

An evening out

I shouldn't have come, thought Sally, as she looked around the Victorian splendour of Tollingthorpe's Public Library. It was too soon. As voices buzzed merrily around her, eagerly anticipating tonight's talk, she felt even more alone than usual.

It was her daughter Emma who had persuaded her; 'Mum, you need to get out more! Meet people, make new friends. I don't like to think of you being so lonely.'

Sally and Kevin had bought the house when they married. Once filled with life, it was now a mausoleum of memories, ever since Kevin had died, a year ago. And Sally had become a recluse; existing, not living, as Emma would say.

Her daughter had agreed to come with her, but that morning Sally had answered the phone to a cold-heavy Emma. 'I'll be okay Mum,' she'd mumbled, 'but I'm going back to bed. Promise me you'll still go tonight though?' Sally had reluctantly agreed; the talk had sounded rather interesting.

It was on '*Marmaduke Sissons, Our Local Philanthropist*'. Sally had always loved local history, and once retired, had enjoyed many afternoons in the archives, scouring the dusty shelves for the stories that brought Tollingthorpe's past to life. Since Kevin's death though, she'd never returned.

The talk was about to start, and Sally began to relax as she recognised the speaker, Geoff Blanchard. He'd been the Archivist until he'd retired a couple of years back, and Sally was pleased to see his friendly face once more.

Geoff brought Marmaduke's story to life, from the humblest start, the illegitimate and extremely wild grandson of a local tradesman, to his epiphany as a well-respected industrialist and mayor of Tollingthorpe. It was he who had founded the library, both funding its building and leaving his vast collections and archives to the people of the then-flourishing town. But the highlights of the night had to be the family tales and photographs from Geoff's personal collection; he was Marmaduke's great great grandson.

What a fascinating character Marmaduke was, thought Sally after the talk had ended. I'd like to find out more; there just might be some overlooked documents in the archives... Sitting contentedly, with a cup of tea and a custard cream, she looked up and saw Geoff heading in her direction.

'Hello Sally, I thought it was you! I was so sorry to hear about Kevin,' he said, 'how are you keeping?'

'I've been quite lonely,' she admitted, 'too much time on my hands. I need to get out more...'

Geoff sat down beside her.

'I don't suppose you'd consider helping me out with my research on Marmaduke? I've really only just scratched the surface! I know there's more hidden away in the archives...'

It would be lovely to be back there, busy and useful once more, she thought. And out of the 'mausoleum'. How kind of Geoff to think of her.

'I'd like to help,' she decided, 'thank you!' and sighed with relief, 'It wasn't a mistake coming tonight, after all!'