

The Seedling: Julie Howard

With each swing of my legs, the old single bed creaks.

I could say I can smell six things, but he'll want to know exactly what they are. I close my eyes and count. Apples – one. Kerosene – two. Candle wax- three. Blood and bone - four. Blood and Bone!! Is it really?

I do wish he'd come back.

I twirl my butterfly net in my hand, anxious to be out exploring the allotment.

What can he be doing?

Rain-streaked newspaper peels from the walls. 'Newspaper's good insulation, lassie,' Uncle Bill always says.

Oh, do hurry up, Uncle Bill! I can't wait to see if my carrots are ready.

The door scrapes across the floor catching on the torn lino. I leap up and I'm beside him in a twinkle.

'Well? What can you smell lassie?'

I give him a huge hug, burrowing my head into his flannel shirt and say, 'Earth, leaves, worms, smoke and you Uncle Bill. I love the smell of you. Oh, and apples, kerosene and candle wax and Uncle Bill, is blood and bone really blood and bone?'

He laughs and says 'Yes, yes, you're a canny lassie. Are yer ready?'

He hands me a basket woven with twigs and we fill it with my carrots and potatoes.

As I rove the garden beds, I find a new crop, small shoots pushing through the soil. But they're stiff. Lifeless almost. No leaves, just pale, yellow stalks.

'Uncle Bill, Uncle Bill. Come and look.'

'Oh, those things. Spaghetti seedlings. Don't touch. Quick growing. Ask yer mum to bring yer over next week. They'll be ready then.'

I plead, 'Mum, mum, we have to go to the allotment, today. PLEASE Mum please! The seedlings will be ready.'

When we arrive I rush to the veggie patch. He's right Long strings of spaghetti have grown from small leafy twigs.

Mum shakes her head and says, 'that brother of mine needs his head examining!'

'Oh, Uncle Bill, you're amazing.' I breath.

AND then he says. 'April Fool!'

Nothing is ever quite the same again.