

Special Award-winning Story “She Called Five Minutes Ago”

She called five minutes ago. She's broken down high up in the moors and it's a filthy day. I was up at 6.30am and it was raining cats and dogs then, now there's a black sky resting heavily on the hills ready for another downpour.



Law gave me. What am I thinking? I couldn't use those numbers for the lottery, it only goes up to 49.

I did everything with Janet; shared boyfriends, stole boyfriends, laughed, sang and wept. Then she met her Billy and we saw less of

It's so typical of her, she'd never think to take an A road when she can use a minor one. She told me once that she'd heard Vivienne Westwood always took side roads if they looked interesting, regardless of where they ended up. So she started to do it 'for fun'. I told her you're not Vivienne Westwood you're Janet Penfold, from Giggleswick. It fell on deaf ears.

I'm supposed to ring the AA and give them her whereabouts, I wouldn't care but this is the second time she's done this to me in a month and it's not even me she's visiting.

I'm sure the number for the AA is on the pad from last time. There's the number for the Indian I ordered last week, with what I chose listed down the side: 3, 40, 42, 96 and 98. I think I'll use those for my lottery numbers this week.

I've known her for thirty years but she's got to me lately. The slow realisation of what she's like has come over me like the achy, shivery feeling you get before a cold.

The phone rang when I was chopping onions for tea. I am half-way through a meat and potato pie recipe my Mother-in-

each other, and I found Dan. Then I had George and lost him and I didn't see her at all through all that time of grief, hating myself.

She's been dead fourteen years this month, my Mother-in-Law. That was a blessed release, for me that is. Dan thought the sun shone out her you-know-what but we never got on, not really. I wasn't what she considered 'good enough'. Luckily, Dan's not an anniversary man, it's likely he's not remembered.

The rain is coming down in streaks, masking the hills behind a great grey curtain. It reminds me of those hanging lights in the arctic, the ones that dance. Dan saw them once in Scotland, Rory Balliaris they're called.

Janet'll be sitting in her car. She said she had to walk right up to the top of the hill to get a reception. She was lucky, there's hardly any signal on the moors and she's in the wildest part. She does it for her art, she likes to pull over and 'capture things' with her sophisticated camera. She makes huge paintings from them that don't sell. I've got six all parcelled up in my barn,

Continued on page 25

the chickens sit on them and crap all over the wrappings.

My hands smell of onions. I should get on, but I have to make this call. She'll be cold up there and it's getting dark.

I always resented that she didn't have to work like me. Her husband pays for her extraordinary clothes and blue gin.

I could have had him, Billy. He saw me first, but she dibbed him like she always did with the good-looking ones. I was the shy one, the one with the over made-up eyes and white skin. The one who hid herself under a spiky black fringe. My mother always told me that I looked like something the cat had dragged in. It's only when you're looking at the photos later you think 'what a mess'. And those awful clothes, tights with big holes in them.

Janet always had smooth blonde hair and eyes like one of our calves, big and brown. There was a splash of freckles just when freckles made a come-back too, just in sodding time. Every thing she did was just perfect, like when she found the most immaculate angora sweater in the second hand shop for 75p. I was so angry with her. God it seems senseless now but then you had to see the looks she got, not just from men, but other women too.

I should get this pie done, Dan will be in from the fields if it's pouring down. The fencing can wait 'til tomorrow, those fields need only be ready for spring. The number's in the directory, I underlined it. 0845, one of those free

ones. People like Janet, who get themselves in a pickle through their own stupidity, should have to pay. It would teach them to check things. I do. And, I take main roads.

She's always thought of herself first, she's selfish to the core. I suppose I found her fascinating, bewitching in a way. That probably sounds odd. Dan could never stand her, he says she's loud and bawdy. I always thought she was good for a laugh. The things we did.

You'd think AA would be the first name in the book but it's AAA Plumbing and Drains Solutions.

The thing is she never turned up when the bad things happened, she just disappeared. My other friends would say "What does Janet say?" and I'd say something vague, but knowing that I hadn't seen her the whole time. Like after George died and all that. She told me she couldn't stand hospitals. I can't either but Dan and me we didn't get to choose. I sent her some flowers when her Dad died, she didn't even send me a card. Not a card, or anything.

The number's here.
On the pad.

I can see it now, I'd written it down the last time but it's been obscured by one of Dan's doodles. I'll phone now and tell them where she is.

Or, maybe I'll give it another half an hour.

Jan Harvey

*Jan has won the **George Hummer Prize for Creative Writing** at Chipping Norton Music Festival with her story 'Five Minutes Ago'. The prize was awarded by a panel of three judges chaired by Patrick Neale, a Whitbread Prize Judge. Jan was asked to read it at The Festival Concert on Saturday 23rd March. Congratulations Jan!*