

In the land of the dead

A grief-stricken man meets a woman who helps shake him out
of the past.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Tall wrought iron Gothic gates stand ominous against a bright blue sky. A hunched-over elderly gentleman shuffles up the path of an ancient cemetery, a bunch of flowers in his hand. In the distance can be heard the sound of an ice cream van.

Eventually he turns a corner and comes to a halt, beside a well-tended grave. He bends down, his knees creaking, and fusses around the edges of the grave, picking up stray leaves and litter, rearranging ornaments and removing wilting flowers from the numerous vases. He fills a plastic bag with the detritus and then arranges the fresh flowers in a crystal vase.

Slowly, and with difficulty, he straightens up and admires his handiwork. He puts the rubbish bag in a nearby bin, and goes to sit on a nearby bench.

ELDERLY MAN

Hello love.

He closes his eyes and listens to the birdsong, and the faint tinkle of the ice cream van. All is still.

He is enveloped by memories - his laughing bride walking down the aisle, babies in arms, children playing, his wife, smiling...

Someone else sits down heavily on the bench. Startled, he opens his eyes, and sees an ELDERLY LADY, bright blue twinkly eyes and an inquisitive smile.

ELDERLY LADY

Hello there.

The man shuffles a little further down the bench. He closes his eyes again. The lady unwraps a bright red popsicle, placing the wrapper on the bench between them. She starts to eat the popsicle. Noisily.

The man stares at her. She gives him a bright red smile, and offers him a suck of the lollipop. He shakes his head vigorously.

ELDERLY LADY

I've a candy bar too.

With effort, the man lifts himself up from the bench and walks back over to his wife's grave. He stares at it for a while.

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Another noise assails him, jolting him back from his memories. Knitting needles. He turns back to the bench and sees the woman, lollipop in mouth, knitting furiously. He glares at her. She smiles, and makes to take the popsicle out of her mouth to speak, but he turns around hurriedly.

Silence resumes.

A breeze stirs, and the popsicle wrapper blows on to the grave. Incensed, the man grabs it and turns round to the bench. The woman is gone. He looks up and down the path. She's nowhere to be seen. Then he spots her, behind a tree. He walks over to her, holding the wrapper towards her.

ELDERLY MAN

Is this yours?

ELDERLY LADY

Hello dear. My name's Nancy.

ELDERLY MAN

Is this your wrapper?

NANCY

I suppose it is dear.

ELDERLY MAN

Well, would you mind not littering
my wife's grave with it please!

He holds the wrapper out to her, but she doesn't take it. He looks at her. She looks at him.

NANCY

How are you, George?

ELDERLY MAN

What? Do we know each other? Please
take this.

NANCY

Such a lovely name. George
McClelland. Do you have Irish
ancestry?

GEORGE

How do you know my name?

NANCY

It's on your wife's grave stone,
George. 'Carol McClelland. Beloved
wife to George.' Lovely.

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GEORGE

I don't... I...

NANCY

'Devoted mother to Rachel and Patrick.' They're lovely names too. Where are Rachel and Patrick?

George stares at her, too outraged to speak.

NANCY

How did Carol die, George?

GEORGE

How dare you!!

NANCY

Ah, you must be heartbroken. Married fifty years. It's a long time.

George is still holding out the popsicle wrapper. She takes it off him, and wraps it around the now licked-clean lolly stick. She gives it back to him.

NANCY

Thanks, pet.

George's mouth opens but no sound comes out.

NANCY

Do you come here regularly? I suppose you're still in the first stages of grief, if it's only been a year.

GEORGE

How do you know so much about me?

NANCY

I told you, it's on the grave stone. Like a little potted history. I love this cemetery. So many interesting stories.

She sweeps her arm around the expanse of the graveyard, taking in its higgledy piggledy gravestones and magnificent trees.

NANCY

There's a crypt over there going back four generations. Little plaques on all the walls. Lovely

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NANCY (cont'd)
poetry. And a grave over there with
the husband, wife and the family
dog all inside. Fascinating, I find
it.

GEORGE
That's what you do, is it? Go
around cemeteries, littering, and
nosing into other people's
business?

NANCY
Oh, it's not nosing. Social
history. And sometimes, I find that
people in cemeteries really just
want someone to talk to.

GEORGE
Well I don't.

NANCY
Well, that's ok. It's been nice
talking to you anyway.

She turns back to the gravestone she's standing beside.

GEORGE
And who's this poor sod you're
reading all about then - what
'interesting' life story do they
have?

NANCY
Tragic, this one. Car accident.
Three lives, snuffed out in a
second.

George looks at the grave stone. It reads:

IN TREASURED MEMORY OF

FRANK HURLEY

ANNE HURLEY

GEORGINA HURLEY

BELOVED HUSBAND AND DAUGHTERS TO NANCY.

FOREVER IN MY HEART.

George looks up and sees Nancy walking slowly away down the
path.

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GEORGE

I'm sorry.

She waves her hand but carries on walking. George trots along behind her.

GEORGE

I didn't realise.

She keeps walking.

GEORGE

Please... I... I *would* like to talk.

Nancy whirls around.

NANCY

Really?

She looks down at the popsicle wrapper in his hand, and again we hear the faint musical chime of the ice cream van.

NANCY

It would be lovely to talk to someone who isn't dead.

GEORGE

Yes, I know that feeling. Perhaps we could go get an ice cream, together.

Smiling hesitantly at each other, they walk slowly, companiably, to the graveyard gates. A few steps along, George bends down and picks up another stray lollipop stick.