

Yearning

by Peter Wood

The cardboard box is brown; the sellotape on the lid and bottom is uncut. It sits, ominous on a window sill busy with ceramic cats-at-play figurines. It has remained like this for the last two days.

Edith's tap-tapping stick is audible before you see her. She's a snow-white haired Cinderella recalling *that* unfortunate ball where some prince slotted a shoe on her foot, then expected... Expected what? Undying love, devotion? More to the point a week in a Bournemouth B & B and years of beer-grumps and whiskey-fuelled witlessness.

But there were good times too. Mustn't grumble.

Hadn't she been prodigious too?

A big warm smile and frame to match that engulfed two sons in tenderness.

Edith's old-woman smell, a pheromone for those seeking solace, comfort, understanding, a tiny crumb of warmth.

Edith sits in the armchair, her bones creaking, settling into the furniture's shape. Through the net curtains she watches the kiddies with their mums and dads waddling by. One or two of them notice her and wave. She raises her hand back. Young saluting old and back.

Like an alcoholic's eye catching sight of a bottle, Edith's gaze is drawn to the box on the sill.

She'd got the news a week back. Since then, her house has become a Euston-station of helping hands, shoulders to cry on, legs doing walk-to-the-shop chores and mouths speaking their condolences. Everyone doing what they thought was needed — all out of love; don't get me wrong — but all unasked for.

'Tragedy brings out the best in people.' she thinks, 'Remember Dunkirk?'

No, neither do they.

The service was good though, he'd've loved it. He'd've been up there belting out the hymns then bickering with the vicar after. Bet

he's pissed off he missed it. No point putting on a party if you don't go yourself.

Now the sitting room is silent, Edith's eyes are drawn back to the box.

Part of her, the young, full of hope, naive Cinderella wants to believe her Prince has left to slay some dragon, capture a castle, do some token of utterly stupid massive proportions to prove his worth and love.

The real, the lived-in Edith knows better. Knows that the swine, the beautiful odd-thinking cantankerous pepper to her salt has copped it.

Peaceful. Asleep and unasked. He simply slipped away. In his sleep, in bed: a good way to go...

Except, it wasn't their bed.

And now there's no chance left to ask why, rant, or vent. No time left to forgive.

Her stick, leaning against the armrest falls sending an awful clatter through the silence.

'What do you want?' she taunts the box. Painfully she leans towards it, 'What were you thinking? This wasn't our deal.' She sighs. When she breathes in again, the air is potent.

Part rage, part resentment, part abandoned feelings but mostly energy.

A thought that's been brewing in her head for the last few days finally materialises and that alone carries her.

It carries Edith to the box. She picks it up. The energy takes her into the kitchen, where she pulls out a knife, slices open the sellotape which when torn aside reveals a shiny black tea-caddy-like tin which she knows contains the tea-leaf like granules of a life.

The energy then carries Edith out into the small uncared-for-in-years garden to the composting area.

The energy fills her lungs; it feels good to breath and holler.

'That wasn't part of the deal.' she shouts over and over as her flat palm smacks the tin's contents out into the manure.

A life.

A lifetime leavened.

Edith looks at the tin. She walks to the black recycling wheely bin the council's made her have, opens the lid. She's about to throw the shiny black tin inside, then decides against it.

Edith returns to the kitchen, pours water into the tin, swishes it around then pours it out.

She watches the final few flakes of ash amble down the plughole. She places the tin on the drainer.

Energy and rage has now subsided. She smiles.

The tin'll be perfect for biscuits.

