

RUNNER BEANS

Putting the tea bags into the pot, Joan placed the two mugs on the tray. She checked the clock 10.25, Jim would be back from the allotment soon. She put two digestives on a plate and looked around the old familiar kitchen; not a thing out of place, taps and sink sparkling. She straightened the tea towel hanging on the oven door. Pouring the boiling water into the pot as the 10.30 news came on the radio, Joan didn't listen to it, but waited for the weather forecast at the end. It could make all the difference to the vegetables Jim grew.

As the music returned to the radio waves, Joan hummed along, smiling as she remembered her and Jim waltzing at the village dance when they were courting, She felt the ache in her legs and knew her dancing days were over.

Where was Jim? It was nearly 10.45, it wasn't like him to be so late. Joan wondered if he was chatting to one of the lads, or had he said he was going to the shop on the way home.

It got to 11.00, Joan tipped the tea down the sink and put the biscuits back in the tin. Wiping down the worktops and polishing the taps, she straightened the tea towel, then went to the front door. Her eyes searched up and down the street, no sign of Jim. He'd been gone too long now.

'Hello Mrs Johnson, are you ok?' Joan's neighbour, Sally, called from her driveway. 'I'm worried about Jim. He's not come back from the allotment. He's been gone hours.'

Sally came to the front door, 'Let's go inside Joan, you'll get cold standing out here.'
'But where is he? Have you seen him today? It's not like him to disappear.'
Sally took her arm and sat her in the chair,
'Calm down Joan, I'm sure he'll be back soon. Let me make you a cuppa.'

Joan burst into tears, 'I think he said he was picking the runner beans today. I was going to cook them with some cod.' Sniffing, she pulled a hankie from her apron pocket and wiped her nose.

'Shall I ring your son Joan?' Sally placed the mug on the side table.
'Oh I don't want to trouble Paul. He'll be at work, but I am really worried about Jim.'
Sally took a mobile out of her pocket. 'I'll give Paul a quick ring.'

Paul arrived fifteen minutes later.

'Hello Mum. What's the matter?' Kneeling beside her, he held her hand.
With watery eyes she looked at him,

'Your Dad's gone missing. You need to go and look for him at the allotment.'

'Mum, do you remember?' He spoke softly and squeezed her hand, 'Dad passed away three years ago? We don't have the allotment anymore.'

'Thanks Sally,' Paul said, as he saw her to the door. 'Mum's still capable of looking after herself and keeping the house immaculate. It's just her memory that's disappearing.'