

The Purple Dolphin – extract

The bright sky and mild breeze lasted well into the afternoon, so after buying some unhealthy cuisine from a mobile van, Cathy pushed Molly's chair along the sea front where there were no cobbles to negotiate. It was after four when they got home, and although there was no sign of Ted in the house, he'd left two leeks on the kitchen table as promised, and a note propped up against the empty teapot.

My beautiful daughter, please forgive me.
Love you always,
Dad xxx

She read the note three times and still didn't understand it. Had he left home or did he just mean sorry about Doris? Juggling these thoughts, she settled Molly in her armchair and crept up the stairs to check her parents' room. His wardrobe was still full of clothes, so he hadn't gone anywhere yet. Feeling less concerned, Catherine returned to the kitchen, carried the leeks to the sink and glanced out of the window. Benji lay on his belly under the tree, next to an overturned set of step ladders. His head turned sideways, gazing upwards. She followed his curious stare ... and then she saw her father hanging there by his blue spotty tie. The tie he saved for special occasions. Adrenalin flooded her body. She raced outside, leek still in hand. Possessed by anger, she took aim.

“What ..WHAT THE BLOODY HELL..... DO YOU THINK YOU’RE DOING?” She choked back sobs as she swung at his legs with the leek.
“YOU..” (bash) “CAN’T” (bash) “DO THIS!” (bigger bash) she yelled, as though it was still possible to change his mind. His body began to sway. Back and forth, to the rhythm. Then she let the sobs come, yelled at him again and hit him some more, until she realised the pointlessness of it all; threw down the tattered remains of their intended supper; cried out in frustration and stumbled back into the house to dial 999.