

Rescue Mission
by
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EXT. STREET - DAY

BINNIE: (V.O) Where are you Donna? I'm sure we said meet at the bus stop.

Can't stop rubbing that bit behind my ear again, where the doubled over elastic from my mask used to cut in. There's nothing there. Definitely nothing. But it feels like a scar. There's a bus. Where's Donna? I don't want to go by myself.

Oh. Oh, it's not slowing. No, wait! Straight past me. It was full. They all had placards, I haven't got a placard. Oh no, I don't want to do this. I should be with my patients.

Rub my ear. Blink. Deep breath.

What if I turned around and just went home instead? Pottered around the kitchen with a test match on? There's that knot in my throat again. Why won't it go away? I should probably go to the GP. No, maybe not. Cricket'd sort me. Wonder if you can still stream last year's commentaries. The knock of bat on ball. Steady and solid, but...gentle. And Agnew's voice, like...like an old comfy pair of slippers. And that holiday in Crete, and Mum was like thunder for a fortnight because she couldn't watch the Ashes. Only because she fancied Ramprakash. Yeah, go home Binnie, put the cricket on. But I suppose that would be easy.

No. I can't. The others'll be waiting. Come on Binnie you can do it. Ok, another bus. Right, decision made then. Here we go. Deep breath.

A bus pulls up and stops, idles.

BINNIE: (V.O) Step forward. I'd be two hours into my shift by now. Oh dear who's going to walk Mrs B up the corridor after her breakfast? She'll be so confused. Step back.

(TO DRIVER) No. No. Sorry driver. I'll walk, actually.
Bus doors close, and it pulls away.

BINNIE: (V.O) Walk? You idiot Binnie. What did you do that for? You're bone tired. What if I'd stayed in bed? I should have stayed in bed. I've never ever done that.
No. No. Wouldn't dream of it.

A text message notification

BINNIE: (V.O) Right, who's this? Donna. Oh, she's already there.

(READS) Hurry up Binnie it's a good turnout. We're all here. Carmel, Rupa, even Marissa. Strong arm emoji heart emoji wow emoji

(V.O) Thought Marissa was undecided last thing yesterday, when Carmel said enough is enough. So it's actually happening. What's it like on the ward this morning? I bet the staff is room a carbon copy of three years ago. Spaces between us. Deserted. Quiet. The laughter and chatter gone. And Lily's there now, on essential care, and making this possible.

And now we're a world away from then. That man in reception on Friday, screaming at the top of his lungs about his 18 month wait, but barely forming sentences. Actually we are not a world away. This is just a different type of front line. Thank goodness Carmel was in the staff room. Shut the door behind me and I cried for him. So did she.

No. No more. Keep going. You cannot go onto the ward today Binnie. You are walking. One foot in front of the other, like always.

Stop a minute. What's this shop window? What's that behind the glass? On the far side of the shop. A sun lounger beneath an aeroplane in the cloudless sky. Vines, white-washed terrace, glittering sea...am I seeing things? A giant photograph mural spread across the whole far wall of the shop. It's like

stepping back in time. And an advert for a last minute deal to Crete. Mum's favourite place. That place looks so lovely. When was the last time I went away? Was it really three years ago? Must be more. How have I become a person who can't think of holidays? How do I get back to before?

A text message notification

BINNIE: (V.O) Donna again. Nothing but a ticking clock gif. Come on then, Binnie. Walk. Keep walking. Nearly there. Follow the crowds.

Oh. Oh no. But if I walk this way...I'll go past...

Oh no. No. Not this.

There isn't another way round. I don't want to go past...

Yep. There it is. The Memorial Wall. And the hundreds of hand painted hearts. The patients, the hospital staff, my colleagues, Mum.

The unfinished Memorial Wall.

BINNIE:

(V.O) Those crowds. There's Rupa. Up the front with a loud hailer. She's got guts. And Marissa's clutching her placard. There's Carmel in the centre of the crowd banging a wooden spoon on the bottom of a saucepan. And a sea of signs. "Claps won't pay the bills". "Broken and broke". "From Hero to Zero". Rub the back of my ear. "Patients are sick, we are tired", "SOS Save our staff."

What if...What if I could burst into a board room of suits. Stand at the head of a polished mahogany table, look right in the eyes of the people sitting round it, sweep my hands across review papers and pay recommendations, and let them skitter across the long table, flutter up on the breeze, and out of the window. But I can't do that. I can't fill out an evaluation form. I can't write to my manager. I can't pop little cards in an anonymous suggestion box.

Well I don't want this anymore. I don't deserve less anymore. We are always here and we always will be. So come on Binnie. Muscle in. Because, this - I can do.

(TO CROWDS) Excuse me. Sorry. Excuse me...can I just - ? Thanks.

(V.O) And here we are. Rupa and Carmel and Marissa and Donna and me. We hold hands. Connected like the hearts on the wall. Those hearts. Close my eyes. I need a break. I do want a holiday. I wish I could afford one. I want to relax on a sun lounger, with the Ashes playing in my headphones, like Mum would have done. I want to jet off. But not just yet. Not today, because there isn't any other option than this. Deeds, not words. That moment when you're on a plane and you're about to go up and there's that low rumble of the engine, but you're not moving yet, and any minute you're going, and they tell you that in an emergency, you have put your own oxygen mask on yourself before you help anyone else with theirs. Save yourself to save others. Well that makes perfect sense.

So. I open my eyes.

And I blink.

I take a deep breath.

And I raise my placard up high.

End.