

Key of the Door

Every Thursday evening for the last two years Nabeel takes a detour on the way home. He takes the Grove Road exit from the station and walks north through the park.

Today the journey begins at home. It is a bright, light evening. He walks to the railway station. It is eerily quiet. Bird song rather than muffled voices and the rumbling of trains fill the air. In normal times commuters would surface from packed carriages and walk purposefully home or to the station car park.

Across the park, overtaking power walkers Nabeel goes. He needs this little bit of exercise – he's been grazing all day on his daughter's freshly baked blueberry muffins. Out through the wrought iron gates Nabeel goes. The houses are grander on this side of the park. Onwards to Wisteria House, a large Edwardian building where a wealthy family and an array of servants once lived.

He places an Easter egg on the step, rings the bell and steps back. The mauve wisteria flowers creep around the brickwork. A woman gingerly opens the door. Her head-to-toe uniform makes him think of childhood fancy dress: Princess Leia or an astronaut.

'You are a super hero,' he wants to say but can't see if she's smiling or frowning. She picks up the Easter egg in her gloved hands.

'Mum always liked a Cadbury's flake,' says Nabeel.

'You can walk round to Margaret's window and say hello,' says the care assistant.

Margaret is asleep in an armchair. The room is full of furniture and nick-nacks from Nabeel's childhood home - all condensed down into one small room. A bit like Margaret really. All shrivelled down.

On the sideboard between an assortment of figurines stands a larger-than-life silver key. The plastic key is propped up proudly in its display box. A light film of dust coats the cellophane lid.

'Twenty-one – key of the door!' he remembers Margaret's words when he came home from university for his birthday with his fiancée Julia. Nabeel didn't take the key with him when he left. Julia said it was hideous and kitsch.