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A Place for Us: Part Two

Written by Harriet Evans

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An exclusive preview of PART TWO from the four part serialisation

A Place for Us

Harriet Evans

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Part Two
The Party

Daisy

August 1973

Wilbur is dead. We buried him last night, in the daisy bank. And I'm the only one who cares.

He was old, that's what Mr Barrow the vet said, but I don't think that's a reason for him to just die. Plenty of people are old, like Mrs White in the village who has – wait for it – white hairs on her chin. She is ninety-five, as she tells everyone every chance she gets. Stupid woman. Wilbur was the same age as me (I am twelve, in October). He wasn't old.

Ma was nice. She helped me bury him. We dug a big hole and wrapped him up, and we sang 'Abide with Me'. We burned candles. There were moths fluttering around in the evening light.

But the others weren't nice. Bill said it was stupid, a funeral for a dog, and he went to play guns in the wood. I always think this is funny because he's on his own – who does he hide from and who does he shoot? And when I crept up on him afterwards and fired one of his blanks, he jolly nearly peed his pants. I think he might have.

And Florence said she didn't like Wilbur because Wilbur used to jump up and scare her and she didn't want to come. She watched out of the window in our room. Scared, stupid, little pig. PIG.

And Pa? Pa was away, in London, for the night. Ma rang him to tell him. He didn't even care. Ma didn't say that, she said, 'Oh, Dad is very sad. He says to send his love.' But I know he didn't. Pa doesn't love me. He loves Florence, sort of loves Bill, but mainly Florence, because she likes paintings and she's a really vile little sneak, a swot, and the worst word I can think of and I'm not writing it down.

And Pa doesn't like me because he thinks I make trouble. I DON'T. I *gave him the idea for Wilbur* and he just doesn't care. All these years

Wilbur has been with us, our family mainstay and support (I got that in a book about awful lives of kitchen maids in Victorian times) and my family doesn't care enough to come and watch him be buried, just me and Ma. Pa stole my ideas off me too. He knows what he did, he knows about my stories about Wilbur. And that's why he's famous now and he still didn't come.

It's not even all of that, it's that I think Wilbur understood me and I understood him. Because he was shaggy and clumsy (not like me, I'm not like that, I'm very careful about everything) and he was enthusiastic about everything, so sometimes he scared people but he was only being friendly. I think people who don't understand that about dogs are stupid.

Florence, I am writing your name down on my list I am keeping. I wish you would die. If Wilbur's dead you should definitely be dead too.

Florence doesn't belong here. She's not even one of us. Look at her. And look at me.

There is a wasps' nest in our room, underneath the roof. We used to have them when we first moved in, and now they're back. Last year there was a nest in the barn and Joseph, the gardener, was stung really badly. He had to go to hospital. I haven't told anyone about this one. The art of war isn't Bill's stupid stupid plastic gun with the babyish paper cartridges, it is planning.

I lie in bed at night and I can hear them humming, in the eaves. It's the wooden gables they like. Wasps like wood. Sometimes it's very faint, but sometimes it seems to get louder, as though they will burst out of the back of the nest, into my room. It keeps me awake. It scares me but I like being scared, too. I like the rushing feeling. I hate being bored. Really I hate it more than anything else.

I am going to make a list and plan out my life about what I want to do when I grow up. I can't wait to be a grown-up. I hate being here.

1. I will leave Winterfold, as soon as I can.
2. I will be rich.
3. I will have a husband. No children, I don't want any children.

4. People will be sorry when they have been horrible to me.
5. I won't come back, not even to see Ma.
6. I will be famous and everyone will have heard of me and be sorry they weren't nicer to me.
7. Florence, Verity, other girls at school who are my friends and then annoy me or won't talk to me any more, I will pay them back for it.
8. I will have another dog and I will call him Wilbur.
9. I will make everyone see the truth about Florence.

But to do that I have to tell her the truth first of all. What I know . . . how little she knows. You see yesterday I heard Ma and Pa arguing. In their room. I stood outside listening quite blatantly as I knew I could quite simply say, 'I'm on my way to the bathroom,' if they caught me.

What they said needs some thinking about as I am not sure I actually entirely understand it.

They don't argue like they used to when we came here. I think they have got used to this house and us all being here but I haven't.

Ma said, 'You said, when Florence came, you'd look out for her.'

Pa said, 'I am. You need to as well, Em. You said you'd send Daisy away to school if she didn't start behaving.'

Ma said, 'I don't want to. You of all people should know why.'

That's exactly what they said and I know two things. Florence is from somewhere else, and Pa wants to send me away.

I don't mean to be naughty, it just happens. I get bored, or angry, or I don't understand something, and then suddenly there's a broken glass, a smashed blackboard, a crying child. I want to feel remorse but I don't. Does Pa feel remorse, for Wilbur? Remorse is what Miss Tooth said I should feel when I flushed Verity's head down the lavatory after school. Verity is a coward, she screamed and cried. I don't cry. Verity's mother came to Winterfold, and shouted at my mother. She said I wasn't ever to go to Verity's house again. I don't care about that Verity lives in a nasty house, she doesn't have colour television, and her father smells of BO. I hated going there for tea.

I sit in our room. It's the corner of the house. I can see Bill and

Flo, playing some stupid game with Hadley, the new dog, and Bill's old swords in the meadow by the Daisy Bank, my Daisy Bank, mine mine. They should have asked me because it's my place and they're not allowed to play there, especially now that Wilbur is buried there. Everyone has one place for themselves. That's my place, my place where I can go. Flo is always in our room when I want to be by myself. She shouldn't be there too. I can see them there and it makes me very very very very angry. I can see Mummy in the garden dead-heading the roses, with a scarf in her hair. It's a pretty scarf.

There's two more things I know: Hadley is dangerous. His father was destroyed for fighting. He has bitten people before. I don't like him. They got him when they found out Wilbur was dying.

And I can see the wasps, flying into the eaves. Just casually, one at a time, and they're building up their nest till there's more of them up till one day when they'll blow the house apart.

I hate it here. I wish I could run away. Mummy is always asking me why I don't feel sorry. It's not a thing I can feel. I wish I could, I wish I was like them but I'm not. I have always known it.

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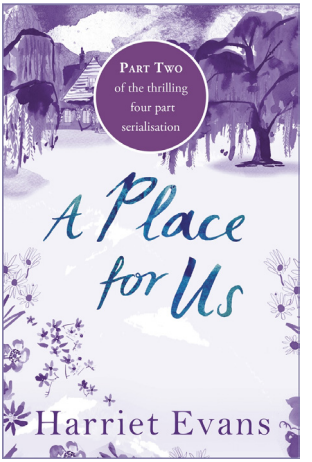

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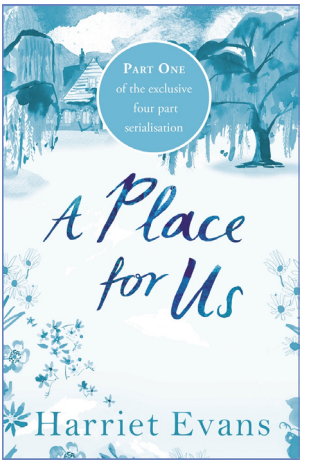

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