

Mike Cockett

The annoyingly insistent facetime tune broke into Jamie's train of thought. She considered ignoring it, but it was her sister, Barbara, who knew she was bound to be at home and always assumed that family communications were of the highest priority.

"Babs, what can I do for you?"

"What do you mean. That's an odd way of talking to your sister."

"Oh sorry. I'm in work mode, deadlines and things."

Jamie knew it was a forlorn hope but there was a chance that Babs would take the hint. Not this time.

"Working! Poor you. I don't know how you manage. I have my hands full with Little John and Daisy."

Ah, the wonder off springs, little John as opposed to big John, Babs' husband and Daisy 'such a little flower'. It would have helped Jamie if they hadn't actually been really cute kids.

"Look at what they drew for me this morning." Babs held up two sheets of paper. The drawings seem to be of large animals but were of a quality only fully appreciated by fond parents.

"Oh, how clever." Jamie said dutifully but thinking that her Tommy was a much better artist.

Daisy appeared "We're going out to Copley Woods this afternoon for our exercise and we are going to look for creepy crawlies."

John poked his head in shot and pulled faces and made creepy crawly movements with his fingers.

Jamie called out. "Tommy, come in and say hello to Daisy and John and aunt Babs."

Four-year-old Tommy came bounding in and waved and called to his cousins enthusiastically. Babs did her favourite aunty routine.

"Oh, how's my lovely boy Tommy. I think you've grown. You're getting so big."

Tommy looked unsure about how to respond.

"What are you up to today, Tommy?"

John cut in. "We're going to the woods and we're going to find all sorts of creepy crawly things and we're going to bring some back in a jar."

Daisy joined in. "We're making a collage of big and small."

Tommy blurted out. "Can I come with you?"

Babs got in first. "Oh Tommy. I wish you could, and John and Daisy miss you so much. I know it's hard, but the time will come when we can all get together again."

Jamie felt she was losing mothering points at a great rate. "Tommy, why don't we go to the park this afternoon. You can run and practice your football skills."

Tommy pouted. "I want to go with Daddy. He's good at football."

Another loss for Jamie, this time of gender equality points. "Girls play football as well Tommy."

The Time Being

Daisy cut in. "We play football at school, boys and girls. My friend Gina is really good. She's better than any of the boys." This silenced Tommy since his admiration of Daisy knew no bounds.

"Listen Babs." Jamie cut in. "I really do have a deadline to meet. I'll call you later. Bye Daisy Bye John. I'm looking forward to seeing your collage later."

She closed FaceTime.

Tommy was still hanging around. "When will time come?" he said.

"What?"

"Aunt Babs said the time will come."

"Oh yes, well. She means eventually. In the future when we can all get together again. I mean we will be able to, but we don't exactly know when."

"I want time to come now."

"Don't we all. Listen Tommy, I really do have to finish this work and then I will be able to take you to the park. For the time being can you just do something, play with your toys or draw one of your wonderful pictures." She turned back to the computer.

Tommy trailed into the kitchen. Later he reappeared. Jamie glanced at the time on the computer. Half an hour and she had to be finished. Tommy held up his picture. Jamie looked at it. "Oh, that's lovely," she said automatically.

"No, it's not." Tommy said.

"Isn't it?" said Jamie and she took the paper and looked at what he had drawn. It was a sort of human figure but with a clock for a face with the fingers set approximately at four forty making them look like a turned down mouth.

"Oh," Jamie said, looking for what to say. "That's interesting."

"It's a time being." Tommy said, "Like a human being."

"Oh, Tommy that's very clever. He looks very sad."

"Time being is always sad. You have to go away on your own and do something boring."

"Tommy," Jamie said, and she slipped off her chair and sat next to him on the floor, hugging him to her. She glanced up at the computer with the time ticking away. 'That's me' she thought, 'Just a boring time being.' Then she said out loud. "Come on Tommy. Time for the park."