

## A Scottish Arts Club Short Story Competition Finalist

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### THE MOVE

BY ROSIE DODD

“Don’t touch that you fool! Honestly, people these days... can’t trust them with a bloody thing.”

“Aunty Mildred! You can’t talk to people like that,” moaned Lucy, wringing her hands as the thickset man in overalls forced a vase into a box with a rather nasty thud.

Mildred turned to Lucy, her electric blue eyes flashing with anger.

“I’m sick of people telling me what I can and can’t say - all this political correctness nonsense. Well, now I won’t be able to say a thing since you’re sending me to that “home,” filled with decrepit old plebs.” She slammed her fist down on the counter so the whole thing rattled.

“Oh Aunty, you know it’s not like that. Just, just, have a seat, I’ll make tea,” Lucy said, running her hands through her hair. She pulled up a chair by the kitchen table, pushing aside a magazine opened on ‘A Scottish Review of French Wine’, then gestured for Mildred to sit.

“I think I’ll need something stronger than tea... how about a dram?” asked Mildred sitting down.

“Aunty it’s only 11!”

“Oh bugger the time! If you’re taking away my freedom by sending me to that god-awful place, don’t take away my whisky.”

Lucy gave her a glance, but something in her great aunt’s face told her not to argue so she busied herself mixing the drink as the removal men clattered noisily around them.

“Thank you, Lucy,” said Mildred accepting the amber filled glass. She took a large gulp and smacked her lips together in satisfaction. “That’s better, tha... You! Put that down at once,” shrieked Mildred pointing her bony finger at the thin man in overalls, who had picked up a

photo frame and was examining it. Jumping, the man dropped the frame back on the table and scurried out the room.

“You see Lucy? Hopeless.”

But Lucy wasn't listening; she had picked up the photo and was looking intently at the black and white figure.

“Who is this Auntie? It's not great Uncle Jackson is it?”

Mildred seemed to blush at the question but shook her head sternly.

“No, of course not, your great uncle was far less handsome.”

“Then who?”

“Oh, never you mind.... can't even recall myself.”

“Come on Auntie, you've got a picture of a stranger in uniform, and you don't know who he is?”

Lucy grinned at Mildred who spared the photo an impatient glance.

“A...friend. Died in the war. Knew him before your great uncle.”

Mildred snatched the frame away and turned it over on the table.

“No point dwelling on the past, anyway, go home please, I can handle myself.”

Lucy shot Mildred a suspicious look.

“But I'm giving you a lift to the retirement home, Mum said to.”

“No need, darling, really, I have ordered a taxi, I think I can manage moving into, oh what do they call it? Ah yes, ‘The house that that feels just like Home’ on my own.” She grimaced.

“Auntie, please, I'm sure you will like it, it's the really nice, it's just knowing someone is there if...” but Mildred cut across.

“Yes, yes, I know...you're worried I'm alone here and I...I understand this house is far too large for one person...” she sighed, but composed her features to a smile “Anyway Lucy, I can find my own way to this, this ‘home.’”

“Well...if you insist Auntie.” Lucy kissed Mildred on both cheeks, “Mum and I will come around next week then.”

“Sounds lovely.” Mildred watched as Lucy turned and left, not taking her eyes from her until she had closed the door. Mildred blinked, drained her whisky, stood up, and clapped her hands.

“Change of plan boys,” she called out, “You won’t be taking my things to that pestilence retirement home, but to this address here.”

She handed the thickset man a slip of paper with a messy scrawl on it. He squinted at it, frowning.

“A storage unit?”

“Indeed,” replied Mildred as she opened the utility room and pulled out a large canvas suitcase that looked full to bursting point.

“What? Shall we bring your stuff to the retirement home another day then?”

“No you fool, my ‘stuff’ can stay at the unit, I’m not going to a retirement home I quite refuse, I’d eat my hat before I set place in such an institution!”

The men looked at each other unsure.

“You will do this and will not speak a word of this to anyone, understand?” The men nodded, too scared to answer.

“Well, get a move on, don’t have all day.”

They left the room hastily. Mildred moved to the table and picked up the frame sighing.

“Oh, Archie, my darling.”

She stood for a moment staring into the handsome face, before giving herself a shake and carefully placing the photo into her handbag.

The plane rattled as it took off and she shut her eyes tightly. She could see his grey eyes, his thick dark hair always so ruffled, that ridiculous cravat that he had loved. The plane’s engine hummed loudly. She could still hear the sound of his laughter, a school boy’s giggle, such a pure beautiful sound, that was always so contagious she couldn’t help but join in. The plane took off, another adventure. He always insisted on silly outings, through the fields, the beach, on a rocky boat, his face always alight with excitement. She could practically feel his smooth hand in hers; see the way he looked at her so intently, like he was seeing more than

just her. And then him, in his uniform, that last fleeting kiss, the soft brush of his lips on hers. Her stomach gave little twinge, and she knew it had nothing to do with the turbulence as the plane rocketed skywards.

As a missing report was being issued throughout Scotland a plane landed gently on the tarmac at Charles de Gaulle airport. A cold breeze greeted the passengers as they alighted and entered through the arrival gate.

Mildred walked through the door and looked around. Her eyes swept the room then landed on a man looking at the arrivals through a thick pair of glasses. Their eyes met and a smile swept across his face making his eyes twinkle, he gestured to her with a thick bouquet of peonies and walked purposely towards her.

“Well, I never, Mildred Allan! It has been a while.”

“Archie, is that really you? You, you got my letter then.”

“If I hadn’t, I wouldn’t have known to come here,” He smiled. “Mildred, you look wonderful.”

He took her hand and kissed it with such tenderness that a pink flush rose in her pale cheeks. He smiled and led her out of the airport, taking her bag and opening the door to a silver taxi. They got in and it began to twist its way through the traffic. Mildred turned in her seat to look at him, her eyes wide.

“I can’t believe I’m seeing you after all these years. If I hadn’t read that wine review of yours I would never have believed you were still alive. Everyone thought you were dead.” A sad look crossed his face at her words.

“So did most people. Apparently some other chap with the same name as me died, caused a bit of a mix-up. I couldn’t tell them otherwise as I had been captured and taken to a prisoner of war camp.”

“But... But, why didn’t you find me, after, when you came back?” More colour rose in Mildred’s cheeks, and her penetrating glare had come back.

“I did, you silly duck, then I found out you had married Jackson... Jackson, of all people!”

“Well, he was very persistent, and he did give me a lovely ring,” she shook her head and looked down at her feet. “He died ten years ago...you could have contacted me then.”

Archie placed his hand on her chin, and gently lifted it, so she was again looking into his eyes.

“I didn’t know he had died... I had nothing and no one to come back to, so I came here, bought a vineyard, made some lovely wine.”

They looked at each other, his hand remaining on her face, neither knowing what to say next.

“So what happens now?”

“Now? Why we have lunch my dear...my darling” his face edged nearer to hers.

“Where to then my Archie?”

“Well, they serve a jolly good roast at 12:30 at my place, looks right over the most beautiful vineyard with rolling hills, quite beautiful.”

“Oh and where do you live, a hotel, or a chateau?” she asked laughing.

“Well it’s actually a most excellent retirement home, honestly, it feels just like home.” And before she could say another word he had placed his other hand on her cheek and kissed her.

*Word Count: 1,476*

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