

Missing Derek

To be honest, I am not very fond of my own company.

Mind, I take good care of myself. I'm not one of them people who doesn't know how to look after themselves. No, it's just – well, I don't feel *right* if there's no-one else around, if you see what I mean. And now our Derek's gone, I don't know what I'll do. No, it's all right, I've got a tissue here. I suppose it sounds boring, but he always used to come with me if I had shopping to do, going round Asda with the trolley. He never used to mind that. And little things, like watching telly. We'd sit there all evening sometimes, if there was something good on, like *Holby* or *Eastenders*. I like a bit of news too – I always like to know what's going on. He never used to talk much, but he'd always agree if I had something to say about Phil Mitchell, or them Afghans. Now and again he'd say, why don't we do something different for a change. But he'd always come round to my way of thinking. There's a sort of comfort in routine, I always think. No, Derek was happy enough. He never let on there was anything wrong, at any rate.

Thanks, I'll just sit here for a bit and take the weight off my pins. Lord, didn't that vicar go on and on? You wouldn't think there'd be that much to say about Derek. Where was I? Oh, aye. Now he's gone, I don't know how I'll manage on my own. D'you know, I'm starting to do daft things. I go round the house, looking at the places where he used to sit. Or I go dusting his things, and looking at old photographs. I found one the other day – I think it was our Karen's christening – he looked quite smart for once. He never could do a tie properly, see. Eggs, he always used to like eggs. I found a few in the fridge. Fair brought a lump to my throat, that did, so I threw the beggars out.

I'll tell you what's got worse, and that's my rheumatism. Derek always used to forget about that, and how I found it hard to walk anywhere. He could be right heartless sometimes. He used to say, if I could get about all right in the January sales, I could just as easily go to Blackpool and have a walk on the prom. Well it's different, isn't it? He never used to understand.

I suppose he had my best interests at heart, but he had a funny way of showing it. The other year he sent me on a holiday, said it'd do me good. One of those Arnold Wallace things, on a coach. He said as I'd like it, on account of it was all planned out beforehand and he knew I always liked to know what was going on. Devon, it were. Lots to do in Devon, he said, and I could meet new people. He'd bought me the ticket and all. I said he'd better come too, but he was having none of it. Put his foot down about it, he did, so in the end I went. But I was *that* worried, 'cos why should he suddenly want me to go and meet new people? And Derek's always needed looking after, see, so I had to phone every night, to keep an eye on him. Oh, he claimed he was all right, but I could see through that, I could. What? Yes, of course he was glad to hear from me. I could tell. And he always asked about what I'd been up to, and whether I'd enjoyed myself. *That* shows he was wishing he'd come with me, I reckon. Shows I'm not the only one who's not very fond of their own company.

I'll have one of those tissues now, if you don't mind. No, it's just my rheumatism. I'm all right. Any road, I've been thinking about that holiday, and what Derek said. I expect it was his way of

getting me used to doing things on my own. He must've known what was in the offing, even then. Never said a word to me, though.

Don't fuss, it's just something in my eye. For all that, I suppose I should've spotted something was up. About last March, I think it was, he started going out in the evenings – 'just going for a walk', he'd say. He'd be out a couple of nights a week, and when I asked him what he was up to, he just said he needed his fresh air. I didn't think much of that, I can tell you. But he wasn't going to the pub or that. I couldn't smell beer on his breath, see. So I just took him at his word. More fool me.

Well, that went on for a few months, and sometimes he'd be out really late. I said he should go to the doctor's, but he just laughed. Wouldn't be any use, he said. Well, he was right about that.

Cake? No thanks. Don't care much for marzipan. Then, out of the blue, he's leaving – packing up! Eh? Oh yes, I argued right enough. 'What do you think you're doing?' I said. 'You can't move out, you can't leave me on my own!' I can still see his face now – he looked like he was puzzled, and sad, and angry all at the same time. And even then, he said something about me being better off without him. I ask you! But he never fooled me. 'You'll be straight back, you will,' I said. 'Mark my words, mister, you'll not manage on your own.' But the beggar took no notice. He just carried on putting his stuff in boxes. I knew he was serious when he packed his videos and his *Railway* magazines – he'd never go anywhere without them. Then he even hired a one of them little vans, to put all his stuff in. So while he was loading it up, I had it out with him. I told him he was – well, I used strong words, I can tell you. Best not repeat 'em, in present company. But he just said as how that made it obvious, didn't it, and how it'd be better for both of us if he moved out. Said he'd call round every week, to see I was all right. Never left me his address, though, or his phone number. Well. I know who to blame – that floozy. Yes, *you* know who I mean. Not that I had an inkling then.

What did I do? Well, he'd only been gone half an hour when I felt my legs going wobbly and my throat getting all tight. I thought I was having a seizure, and it'd all be Derek's fault. So I went round to see Alice Helsby, at number fifty-three. She took me in, a proper good neighbour she is, and we watched *Eastenders*. No, I didn't stay over. They've got one of them German Shepherds, and I never did like dogs.

I had tea at Alice's for a few days, but then one of her boys got ill – she said she thought it might be swine flu. Well, I didn't want to risk catching that, but it meant I'd be on my own, didn't it? Then I remembered I still had Derek's number at work, and I called him there and said, when was he coming back? I told him how hard it had been, so he came round that evening. And do you know what he said? He said, it was bound to be difficult at first, but he was sure I'd get used to it. I ask you! He *knows* I'm not very fond of my own company.

I'm really lonely now. After I kept calling Derek at work, he got the switchboard to block me. No, I don't get out much, except for the bingo. And most Saturdays I go to the shops with Alice. What? Well, of course, I stay on after church on Sundays, for a cuppa. I don't hold with it all this religious stuff myself, but it's a bit of company.

And I have to do all the housework now. Derek never used to do much, of course. He'd do the dishes most nights, and cook something of a weekend – mostly omelettes, it were. And I could never manage the decorating. And there's always been those bits on the landing where I can't reach the cobwebs.

Ooh, that's kind. I'll have another glass of sherry, please. Last week I went to the doctor with my palpitations and my rheumatism. He says I should get out more. What does he know?

Oh, didn't I say? Yes, Derek's been coming round every week, on a Wednesday night. Oh, aye. Regular as clockwork. Well, it's the least he could do, isn't it, after walking out on me like that.

What happened next? Aye, you may well ask. As if Derek moving out wasn't enough, what does he do but bring his girlfriend round! 'This is Belinda,' he says, 'and she's someone very special to me.' Ooh, I was spitting feathers. Adding insult to injury, that's what I call it. Floozy!

Eh up, they'll be off in a minute, bride and groom. What's that? Well *of course* I had to come. I admit, when Derek gave me the invitation I wasn't sure – after all, I'd have to face that floozy, wouldn't I? But I couldn't miss out on my own son's wedding, could I?