

DAISY

Daisy Daniels looked every inch of her ninety-one years as she sat, frail and thin, in an old winged fireside chair. Sergeant Grant's uniformed presence was scarcely acknowledged, despite the clomping of his heavy boots in the floorboards as he walked through the little parlour. Her pale but alert eyes rested on the rag rug that he stopped on.

“My mother made that in 1921. It took her months, huddled over a candle right where I'm sitting now. I remember where every scrap came from. That was my father's old night shirt. Those lovely lavender pieces,” A thin finger pointed, “Was a beautiful blouse of my grandmother's.”

It was like treading history underfoot. Sergeant Grant sidestepped quickly then assumed an official air. “Have you made a list of the stolen items, like we asked?”

Daisy raised herself slowly and retrieved a piece of paper from the mantelpiece. He studied the items written in a shaky hand, “They didn't take much.”

“It depends on what you call much, Sergeant. Those two rings have great sentimental value.” She pressed her lips together and blinked quickly, “Come into the kitchen

and I'll make you a nice cup of tea. Would you like some home-made fruit cake to go with it?" Daisy shuffled past him down the dark hall. As she filled the kettle, he sat down and looked around. Opposite him was a gun mounted on the wall. Daisy smiled at his surprise, "My husband was in the infantry during the war. He took it from a German POW."

"It's a Luger, isn't it?" He bit into the cake, "Mrs Daniels, this is the best fruit cake I've ever tasted!"

She smiled with pleasure, "Thank you Sergeant but call me Daisy."

The Sergeant smiled back, "and call me Jeff." He watched as she took the gun from its mount and handed it to him, "I clean this every week, just like my Edward used to do." He opened the gun and was surprised to see two bullets still inside. "You know Jeff," she continued, "Both my sons died in World War II. Those rings that were stolen were theirs." Her voice shook with emotion.

"I am so sorry," Jeff said, "That's dreadful. Oh, for goodness' sake Daisy, why did you let them in?"

"They were offering to do odd jobs. They seemed like such nice boys."

Jeff looked at the frail figure, at the livid bruise on her face where she had been punched to the floor, and felt a sudden rage against the low life who had done this. Daisy fixed him with her bright intelligent eyes, “Do you think they’ll be caught?”

“We’ll do our best.”

“Will they be punished?”

Jeff looked at her. She was too smart to be fooled, “That’s not as easy to answer. It depends on a number of things...”

Daisy shook her head, “I know. I think they’ll get a good solicitor and end up with a ticking off and community service. Then they’ll carry on doing this to weak and vulnerable people.” She didn’t add “like me” and Jeff approved of that. “Now Jeff, I’m sure you’ve time for another piece of cake before you get back to work?”

Jeff smiled and nodded.

Jeff made a point of dropping in to see Daisy whenever he was in the area. She enjoyed his visits and always managed to have his favourite fresh fruit cake waiting for him. He was never able to tell her any positive news

about her attackers, and she took this with a quiet resignation that saddened him.

However, three weeks after his first visit, he was able to bring some more positive news. Daisy poured tea out as he put his cap on the table, “We think we know where they are.” He smiled up at her. Daisy sat down quickly, her face suddenly pale, “Go on?”

“An old man was walking his dog last night and was attacked by two lads. They came out of a boarded up house in Cinnamon Street. Luckily, his dog saw them off before they managed to hurt him but he was able to give a good description of them. It matches the description you gave.”

Daisy continued to look at him, “So what’s going to happen?”

“We think they’re squatters so we’re going to raid the house tonight.”

“Well, I hope you get them. Tell me Jeff, my great aunt lived in that street when I was a little girl; I used to visit her all the time. I wonder if it was her house.”

“It’s number 44” Jeff said, “Was that your aunt’s?”

“No.” Daisy shook her head, “She was the other end of the street.”

“Well, I must get off now Daisy. Thanks for the tea. Lock the door after me and keep your fingers crossed for a result.”

Daisy nodded and smiled then pulled her cardigan closer round her as her bright, shrewd eyes watched him walk away.

Jeff sat down at the table. His mood was far removed from the excited visit the day before. As she busied herself making tea, Daisy was aware of the tension in the kitchen.

He cleared his throat, “Don’t you want to know what happened last night?”

“I’m waiting for you to tell me.” She kept her back to him as she poured milk into cups. When she joined him, he took a sealed bag from his pocket and placed it between them. “Can you identify these?”

She inhaled sharply, “They’re my sons’ rings.”

“You can keep them. They were as you described so I was able to sign them out for you.”

Daisy’s gratitude was trapped inside in a sob. She picked up the bag and pressed it to her chest. She looked at Jeff, who was studying her closely. “Unfortunately, we weren’t able to make any arrests.”

Daisy took a shallow breath, “Oh.”

“Someone got there before us.”

Daisy tried to pick up her tea but her hands were shaking and the clatter of the cup against the saucer sounded loud in the silence that followed. Her face had gone deathly white, against which the yellow reminder of her bruise stood out in stark relief.

“They were dead when we arrived. Shot at point blank range.”

Daisy’s mouth opened, but no sound came out.

“The bullets went right through and hit the wall behind. They were very old bullets. Exactly like the ones I saw here yesterday.” She followed his eyes up to the luger on the wall and her whole body seemed to shrink away from him. He looked back at her, “The police have no leads, and it looks like there will be no further

investigation. However, I think we both know who killed them, don't we, Daisy?"

"Yes." Her voice was a whisper and she closed her eyes.

Jeff looked at her for some time. She straightened herself and looked across at him, pursing her lips to stop them trembling. He felt a surge of compassion for this good, brave woman who had suffered such fear, pain and indignity. "There's only one more question I am going to ask you," he went on.

His eyes softened and he began to smile, "Any more of your wonderful fruit cake?"