similar. It is just good old fashioned and solidly so, Nelly. Who is happy to be called Nell? Or more extraordinarily, Bot Bot (I have no idea why!) and wonderfully so for my memories she's socialist to the core.

As were her parents, I gratefully learned and further back in her family too, although not as far as the Conqueror. That particular boast still belongs to my Elizabeth Primrose-May Florence St.Montelin HYPHEN Burrudge and as daft as it sounds I am glad of it. Such a proud ribbon of names truly does deserve to be flown with prominence and never surpassed, while for me, it is still a magical spell.

Merely unfurling the ribbon transports me instantly to our first moment down by the slipway, which has yet to be repaired and strangely I realise I don't ever want it to be. It would not seem right somehow.

As for Nelly, I have to admit she does have a certain look of Elizabeth. Especially around the eyes. Or the gills as my dad would say. Truthfully, she does. Once I recovered from the fear that she might be, *you know*, the similarity caused me to go off a-wondering, did Elizabeth and I leave something of ourselves in the sand for others to find.

It was certainly a magical time full of thrills and wonder and growing spirits and who knows the working of such things. Look what Elizabeth did for my creative spirit and how she taught my hands to be purposeful but

gentle. Without her encouragement who knows what I might be now? A shelf stacker or toiling unfulfilled in someone's sadistic dream of a fulfilment centre. Instead, I'm a free spirit and what more can anyone ever ask for in these over-controlled days?

Anyway, thankfully, Nell is too young to be..., you know..., and too old to be Elizabeth's grandchild. So, wonderfully all is right with the universe. So I can continue to smile fondly as I slide the drawer shut once more while knowing full well we will visit again and soon. Just as we will many times thereafter, or so I deeply hope.

Funnily, already missing my Kate-Elizabeth I'm tempted to open the drawer again to spend more time with her, but as my hand reaches for the handle I flashback to how I felt on the coach when she waved me off... and as it turned out, waved me goodbye too.

My heart screamed then in a way it has never done since. "Open the door, open the door, let me out!"

On the other side of the window, her eyes poured with tears as mine were doing. With a tearing heart bravely, or was it weakly, I stayed the emotion, as I'm doing now while ignoring several peskily persistent what-if questions.

In a happy and sad mood, I set to work on my latest piece with furiously moving hands. It's the best way I find. Grab the emotion, use it, pour it out, give it breath and let it live. Except this time the flow was wrong. My hands faltered. But only for a moment. Suddenly I connected with the piece and I knew that Elizabeth had slipped out of the drawer to join me and nudged the present aside. Then skilfully but gently she guided my hands as once she did so passionately in those memorable times in our special dune. I could feel her sweet breath blessing my work and bringing it to life. And I just know that

this piece is going to be especially good.

Suddenly, when I stood back to look it over I was struck with an idea, although whether it was mine or Elizabeth's I had no way of knowing. Maybe it came from us both? Regardless, I decided that with a bit of tidying up the idea running through my mind will do nicely as a by-line for the piece.

“A ghost in metal - but not in flesh, for skin does not fit their likes well.”

And then, I wondered, will she ever see it?

Only to smirk at my deceit... because I knew full well that I wanted her to see it, as I always do and will.

The End?