

## A Time and a Place

By Mark Turner

If anywhere felt like home for Emma, it was the cemetery.

She often sat on the grass and dwelt in the silence. The headstones and statues surrounded her as non-judgemental friends joining in her contemplation. They remained segregated as in life; the well off, the ostentatious, the religious (each denomination in its own section), the hard done by and the simple, all appropriately labelled. These markers said more about those who remained than the lives of the deceased. They strived to retain the social standing of the occupant no matter where the grave was placed.

It was the silent eloquence of the granite, concrete and wooden symbols that pleased her. She related to the fading inscriptions that made her guess the dates and words. The older graves aged as the occupants had in life - wrinkles etched in their skin, sunken shoulders of earth and headstones bent forward with age. The younger tombstones were shiny and assertive each engraving competing with its neighbour for cleverness of phrasing but somehow never being truly original. Some revealed nothing but a name. She could talk to all these graves without fear of contradiction.

Emma thought about the cemetery to the point of obsession. It was not just for her quiet time; an escape from her working life and financial stress which had become more difficult to manage, especially with her ongoing health issues. For her, visiting the cemetery was a respite from these problems.

It wasn't that Emma was depressed or in need of a holiday; she never had the time or inclination for marriage and children. Her business and the staff at the workshop that she established many years ago, was her life, but not her whole life, there was another part she kept submerged never allowing it to come up for air. She was well educated, still in her forties but had no close friends. A genetic disorder affecting her heart limited her physical activities, so she loved to write. It was her only hobby and the solitude of those tombs and their untold stories intrigued her, although loneliness contaminated her thoughts.

Her nights were restless. She was becoming concerned about her dreams which seemed a little too alive. One morning, as Emma looked at her reflection in the mirror, the image of a dream returned with such clarity that she was certain it was beside her. A man dressed in muddy dungarees, gumboots and a sweat stained hat, stared back at her and appeared to be mouthing words she couldn't quite make out. He looked around as if searching for something and then faded from view. She shuddered as she recalled her dream of the same man backing up against a fence as he was crushed by panicking cattle. She could still hear the noise and reverberation of his scream.

“Perhaps I do need a holiday” she said, rather shakily, to her reflection.

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