

Every time we say goodbye: Julie Dawson

Yesterday was bleak. Robert, my friend Margo's partner had just died, and the world felt hollow. We walked around Manly Dam, trying to make sense of what had happened. Cold penetrated our bodies and our hearts. I couldn't help thinking about the day my dad died all those years ago. Mum and I, arms linked were walking slowly through Whirlow Park. The trickle of pale sunshine could not lift our spirits on that grim February day. The snow had shrunk to the centre of the flower beds. Here and there snowdrops and crocuses pushed their bright leaves through the dark soil, but they brought us no comfort.

A robin fluttered onto the path in front of us. He tilted his head to one side and silently fixed his eye on us. 'Hello little fellow' I said, 'what do you want?' He looked at me and then hopped right in front of mum, waited a moment and then flew up to the bush next to the path.

'Well that was weird' I said and we started to walk on. A few moments later he was back. Head tilted, looking up at mum. This happened three times until finally he hopped towards mum and with his beak, tapped her foot gently.

Mum gasped. Her mouth gaped open. 'Oh it's you isn't it? It's my darling Tom'. By now tears were streaming down her face but she was smiling. She grabbed my hand 'Maggie, Maggie, it's your dad, he's here to say goodbye'.

I tried to stem my tears, but I couldn't help myself. 'What is it?' said Margo. I pointed to the magpie watching us from the side of the path, its head tilted to one side. As Margo turned, the magpie hopped lopsidedly towards us. For a moment its dark unblinking eye focussed on me, her and then it hopped forward and tapped Margo gently on her foot.

'It's Robert' I smiled, 'He's okay, he's just saying goodbye'.