



2 Joby

by Stan Barstow

Because his mother is ill in hospital, eleven-year-old Joby is staying with his aunt. He has just made up his mind to visit Sidney, a friend of his who is also called Snap.

The very small old lady with a shawl round her shoulders came out of the next house and looked at Joby standing on Snap's doorstep.

"It's no use knocking at their door, young man," she said. "There is nobody there. They have gone on their holidays to Bridlington." Her voice was as light and thin as her body.

"Have they gone for the week?" Joby asked.

"As far as I know, they have. Was it young Sidney you wanted?"

make up one's mind
beslutte (sig)

shawl sjal

Bridlington by i det
nordøstlige England



"Yes, it was."

"Well, they have all gone, so you will have to wait until they come back."

"Yes, all right then. I'll be off."

"Just a minute." The old lady moved her head, looking at Joby first over the top of her glasses and then through them.

"Are you in a hurry? Have you got to go somewhere?"

Joby shook his head and moved towards her along the pavement that ran along the houses.

"What's your name?" the old lady asked him.

"Joseph Weston."

"Have I seen you before?"

"I don't know. I've been here a few times."

"Yes, I thought so. Do you go to school with Sidney?"

"I did till the end of last term; but I'm going to a new school next month."

"Oh." The old lady nodded several times. "Oh. Well then, I wonder if you would give me a minute and come inside."

The old lady turned and led the way into the house. The living room, beautifully clean and neat, had the faint smell of old age you sometimes find in old people's homes. The old lady crossed to the table and picked up an envelope.

"This came through the post this morning," she said, turning once more to Joby. "It's from my eldest son; I can tell by the writing, how he makes his letters, you know. I wonder, as you are a school-boy, if you could read it to me."

Joby wondered for a moment if she was giving him some kind of a test and then he realised that the old lady couldn't read.

"We never had much schooling when I was a girl," she said, feeling in the envelope with her old fingers and taking out a sheet of writing-paper. "I don't suppose I had more than a year altogether. It's different now. You young people have all the chances we never had." She held out the letter and Joby took it. "Here, see if you can see what it says."

"It's from Coventry," Joby said, looking at the address.

"Yes," nodded the lady. "That's where he lives. He went down there three years ago and got a job in a motor-car factory. He helps to put all these motor-cars together that you see on the roads."

Joby was quickly reading through the first page of the letter while the old lady was talking. He found that his hand was trembling.

"What has he got to say then?"

I'll be off (*her*) så går jeg
igen

glasses *briller*

pavement *fortov*

term *semester*

nod *nikke*

lead (*led/led*) *the way*

gå forrest

neat *pæn*

faint *svag*

envelope *konvolut*

tell by (*her*) *se det af*

test *prøve*

realise *forstå, indse*

sheet *ark*

factory *fabrik*

tremble *ryste, skælve*





"I... I can't really read what it says," Joby stammered. "He doesn't write very clearly, does he?"

"Oh? I always thought he did. Mrs Prendergast says he's a very clear writer. She usually reads his letters to me and then writes back for me. I don't like to ask the woman who lives on the other side – Mrs Carter. She hasn't lived here long, and I think she is too interested in other people's private lives."

"I'm not very good with handwriting," Joby said.

"Can't you read it at all?"

Joby shook his head. His face was very red, he knew, but he didn't think that the old lady's eyes were sharp enough to notice it.

"Well, I thought you said you were going to a new school. I don't think you will do very well there if you can't read a letter."

"I'm better at some things than others," Joby said. "I'm good at history."

"Ah well, I can't read a word, so I shouldn't say anything."

notice bemærke



She took the letter back and put it away. "Maybe I'll get Mrs Carter to look at it for me in the morning."

"That'll be best," Joby said, "I'm sorry."

"Oh, it doesn't matter. It can wait until tomorrow. It'll be just bits of news about the family and that sort of thing. But he knows I like to know what is going on. He doesn't get up here very often, you see, as it is so far to come. He says it would be wonderful if he could borrow a car out of the factory at week-ends. Just his joke, you know. William is a great joker. Always full of fun."

"I'd better be going," Joby said, making for the door.

"Yes, all right then. And thank you for trying."

"I wish I could have read it for you."

"You did your best, I am sure." The old lady went with him to the door. "But I would study at that, if I were you. You'll be handicapped if you can't read handwriting."

"Yes, I know," Joby said. "Good night then."

The old lady gave him a farewell smile and stood watching him walk up the road. He wondered if he had done the right thing and knew that he could not have read out the first sentences of the letter:

1. What is the situation in Joby's family?
2. What happens when he goes to Snap's house?
3. What does the old lady ask Joby about?
4. What is the old lady's house like?
5. What does the letter say?
6. What does the old lady tell Joby about her son?
7. What does the old lady do with her letters when Joby is not there to read them for her?
8. What did William write in the letter to his mother?
9. Why didn't Joby read the letter aloud?
10. What did Joby feel when he first read the letter?
11. What would you have done?

borrow låne

joke spøg; joker spøgefugt

make for gå hen imod

sentence sætning

fault skyld

15 Madeira Road
Coventry
Friday

Dear Mother,
I'm afraid this letter brings you bad news. You will be shocked to know that little Cynthia was knocked down by a bus the day before yesterday and died in hospital last night. It was nobody's fault. She ran out of the house like kids do...

