

WOMAN LEFT BEHIND

by

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THE SCREEN IS BLACK

We hear the sound of a phone line, ringing. It is answered.

ELSIE

...just the week...He wanted to get away before Easter...it's bloody freezing - and now the government are saying we may go into some national lockdown..? I don't know. I just want to get home, but Thomas loves it here...You're joking! When does he ever?

OVER BLACK

The sound of shoes on gravel, gradually getting louder.

TITLE CARD (over black) - WOMAN LEFT BEHIND

FADE IN:

EXT. HOLIDAY COTTAGE CARPORT - MORNING

A woman takes a shopping bag from the boot of a car and places it on the ground next to her, on top of a large pile, and closes the boot. She is wearing a cable jumper, bobble hat and wellies. As she straightens up, we see her breath, and then her face. This is ELSIE, (72). She looks at the pile and sets her jaw. She reaches over and grabs the top 3 bags and hefts them up the path towards the door, which has a large wheelchair ramp. The bags clank as she struggles with them.

She limps around, off the path, towards the back door.

The cottage is stone and slate, with an overgrown fence and a rusted gate. The garden is wind-whipped, with mosses, heather and wild grass.

INT. HOLIDAY COTTAGE KITCHEN - DAY

ELSIE places the bags down on the counter next to an ancient, chipped teapot and a large flask. She rubs her hands together against the cold. She cocks her head, listening, then leans over and opens the door of an ancient Aga.

The pilot light is out.

She straightens up and turns around, opening a drawer. She retrieves a long handled match, strikes it, and re-lights the pilot.

THOMAS (O.S.)
Yer back! It's freezin' in here!

ELSIE calmly fills a kettle and places it on the Aga.

EXT. BEACHHEAD - LATE AFTERNOON

The beachhead is jagged and windswept. There is a sandy pathway leading to a viewpoint bench. It is currently deserted.

THOMAS (74), labours as he pushes himself along in a wheelchair. He is a big man, obviously once powerful, and does not look well. He has a short coat and a large RN scarf.

He is wheeling himself along towards a lighthouse. There are a few trawlers in the distance. As he nears the bench, he pulls up 10 feet short with a grunt and turns out to face the sea. The wind is getting up and blows with a steadily increasing ferocity.

THOMAS applies his brakes and sticks his arms straight out in front of him.

ELSIE, walking about 20 feet behind him, stops and looks at him. She is carrying a large blanket over her shoulder, as well as the flask and a shopping bag.

She places the bag down and approaches him, unfurling the blanket. With a practiced motion, she whips it across his lap. THOMAS lowers his arms, pinning it in place, and turns his hands up. ELSIE hands him the flask, trudges back, picks up the bag, and sits down on the bench, at the side farthest from THOMAS.

ELSIE reaches into the bag, removes a pack of cigarettes and lights one, taking a huge drag. Thomas glances at her but says nothing. He opens the flask and pours his tea.

The seagulls roar as they come back overhead.

INT. HOLIDAY COTTAGE - NIGHT

In the kitchen, ELSIE stands at the counter, filling a weekly pill-box from a host of medicine bottles.

From the lounge, we hear the television.

ELSIE drops pills in with rapidity bred from familiarity, until one of the bottles comes short. She frowns and looks at the other bottles, then shakes her head.

Next to the pills is a glass with an upper denture soaking. She glances at her watch and reaches in to the glass and retrieves them as her mobile phone rings. She dries her hands quickly and fumbles for the phone.

THOMAS (O.S.)
WHO IS THAT?! NEWS IS ON!

ELSIE grabs the phone and quickly walks out the back door, into the garden.

EXT. BACK GARDEN - NIGHT

ELSIE stands in the doorway, with the door almost closed. She winces at the cold, and half whispers into the phone.

ELSIE
Hello, dear! How are the...No, we are still here, why?

Her brow furrows.

ELSIE (cont'd)
What lockdown? What does that mean?
Well, then we'll go tomorrow morning...

THOMAS (O.S.)
Lockdown? Elsie! ELSIE!

EXT. HOLIDAY COTTAGE CARPORT - MORNING

THOMAS sits in the front passenger seat of the car, listening to the news on the radio. ELSIE has the boot open, and is struggling to get the wheelchair into the back of the car. She finally shoves hard and we hear something metallic snap with a sharp twang.

ELSIE
Shit.

EXT. SINGLE CARRIAGEWAY - MORNING

The CAR rolls along the road, pulling up to the Kirkwall Orkney Ferry Terminal. There is no ferry. There are no other passengers. A large sign proclaims "Ferry Suspended Due To Lockdown."

There is a police car with a single OFFICER, who gets out and walks over to the car, towards ELSIE's window. She fastens a facemask into place as she walks.

ELSIE lowers the window, and THOMAS leans across her and grunts. The OFFICER addresses Elsie with her eyes.

EXT. SINGLE CARRIAGEWAY - MORNING

The CAR travels back to the cottage.

EXT. HOLIDAY COTTAGE CARPORT - MORNING

The wheelchair lies in a broken heap in front of THOMAS' open car door.

Both of them stare at it.

EXT. HOLIDAY COTTAGE - LATE MORNING

The gravel path is wildly disturbed all the way along. Near the front door of the cottage, THOMAS sits on one of the kitchen chairs, with another one beside him on the path. ELSIE grunts as she lifts the chair, moves it around, and places it next to THOMAS, nearer the cottage door.

She plants it, then pushes it down firmly, making sure it will not rock or slide.

She walks in front of THOMAS and puts her arms out. THOMAS takes her arms and both of them quickly jerk him sideways onto the next chair, which tips a little before settling back in.

THOMAS looks at how far they still have to go and grimaces, then pulls his legs back in front of himself. He is panting with the effort.

ELSIE grimly walks around and picks up the empty chair and moves it closer to the cottage.

INT. HOLIDAY COTTAGE - DUSK

THOMAS is asleep in his chair, the TV on the news, volume high. His dentures sit in a glass next to him on the table.

ELSIE picks up her phone and moves to the kitchen. She clicks to connect.

ELSIE

Hannah? We're still here. No, the ferry is off. I know. I know! Hannah, enough. Your father wanted to go, and how were we meant to know...

ELSIE looks back into the lounge, then walks over to the back door, opens it slightly, and lights a cigarette.

EXT. HOLIDAY COTTAGE - AFTERNOON

The sky is grey, cold and the wind is whipping. ELSIE walks out and gets into the car and drives off.

EXT. SINGLE CARRIAGEWAY - AFTERNOON

The car drives along, towards the town.

EXT. CHEMIST SHOP - AFTERNOON

The car is parked outside. There is a large sign on the door: CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE.

ELSIE stares in disbelief.

EXT. SINGLE CARRIAGEWAY - LATE AFTERNOON

The car travels back to the cottage. The wind is ferocious.

INT. HOLIDAY COTTAGE - DAY

ELSIE opens the back door. We hear snoring. She places her bag down on the counter, and creeps to the living room.

THOMAS is asleep in the chair, head back, remote control still gripped tightly in his hand.

On the table next to him is a small, untouched glass of water and a small pile of pills.

EXT. - BEACHHEAD - LATE AFTERNOON

The car is parked, with all its windows down. Thomas sits in the front, under his blanket, with his flask of tea.

ELSIE is off at the bench, sitting to one side, smoking. Her hand shakes as she brings the cigarette to her lips.

The car's horn honks, then again, then a last, long time.

She finishes the cigarette and makes her way back to the car.

INT. HOLIDAY COTTAGE - NIGHT

ELSIE is finishing the dishes. We hear a colossal thump from the living room, and a thin wail of pain.

ELSIE rushes in to find THOMAS in a heap on the floor, one leg trapped underneath him. ELSIE grabs him under the arms from behind and pulls. His legs straighten and both of them sit gasping. THOMAS looks drained, and grabs the arm of the chair, trying to pull himself back up and in.

ELSIE shakes her head and stands up, wearily, ready to help him. Her phone trills.

THOMAS

Ah, go an' get it!

Something about the way he said it. ELSIE leaves him on the floor and walks into the kitchen, grabbing the phone and her bag, heading for the door.

LATER

ELSIE sits in the living room, alone, the TV droning in the background. She is fast asleep.

On the table next to her are THOMAS'S pillbox, now empty, and a bunch of empty pill bottles.

There is a crack of thunder, and the TV flicks off.

EXT. HOLIDAY COTTAGE - MORNING

It is pouring with rain. The wind is horrible, and there is a rhythmic thumping.

INT. HOLIDAY COTTAGE - MORNING

ELSIE flicks the light switch grimly, with no effect.

THOMAS sits in his chair, staring towards the TV, clutching the remote. He looks grey and drawn.

There is a dull thumping, followed by a muffled smashing sound. THOMAS glances to the window and grunts.

EXT. HOLIDAY COTTAGE CARPORT - DAY

The rain pours down, the wind whips. ELSIE stares at the car. There are small hailstones on the ground near her, melting away.

The front and rear windscreens of the car are shattered. It is undriveable.

She takes out her phone, but has no bars. She dials 999.

Nothing.

She turns and walks back in the cottage.

INT. HOLIDAY COTTAGE - DAY

ELSIE walks in, shaking the rain off, and sees THOMAS sitting in his chair having a massive seizure. His eyes are open, but he fits rhythmically.

She runs over to him, cradling his head and trying to stabilize him.

EXT. HOLIDAY COTTAGE CARPORT - DUSK

An AMBULANCE is parked outside, its back doors open. There is a gurney in the back. A man, in full PPE, jumps down from the back and closes the doors. The ambulance slowly drives off, in no hurry.

A BLACK SEDAN is parked nearby.

The car, with its shattered screens, has one door open. ELSIE sits in the car, cigarette clenched in her fist. She is "keeping it together" only with massive effort.

A MAN, wearing a dark suit, with a black facemask and white vinyl gloves, walks up to the car, carefully staying two metres from the door.

He has a clear plastic folder in his hands. He places it on the bonnet of the car and nods at ELSIE.

He walks to the sedan and drives off.

ELSIE looks at the folder. It is filled with papers and two large, filled envelopes.

She stands up, takes the folder, and walks unsteadily toward the cottage.

INT. HOLIDAY COTTAGE - NIGHT

ELSIE makes tea, automatically setting two cups out. She is glazed over as she pours milk in both, fills one cup and is about to pour the other when she stops and realises.

She looks at the folder on the counter. It is still unopened.

She puts the teapot down and takes the folder, opening it. The two envelopes slide out, one falling open. A silver watch is visible with a worn brown leather band. ELSIE smiles at it gently and picks it out. She looks at the faded inscription, "From Your Loving Elsie".

She looks at the other envelope with a frown. She feels around it, then tears it open. An object drops out. She stares at it.

ELSIE

Oh God...

On the counter is Thomas's upper denture.

EXT. BEACHHEAD - DUSK

ELSIE sits at the bench, staring out to sea.

THOMAS'S blanket sits, folded neatly, on the bench next to her.

Her phone trills. She doesn't even flicker. When it stops ringing, she sighs and reaches into her pocket. She pulls out a pack of cigarettes. She opens it, then stares out to sea again.

A large ship emblazoned NORTHLINK FERRY hoves into view.

ELSIE nods slightly, turns her head to take in the view, draws a big breath, and pulls out a small envelope.

She places it on top of the blanket, then lays the cigarette packet on top.

She reaches down for her bag, lifts it on to her shoulder, stands up and walks straight past the camera towards the sea railing.

FADE TO BLACK.