

ECHOES.

Denise sat, listening, as the priest explained. 'Jesus said that he was the light of the world. As true Christians we all know this to be true.' Denise shuffled in her wooden pew, not because she did not believe what the priest was saying, but because she wanted to go out and play with her friends. The winter months had deprived them of the long days of summer that they all loved.

There was no substitute for light. Denise had been taught this as a Christian, and had experienced it as a growing girl. When the sermon was over, Denise left to play football with her friends. She was the only girl in the group, but no one cared. The only thing that mattered was the connection between them.

Twenty years later, and the afternoon was a great contrast. The sun still shone through the window, beckoning Denise to take a walk in the same fields that she had known as a child. But the darkness she felt inside meant she couldn't face the prospect of meeting other dog-walkers, as she walked along the well-trodden path. They would ask her how she was, and why Jack, her beloved labradoodle, was not with her.

As fellow dog-lovers, they would understand Denise's sorrow, of course, unlike a neighbour who had not understood the affection between human and animal, as that they both saved each other from loneliness.

'But he was just a dog.' Denise had said nothing in reply, continuing to smile in the way that she believed would bring light to others, concealing the darkness inside.

Having known that Jack was terminally ill, Denise had recorded his bark. But, sitting all alone by herself, she could not bring herself to 'press play'.

'Knock! Knock!' Who was that?

Denise opened the door to be greeted by Michael.

'I've heard,' he started. 'I just wanted to say that....'

'I'm sorry. It's so kind of you to call round, Michael, but...' The emotion Denise felt halted her in mid-sentence. She knew Michael would understand and she didn't want to be rude, but now was not the time. Jack and Michael's dog, Cindy, had been so fond of one another. They would often be seen running around together in Michael's garden, when Denise visited. It used to remind her of the fun she used to have, playing football with her friends, all those years ago.

Michael continued. 'I think you'll want to know this. We took Cindy to the vet's yesterday. We were delighted to hear that she's going to have a litter. The only dog who she has ever been allowed to be with is Jack, so we know that must be the father. We would like you to have at least one of the puppies.'

Denise was speechless. She would inherit another Jack. The barks of the newcomer would echo those of his father. The sun had been eclipsed, but only temporarily.

Light was soon to return.