

# Light in her darkness by Emily Warner

(Finalist, 15 years and over category, Janis Clark Short Story Competition)



I walk in to my new job.

It is old, dark and smells musty but with a faint scent of hospitals; just enough to remind everyone that despite the worn sofas and photos it is a hospice. A place of no return.

Nurses rush through the corridors with bundles of stained clothes, pushing wheelchairs or holding old wrinkled hands belonging to the inhabitants. They don't rush. Most of them sag in chairs. Those who can walk just shuffle around the tiny garden.

I walk into my new job at the hospice.

Jillian is the nurse who shows me around flashing her white grin at whoever meets her eye. She is an efficient woman, clipboard in hand, checking everything is in order.

"Alan, have you taken your pills?"

"Sally, have you washed Maggie's sheets yet?"

"Good morning Agatha, let me help you to a chair."

I feel overwhelmed by this frenzy of activity, this ordered chaos that unfolds around me. Once I have been shown the building I am introduced to the dozing inhabitants. Everyone except Rose.

"Who's that?" I ask intrigued by the old lady, who looks as if a slight breath of wind might knock her over. She is crumpled in a dark corner, eyelids half closed in her sunken face. Activity seems to still around her. "Oh, that's just Rose, you won't get anything out of her," Jillian says, fake smile pasted on her face.

Gently I approach the old woman.

"Does she have any family?" I ask.

"Not any more, there are some photos on the fireplace though, but I wouldn't bother, she won't remember a thing," Jillian says impatiently before marching off in search of another unfinished job.

I approach Rose taking her withered hand in mine.

"Hello Rose." I say reaching up for the faded photograph above us.

"Who are these people in the photo?"

A moment passes and then I see something incredible. A light appears in Rose's vacant eyes and her head rises from her collapsed chest. She reaches out and lovingly caresses the torn edges of the photo in my hand.

"That's me," she whispers pointing at a pretty young girl smiling in the arms of a man in a soldier's uniform.

"That's John. He could always make me laugh. We used to live on a farm. Some days...before the war... we would ride the horses up the hill and watch the sunset. It was so beautiful."

Rose's face lights up and a small flame flickers in her soul, a memory that ignites her. A woman with a story to tell. The light appears in the darkness, the abyss of her memory. Then,

"Time for your medicine Rose" Jillian interrupts.

The flame is extinguished, she sinks back against the cushions, dark and cold again.

"I did warn you girl, you won't get anything from her," Jillian tuts.

Rose is still and empty, but as I stand to leave I swear I see the ghost of a smile playing on her lips.