

Not Dead Yet, Lily?

Pre-reading

1. You are going to read or listen to a short story by the Scottish author Ron Butlin called 'Not Dead Yet, Lily?'

The person mentioned in the title is Lily Williams, an old lady who lives alone. Who do you think is asking the question 'Not dead yet, Lily?'

Relatives? Neighbours? Strangers? Friends? No one?

2. Here is a section of the story which explains the title. While you read it decide who, if anyone, actually says the words 'are you dead yet?'

She didn't want to have the likes of Mrs MacDonald come in to find her keeled over at last. Sometimes it felt as if the whole street was waiting for her to go. All these neighbourly visits about nothing in particular, except to check she'd not died in her sleep. They were being kind, and she supposed she was grateful, but there was always the unspoken pause, the split-second's refocusing of a glance that betrayed the real question:

Not dead yet?

Who do you think Mrs Macdonald is? Where does Mrs Macdonald live? How many other people in the street might behave like Mrs Macdonald?

3. What do you suppose Lily Williams thinks about this attitude? Try to gauge her reaction by reading these extracts:

A

One morning she'd been woken by Mrs Miller phoning to ask, after the 'not-dead-yet?' pause, if she wanted something from the shop. She'd said no, then hung up.

B

Across the street she could see the MacDonalds, a group of stuffed figures crouched in a family circle around their patio-table. Who were the MacDonalds, who were the Millers? Where had they come from? Where had any of the people in the street come from with their tracksuits, their baggy shorts, their baseball caps, their mobile phones and their internets?

C

The wobbly MacDonald was standing at her gate: 'Mrs Williams! Hello there, Mrs Williams!'

Should she pretend to have gone deaf?

Yes.

4. This is a story about rebellion. Normally we associate rebellion against society with young people. In this case the rebel is an old lady. In what ways do you think she might stage a rebellion against her neighbours?

5. Try to create a story about Lily Williams, called 'Not Dead Yet, Lily?' by including all the following elements (in any order)

- The neighbours, especially the Macdonalds.
- A hot day, threatening a storm.
- Lily talking to herself.
- A neighbour's spade.
- A lilac bush in Lily's front garden.

Tell the outline of your story to other members of your class. Which one is the most dramatic, most realistic or most humorous?

6. Now read the story called 'Not Dead Yet, Lily?' by Ron Butlin.