

The Reunion

I'd been researching my family tree on Ancestors.com all day and I'd gone to bed tired and disappointed having come to a dead end. Imagine my surprise this morning when I went downstairs and heard the clack of the printer spawning paper. I couldn't work it out. Cautiously I picked up the newly printed sheet of A4 and read:

Hi Mary. My name is "Yahoo" and I am the new-age ghost. What is the World Wide Web if not the whoosh of a spectre moving invisibly through cyber space? What chance have your old fashioned spirits got against my technology? I can do anything. At the push of a button, I can raise the dead and I can erase the living. My reality, like that of all phantoms, is virtual, nearly there, nebulous, ghostly, imagined. My voice is disembodied calling from the past and shaping the future. All your ancestors are here and can be contacted through me. Just tap any key. They are waiting for you.

A shiver ran down my spine. I was being spooked by a computer! I pressed the space bar and wiggled the mouse for good measure. I guessed it was some trick set up by James to scare me. He blamed me every time the silly computer went wrong. My last birthday present from him was "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Computer Basics". What does that tell you? As I gazed bemused at the blank screen, it burst into life and all the people I'd ever known flashed across it. An unearthly voice boomed loud and theatrical through the speakers like the chilling voice of a medium at a séance:

"Are you there? Hello! Can you hear me? Is anybody there?"

Every muscle in my body went rigid. The eerie words hung like vampire bats in the air, reverberating in my head. Then the voice filled the room again:

"Hello! Are you there? Can you hear me, Mary?"

"Yes, I'm here," I whispered. "Who is it? Who's there?"

"We're all here, Mary, my dear," a long forgotten voice from the past replied in that familiar Teesside twang. "We're sitting on Whitby beach on that one warm sunny day we all remembered. We've kept the moment for you. We have the tent to change in if you fancy a swim and ice cream too. You can have as many donkey rides as you like. Gran is here in her floral dress, stockinged and shoed as usual, sheltering from the sun under the umbrella, guarding the spam sandwiches, knitting. Dad's

down by the sea, white knotted handkerchief protecting his bald head, trousers rolled up to his knees, splodging. The salt water is good for his athletes' foot. He's packed the cricket bat for later."

"But Gran and Dad never got on", I stammered, "and where's Mam?"

"She's paddling too (good for the varicose veins). Not a care in the world. This is Heaven, my dear."

The screen showed the whole damn family: father, mother, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters and cousins all whooping it up on the beach, getting on famously like they never did. I couldn't believe my eyes. Had it ever been like that? I was tempted to join them. I hadn't been feeling well lately. Could this be the call for me?

"Come in number 3, your time is up," joked Mam, acknowledging my thoughts, beckoning from the screen, smiling and relaxed.

"How do I get there?" I asked. "Do I take the train from York? I don't know how to get there." I was beginning to panic.

"Just close your eyes and we'll do the rest", she said.

I felt the pains in my chest loosen and I began to smile. It would be nice to let go. A day at the sea-side would do me good. I closed my eyes and...