

I parked my car in the hospital car park and paid for an all-day ticket. I looked up at the hospital building with a feeling of apprehension in my stomach. The last time I was here my Mum was just about to go into surgery. But before she went down, as they say, she made one request to me. She assured me, quite confidently, that she was in good hands in the coming days, so I was not to worry about her, and could I complete a mission for her.

Mum had come to me for her yearly visit, two weeks by the sea. It was her last full day and she was rushing around buying gifts for her friends, the neighbours, when she was knocked down by a car as she was crossing a busy junction. The police and an ambulance were called. The police looked in her handbag and found her mobile phone. I was listed as the emergency contact. She was already in the A&E when I arrived. Thankfully I was with her when the doctor came into the cubicle to tell her she was being admitted to hospital for further test and treatment.

I stayed with her and went with her to the ward she was being transferred to. The nurses were very good and let me stay until quite late. They were monitoring her vitals and were pleased she was chatting to me. But it was our usual conversation about her living on her own.

She lives in London, which she loves and wouldn't dream of moving in with me. I live on the coast, on my own, divorced with no children. She's a widow, with no thought of getting a partner. When I've suggested it, she would shake her head vehemently and say, "No one can replace your father, so don't suggest it again. Anyway, what would I do all day, all my friends live in my street? We're a close-knit group. If I came and lived with you, I would have to make new friends, and to be honest I'm not up to it. And your's are either at work, like you, or have young families. I'm too old for young babies running around me."

"No, you come to me a week before Christmas. We go to shows, see the lights. Have wonderful meals out together. Everything in London just before Christmas is about having fun. I come to you in the summer for two weeks on the coast, just before the children break up for the summer holidays. The air is so fresh being by the sea. Everything is slower. We walk along the beach carrying our sandals and stop and have a coffee or ice cream from a beach hut. And we always see a summer show on the pier. It suits me and I think it does you?" And if I'm being truthful; it does.

So, the next morning I arrived at the hospital with a bag of Mum's personal stuff and as a special treat a bottle of her favourite cologne. We sat there chatting about nothing in particular. I just wanted to make sure she was alert and taking notice, when she suddenly said, "I need you to go to London and tell my friends what has happened to me. Now, you will need a big writing pad and several pens or pencils because I want all their news." I looked at her as if she was going mad. Because she said quite seriously, "Belinda, you have to go to each one in turn. Don't miss anyone out. If she's not in, put a cross next to her name and go back later. You must not miss anybody out. Oh, and at each house you will have a coffee or tea and something to eat. Do not refuse, understood," she said quite aggressively, then continued in a

normal voice. "Their news might be the same, just said a little differently. But you must pay attention. These are my friends and are easily upset. Each one has a bit of news for me to hear."

She then handed me a sheet of paper one of the nurses had given her earlier. She proceeded to list the neighbours names and house numbers for me to write down, as I felt her eyes watching me. "But Mum you can phone them," I said, half hoping to get out of going to London and sleeping in Mum's house. A big London Victorian house, the one I was brought up in. I'm not afraid of being on my own, but when I was younger, there was Mum, Dad and their relatives and all my friends popping in. It was a busy house. Now it will be a quiet house without Mum there.

At that moment I wanted to search out the doctor and tell him my Mum is ok. Her marbles are all in place, but I could see there was something wrong with my Mum, and they were going to fix her. So, if giving her peace of mind and the ability to cope with what was to come, I would go to London and see her army of friends and neighbours.

But before I left Mum that night to go to London the next day, I took out my mobile phone and took several photos of her. When I showed them to her, she just gasped and I could see a tear, because the bruises were just beginning to appear. I put my phone down and went and gave her a big hug. I asked her if she was sure she wanted me to go to London and get the news or stay with her. But her reply was a confident, "Go to London and get the news."

Well, I went and did as I was told, being the dutiful daughter. Oh boy did I eat a lot of cake and drink lots of coffee. But I saw everyone and got the news, and they were shocked by the photos I took of Mum in the hospital. I was getting ready to leave London when there was a knock on the door. On opening it there stood all the neighbours. Each one had a card and Tupperware box with something in it for Mum. I just stood there and wanted to cry, but I knew Mum would say 'chin up Belinda, you're my -representative'. So, I went and said my sincere thanks to each one and promised them I would phone them with an update on Mum's condition as soon as I got back.

So here I am standing in the doorway of Mum's ward armed with cards, cake and of course writing pads full of Mum's friends and neighbours news.

I could see Mum was asleep as I walked into the ward. So, I went to the nurses station to ask how things went. I had promised Mum I would not keep phoning the nurses. Anyway, as she said, "You'll have something to tell my friends when you get back, and you have seen me. Right."

As I walked over to Mum's bed she woke up. With a big smile on both our faces. I said, "Hi Mum. Do you want your cards and cake or all the news?"

She said, "Hello Belinda. First a hug from you, then the news."