

Tom and Gerry

by Jessica Barrah

I had been living at Hill Crest Residential Home for almost two years. I liked it there.

The staff, mainly Eastern Europeans, were kind, and willing to play scrabble with me.



I made some good friends, but it was hard sometimes. People came and went.

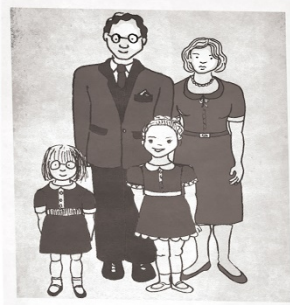


Geraldine?
Can that really be YOU?



You are knowing each other?





We knew each other only too well...



I was a real daddy's girl.

Do I look pretty Daddy?
Imagine Gerry in a tutu!
Like a fat dancing pig!



She was jealous, always seeking attention.

Miss Lovely Legs 1951



We grew even further apart as we got older.



Studying in the library meant something quite different for her



On the day I was offered a place at university,
Thomasina trumped me with her own news.



I know Daddy was proud of me.
But just a few days later...

my arm!
shooting...
pain...



My world ended.



Thomasina's wedding was a sombre affair. Mother wore black. It was the last time she left the house.



After the wedding, mother took to her bed. it was the start of a twenty year decline

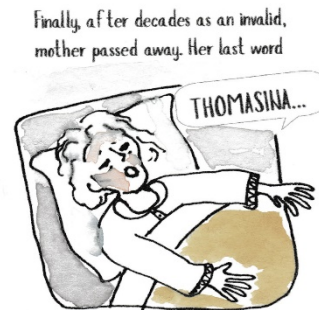
Of course, I had to give up my university place.



Years went by, and Thomasina very rarely visited.



The garden shed was my only refuge from her constant criticisms.



Finally, after decades as an invalid, mother passed away. Her last word



Thomasina got all her jewellery and half the house. The funeral was the last time I saw my sister. My birthday and Christmas cards to her came back 'not known at this address'



I felt free for the first time in my life. I got a job in the library, and started dating Malcolm, a widower with a keen interest in historical reenactments and Airdale dogs.



Malcolm and I had a long and happy marriage until his death from prostate cancer at 74. I stayed on in our beloved bungalow until my arthritis got too bad a few years ago.

I can't pretend I was delighted to see her.



How can you make sure
these thieving Poles don't
pinch your jewellery?
Oh, I forgot, you don't have
any.



She was as spiteful as ever.

The staff, thinking this was a real life episode of Long Lost Families, kept leaving us together to catch up. I could think of nothing worse. It was obvious her mind was going. She told me the same tedious three stories over and over.



I fantasised about pushing her
wheelchair down the hill



it would gather speed



then catapult her into the boggy
stream, where she would get an actual
frog in her throat and stop talking.

If only... but there was something
I could do.



without my hearing aid I was now
completely deaf.



I switched it off.



and enjoyed the golden sunset, feeling just a faint
breeze from my sister's silently flapping mouth.