

Pete

by Naomi Stevens

It's still raining. The window's cold and there's a wet blob on it where my head was. My hair's wet. It was like that when Daddy went away.

I really wanted to go to Michael's birthday party. Mummy said the car won't start so we can't get to Auntie Jane's. When Daddy was here he could make it work. Why can't Mummy do it? And if Mummy can't do things maybe I she won't be able to make me a birthday party when I'm four next month.

Lots has changed since Daddy stopped coming home. That nasty policeman made Mummy cry when he came round. Why did he have to tell Mummy that Daddy'd gone to live with God? Why couldn't Daddy have told her himself? When the policeman left I told Mummy, "I don't like that man. He made you cry." She hugged me but her crying made the top of my head wet, like it is now.

Mummy's voice sounded funny when I asked her when we'd see Daddy again. I wasn't sure what she said, but it sounded like "When it's time for us to go to live with God too." I wondered how we'd know, but Mummy was holding me so tightly I could hardly breathe, so I didn't say anything.

After that Mummy cried a lot. 'Specially the day after my last birthday. I was looking out the window that day too except it wasn't our one. Grandma had taken me to Auntie Pat's. On the other side of the road I could see our house. There was a big, black car covered in flowers outside it. It'd looked really pretty. Auntie Pat kept calling me into the kitchen. But I wanted to know what was happening so I kept on going back to the living room to look out of the window. If Mummy and Grandma hadn't looked so sad, it would have been a fun game.

When Mummy came round for me later she kept hugging and kissing me. I usually hate being cuddled, but that day, just like the one with the policeman, I didn't mind. I don't know why. It sort of felt as if I was helping Mummy somehow and made me feel very grown up. Well, I am getting bigger. I've been going to play group for six months and I'll be going to big-boy school soon.

When I pull my head off the window my hairs stick on it. Water's running down the glass where my head was and my fringe sticks to me when I push it to the side.

Mummy said Michael's house is too far away from the bus stop for us to get a bus there. I know the long lane that leads up to it has lots of holes. The last time we went there, me and Michael tried to walk to the end of the lane. But it started raining and the big holes filled up with water ever so quickly. We were both getting scared about how we'd get back. Then we heard Daddy and Uncle Tom calling us.

Daddy picked me up and Uncle Tom grabbed Michael and we were both put on the back seat of Daddy's car. When we got to Michael's house we giggled as Auntie Bess and Mummy undressed us and wrapped great big towels around us. My towel was fluffy and soft. It was blue with big lighter blue flowers all over it but it was funny 'cos when you looked on the other side of the towel, the colours changed over.

We haven't been to Michael's since Daddy went away and I really want to go there again. Michael's present is wrapped in Winnie the Poo paper. It's on the table behind me next to his birthday card. I wrote my name all by myself without Mummy's help.

Mummy bought me new clothes for the party. I've got a shirt and a pair of long trousers. And they're not jeans. I felt very grown-up in the shop when I tried them on. I'm wearing them now and want to show them to Uncle Tom. It's nice when Uncle Tom tells me I look smart. I have to let Auntie Bess cuddle me otherwise she looks sad. Then she tells Mummy and Daddy how much I've grown since last time. She won't be able to tell Daddy now, but she'll probably tell Mummy - if we can get there!

I heard our front door bell so I followed Mummy to the door. It was Auntie Pat. I didn't hear what she said but Mummy asked if I wanted to pop across the road with her for a minute. I knew she wasn't really asking if I wanted to go but it was just her nice way of saying she won't leave me on my own. I didn't want to get my new clothes wet, so when Mummy put her coat on I got mine on too. I also took my wellies out of the shoe cupboard in the hall and put them on by myself.

When we got over the road to Aunty Pat's, she took our coats and put them on the knob at the end of the bannister and I took off my wellies. Then she and Mummy went down the hall into the kitchen. I didn't though. I went into the sitting room 'cos I knew Patch would be hiding under the table next to

Auntie Pat's big, brown armchair. When it rained like this Patch's tail always stopped wagging and he went under the table.

I'd tried to explain to him that the bangs in the sky were God moving His furniture around and the flashes of light were when He turned His lights on and off. I never could understand why God always chose to move his furniture when it rained. Not unless He washed it before He moved it. I knew why the flashes happened before the bangs though. That was obvious. God had to turn the lights on before He moved anything, so that He could see where to put it. I wondered if my Daddy was helping God now.

As I sat on the armchair I saw the telephone with a big yellow book beside it. Last time I'd been at Aunty Pat's she'd told me it was called a Yellow Pages dye-rect'ry. She'd had a leaky tap that she didn't know how to mend, so she'd shown me how to use the dye-rect'ry to find someone who could do it for her.

Auntie Pat showed me the boxes on the pages which she said were called adverts. Some only had lots of words which she said told her people's names but some also had pictures to show what jobs they did. One of the pictures was of a tap with a drip coming from it so she knew that it would be for someone who could help her with her tap. Then she pointed to the numbers which she said she could put in the 'phone to speak to the person who'd put the advert in so she could tell them what she needed. She let me press the numbers on the 'phone and listen to the different noises.

That gave me an idea! I even felt my eyes getting bigger. I turned to the dye-rect'ry and started flipping over the pages. It didn't take long to find a picture of a car. That means whoever put this advert in the dye-rect'ry has something to do with cars and we need a car. I thought if I 'phone them, I can explain what's happened and perhaps they can help. I wasn't sure what Mummy or Auntie Pat would think about it, so decided not to tell them about it.

I crept over to the living room door and looked out towards the kitchen. Good! They were both busy and looking the other way. Closing the door quietly I went back to the 'phone. Auntie Pat had told me that the thing on the end of the curly wire is the handset. I've seen her talking into it, so I lifted it off the 'phone and put it on top of the open dye-rect'ry to stop the pages flipping back over. Then I carefully pointed to just under the number I wanted.

With my other hand, I pressed the button on the 'phone which had the same shape on it as the first number in the book, just like Auntie Pat showed me. Then I did the same with the next number and the next. But then I came up against a problem. There were two lots of numbers and there was a gap between them. I tried to remember if the number Auntie Pat showed me had two lots of numbers and if she'd used both.

I wondered what to do. I couldn't go and ask anyone. What had she done? I didn't remember her even mentioning a gap so maybe it didn't matter. I moved my finger to the next number and carried on. When I had pressed the last button I picked up the handset and held it to my ear.

A woman's voice started talking before I had a chance to say anything. I listened carefully. I didn't understand everything she said excepting the bit at the end where she said "Please try again later." I had no idea who she was, or how she'd known what numbers I'd dialled, but she sounded so sure of herself that I decided that I'd better do as she said. I put the handset back on the book and found my advert again. The woman was still talking! She was saying the same thing she'd just said! I put the handset back on the 'phone and had a think.

Deciding to explain to the lady that I would try again if only she'd stop talking, I picked up the receiver again and put it back to my ear. She'd gone! The pussy-cat noise was back again. I put the handset back onto the open page of the book and went through the numbers and buttons and tried again.

When Auntie Pat had made her call she'd let me listen to the ringing noise and I recognised the same sound now. The lady who answered sounded so nice that I told her all about the party and the car not working and Daddy and everything, even about my new trousers and about writing out the birthday card. The lady didn't say anything until I was finished, then she asked me how old I was.

"I'll be four next month."

She asked me if my Mummy knew I was 'phoning her. Feeling naughty I shook my head and swallowed. I felt like crying, but big boys don't cry, and after all you had to be a big boy to make 'phone calls all by yourself.

The lady was talking again. She asked me where I lived. Mummy had told me that I must learn my address in case I ever got lost so that was something I

did know. "27 Vicarage Road, Grantchester. But me and Mummy are over the road at Auntie Pat's."

"Do you know what number Auntie Pat lives at?"

"No. But if you're going to come round, I'll look out of Auntie Pat's window and will see you if you knock on my front door."

The lady said she wasn't coming but someone else would. She asked me if I knew what a mini-cab was. When I said I didn't, she told me that mini-cabs are cars you can call to take you somewhere, just like I wanted to get to Michael's. She said to tell Mummy that a car would be here in half an hour and to say that it would be 'On the House'. Then she said "Goodbye" and hung up before I had time to ask her why they should want to put a car on top of a house, how they could get it there and how they could get it down again!

Putting the handset back on the 'phone, I took a deep breath, opened the living room door and went into the hall. Near the kitchen I heard Auntie Pat telling Mummy that something would turn up. Mummy sounded like she had a cold when she said, "...the look on his little face" and I knew she was talking about me. I ran to Mummy just as she was saying "... if only I could afford a taxi"

"Mummy, Mummy. I 'phoned a lady who said she'd send a car on top of our house to take us to Michael so you don't have to cry.

"Pete, stop! Start again at the beginning and tell me exactly what you've done."

So I told her all about it from the beginning, just like I've told you. When I got to the bit about the car on the house, Mummy started laughing and crying at the same time. I was going to ask her to explain, but she grabbed hold of me and started hugging me. I put up with it for a little while, but then the I remembered the time and reminded her the lady had said half an hour and that was ages ago.

Auntie Pat pushed us both to the door and picked up our coats from the bottom of the bannister. I tried to put my wellies on quickly and got them on the wrong feet. I couldn't believe it when Mummy made me change them over. Fancy worrying about something like that!

At last we were ready and after checking to make sure no cars were coming, I ran across the road and hopped from one foot to the other whilst Mummy unlocked our front door. I did remember to wipe my feet before I ran inside. Then I grabbed the present and card and sat on the window sill again to watch the road, not only for the car but also to check the roofs of the houses too.

It seemed ages but at last a big, blue car pulled up in front of the house and a man got out and walked up the drive. I'd opened the front door before he could knock. The man asked if I was the young gentleman who had 'phoned for a cab. Before I could answer Mummy came to the door. She looked worried and asked the man if he was sure it was all right. I looked up at Mummy, then at the man. I liked the way they looked at each other. It reminded me of the way Mummy and Daddy had looked each other. I knew that EVERYTHING was going to be all right.
