

The Rafters.

...it seems like time plays tricks, sometimes running away with me, and then going so slow it almost stops. But it's not important. I go by the weather, like I did when I were younger and still had the farm. Wake up when light shows through the curtains, and when it begins to get dark, well, I know it's evening don't I?

It's evening now and I should get something to eat but I'm not hungry. 'Course Kath will have something to say about that. She's me neighbour you see, drops in on me any old time with a cheery 'now Bill' by way of greeting. Don't get me wrong, she's a good lass, but sometimes she doesn't understand but then that's women for you. Take my Emily. Sometimes she knew me too well and at times we had a few words but we got along. It weren't right really, expecting her to take to the farming life, she weren't made for it but she stuck by me. And we had a son, Matthew. I remember him running through the fields when he were little but soon he grew and left.

I know I talk to Emily like she's in the room with me an' maybe she is an' all and I bet she'd laugh and call me a silly old fool. Like that policeman, the one who brought me home 'cause I'd gone out in me slippers but I'd only forgot to put me shoes on...I likes to go out you see, when it's dark an' I can't see the clocks. Hate 'em I do, they're everywhere; on towers, churches and there's even a big one at the cross roads. All right, so I do wander about a bit, and I know sometimes me thoughts get a bit muddled. They think I'm going a bit senile, like, but I know what I'm doing. I'm looking for her, my Emily, you see.

I weren't always like I am now, what with me old bones and creaking joints. No, once I was strong, thrived on work I did. Why, I could toss straw bales into the barn all day till it were full to the rafters and not get tired.

Here's something to think about...

...time's a strange thing. Sometimes I know what I'm about and then things sort of drift and I'm back on the farm and it doesn't seem quite right somehow and things aren't where they should be, and I'm lost.

I'd like a cup of tea but I can't find the tea caddy and the old range isn't where it should be. And then Kath says, 'Here you are Bill' and she doesn't act like I've gone a bit daft. Not like them others, always poking their noses in. Sometimes, when I sit me self down in front of the little fire I'm back on the farm and it's quiet, 'cept the clocks ticking and I'm listening for the sound of Emily's footsteps and then I remember she's gone. Then I lost the farm.

And I can't stand clocks, not since my Emily went and the tall clock on the landing stopped the day they put her in the ground, as if the clock knew and no amount of tinkering could get it going again. Sometimes I wonder what happened to it, and the photographs. I remember 'em well, the look on Emily's face, the set of her lips and the way she's staring out, disapproving, like she weren't happy, new something I didn't.

'Well Bill,' my neighbour Kath says, 'glad you're ready. You look really dapper.' Of course I'm ready, been ready a long time, waiting. Like I said, she's a good lass and she got this idea she were taking me out in her car to this new pubs that's just opened. The Rafters, it's called.

We're getting out of the car and I see the building. The shape of it, the windows placed sort of irregular and the great big doorway...and it's like I've come home after I've been away.

Let me tell you about...

... the dances we used to have after harvest were in and music played and the barn were decorated with bunting up to the rafters and...it's like I'm a young man again, and Kath's hurrying behind with a 'now Bill', and I'm not listening to her, just the tunes of the fiddles I can hear playing.

There's thick carpet on the floor, and walls where they didn't used to be none, and Kath's sat me at a table and a meals been brought but I can't eat, can't sit still. I need to be up, looking, searching. There's a wide stair well where there should be a ladder and I'm looking at the stairs and before I think about it I'm already climbing those stairs and a voice says, 'Excuse me mate, you can't go up there.' But I do and there's this bloke behind me and Kath has hold of my arm and her voice sounds anxious and then I see the clock on the

landing. The clock that stopped when my Emily passed and it's going now, and the pendulum is swinging sweet as anything.

'Come on now, Bill. We can't have you getting upset. But I'm not upset and my heart might be racing something wicked but I've seen the photos, the ones of me and Emily and our lad and the old horse harnessed to the hay wagon.

'Do you recognise them?' It's the man's voice.

"Course I do. It's me family.'

'We found the photos and the clock at the back of the barn, under a tarpaulin. We thought they looked like they belong here.'

With a trembling finger, I'm reaching out like, and when my fingers touch Emily's face the skin feels smooth and warm and do you know, she is smiling, like she's content now...

... seems like time just don't mean a thing.

ends