

'Bodyguard'

Joan, fifty - something, sits, dressed formally, as if for an interview, in a corridor, outside a closed door. On the walls either side of her are posters created by school children. We hear a school bell.

JOAN ‘Sometimes the truth is so precious she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies.’

Winston Churchill, 1943, in conversation with Josef Stalin, or so it is said.

What is a lie? An act of defence? An act of aggression? Or something else completely? They're in there now, Stalin's grandchildren. The interrogators. I hope they're not going to be much longer. It's just a preliminary hearing.

They said to be here at ten. It's twenty past now and I need to get on – it's my granddaughter's birthday. There's a bit of a family get together and I want to be there to see her unwrap her present. I spend ages finding the right thing – it's so tricky these days, she's got so many things. I think she'll be pleased with it.

A lie: an inaccurate or false statement. We all know what it means, but I thought it would be interesting to look it up. They all say more or less the same thing, the dictionaries. Well, you'd like to think they'd get that right wouldn't you? She's smashing, little Ellen. Five years old. She rang me the other night – the tooth fairy had been. She had. Apparently it's a pound these days. That's inflation for you. You get more and more every year. The tooth fairy takes away the tooth and leaves you a shiny new pound coin. It's what her Mum told her. Her Mum. My daughter.

A born liar.

She's done it before, we all know that. Quite a reputation, the little minx. Two accusations, two teachers, two hearings. Nothing decided, of course, how could it be? She says one thing, the teacher says another. One of them is lying. They must be, if they can't agree.

Middle class girl. Unusual for this place. The mother's a barrister, apparently. Used to being listened to. Used to being believed.

I'd like to see more of them, Catherine's little ones. It's lovely watching them growing up. I want to be a part of it. What's the point of having granny nearby if she can't help you out, especially now he's away with his new woman. It's not easy for her, three kids under ten and no partner to do his share. If he'd been a husband it might have made a difference.

We're all so busy, all of us. There's far more to do now than when I first started – far more. I don't like it, all the running around, the backchat, the lack of discipline. Everything written up on a form, signed by all and sundry, health and safety blah blah blah.

Thirty four years in the game.

It wasn't like that when I started.

It wasn't.

(Joan adopts the patrician tones of a senior teacher)

Nothing stays the same, does it? The world moves on. We all move on.

(Normal voice again)

Where's the joy in it now?

Oh – with my degree I could have gone across town and signed up at the Ivory Tower on the hill, spent my days teaching the offspring of the successful ones. Eighteen in a class and facilities to die for. And I'd have scrubbed up on Speech Day and allowed myself to be patronised over a glass of warm white wine by thin women in fur coats.

It would have been easy and comfortableand cowardly.

So I didn't. I made up my mind early on. Not for me, that world.

(Smiles ruefully)

A brand new history degree and a head full of ideals. Oxbridge to Uxbridge and beyond.

I'm too young to retire, of course. Different matter twenty years ago. Retire in July then come back and cover your old job in September. Doubled your money. They stopped all that kind of thing and quite right too.

No kind of pension at fifty - five and no other source of income.

(Senior teacher's voice)

'We're all tired, Joan. Goes with the turf. We could look at a job share if you can find a pal to do the other half.'

(Normal voice)

Fat chance. Job share on twenty five years of Saturday morning hockey at precisely zero point zero pounds per hour plus overtime for

dealing with stroppy parents. Did I mention costumes for the school play? Tell you what I'll give you my share of the bugger all that we get for that.