

## Night Time

by MaryPat Campbell

Setting off for the morning paper and a few bits in the shop, Mike had that familiar feeling when stepping out of his front door onto the pavement, that this was his neighbourhood. A proud and warm feeling he had known for years.

Slamming the door behind him, he locked it with both keys and stepped out, pulling his shopping trolley behind him with its familiar squeaky wheels. Within minutes, he had passed three neighbours, all of whom waved and greeted him warmly. Mike didn't notice how all three looked at him with some concern. He looked worn out, dark circles under his eyes, as if he hadn't slept.

Most nights Mike was in two minds about whether or not he wanted to, or could sleep. He sat up drinking cups of tea for what felt like most of the night. They usually went cold. Why was it that in the mornings he loved his road, his neighbours, enjoyed getting out in the fresh air, while at night it was a different matter. At night the dark sky became thick and silent, not just misty as it would be in the day time. The rowan trees on Mike's road hissed and shook in the wind, and he would try to visualise their red berries and how pretty they looked in the day time. His thoughts wandered into the past and stayed there. Before Bruno died last month, before Dinah left him long ago, before he had to retire and leave his work mates behind in the office, promising to come back and meet them in the pub on Friday evenings after work, which he never did.

His neighbours depended on Mike, he was always the one who knew which Monday to put the black bins out on the pavement alongside the green ones. He could advise on which carpenter, gardener or house painter was best in the neighbourhood. Before Bruno died last year, Mike and he were one of the familiar sights on the roads around where he lived. Everyone knew Bruno and Mike stopped to talk to everyone, whether he knew them or not.

A week after Bruno died, Mike sat up all night unable to sleep. He thought of Bruno's blanket and toys, his bowl, collar and lead. His friends told Mike to hold onto them, that one day he might get a new dog. But Mike knew he would not. He hadn't the heart anymore to love another creature as odd and companionable as Bruno had been. They had been friends since Bruno arrived on his doorstep five years ago, hungry and lost. Mike adopted Bruno then and there, and until he died, they had been inseparable.

Last night before going to bed, Mike made his usual pot of tea. He carried it and his blue mug and some biscuits into his bedroom, and tried to settle down for the night. He read for a while after watching the news, took his glasses off and tried to get comfortable in bed. A swirl of nightmarish scenes began to fill his head. The sound of rain lashing down and leaking through the roof; the tap he hadn't mended in the bathroom dripping and making a horrible noise. He couldn't tell if this was really happening or if it was just in his head. He longed to fall asleep.

He put on his glasses, hoping it would make things clearer. His head began to spin, he could feel his eyes become heavy and he longed to close them and fall asleep. But his tiredness hurt so much it kept him awake. Loud noises assailed him, banging and thumping. There was no Bruno to bark and make it all go away. Mike sat up in bed, sweating and afraid. He wanted to call out, but found that he couldn't make a sound. He thought he might be going mad. He worried he might be dead in the morning if someone was breaking into the house and was about to kill him.

A strip of daylight through his half-closed eyes woke him up. With relief, Mike climbed out of bed, opened the curtains and looked out onto the road. He could see his neighbour Fred across the road setting off to work on what looked like a cold, blustery morning.