



# Phone A Friend

Talk on the phone  
make up a story....

During April and May, members of the Royal Exchange Elders programme took part in a new, creative story-making project on the phone (rather than on online).

The project was designed for people who wanted to do something creative with another person, but who were facing barriers to taking part online or who were Zoomed out!

The project was led by the Elders Leaders - graduates of the Elders Company who volunteer to support the Elders programme. Participants were partnered with an Elders Leader, who contacted them four times on the phone for a 30-minute call during a two-week period.

During each call, the pair had a chat, caught up and explored some creative questions so that together they created a story.

This pack contains the stories they created together...

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**Elders Leaders** Donald McGregor, Dudley Newall, Estelle Longmore, Glyn Treharne, Graham Gillis, Jackie Corr, Jacquie Long, Sandy Parkinson and Tony Cocker.

**Participants** Anne Tober, Brenda Hickey, Charles McDermott, Elena Staniscia, Helen Browne, Judith Wood, Liz Aniteye, Norman Goodman and Pat Mckenzie.



# FLUMMOXED

By Anne and Estelle

Sophia was so excited. She was going to Brussels to take up a place at the LUCA School of Arts in Brussels.

She had never travelled by plane by herself before but she was all prepared. She had her phone, her headphones and her sketch book with her to keep her occupied on the journey. She was a bit sad about leaving her friends behind but looking forward to making a whole lot of new friends – from different parts of Europe. Her Mum and Dad came to see her off at the airport – she was only 17 after all!

Yes, she was excited but also a little apprehensive. Would she cope with the language? What would the food be like? Would her art be good enough? Then she told herself not to be silly. She had won a scholarship so she must be good enough. The flight went smoothly and she passed the time looking at the people around her and surreptitiously sketching.

When they touched down in Brussels, she found her luggage and made her way to the taxi queue. After a short wait it was her turn and she tried to communicate with the taxi driver the name of the Hall of Residence she was due to live in. Either her pronunciation was not good, or the young taxi driver couldn't understand her. She was flummoxed. Then a man came to her aid. He had been on the same plane from Manchester and helped her to communicate her destination. He told her that he was going that way, so they shared the cab.

While chatting, Sophia discovered that her fellow passenger was Eddy and he was a lecturer at the same Art school that she was joining. He had apparently had some time off after being unwell but was now returning to his job. As they reached her destination Eddy also insisted on covering the fare. And suggested that they exchange numbers which Sophia agreed to as she realised how much she liked Eddy already.

She settled into school and during fresher's week and met some second year students. She chatted about Eddy the helpful lecturer with whom she shared the taxi. She received some rather odd looks from some of the students and eventually she was told to be careful of Eddy. He had not been away because he had been ill.

He had been suspended, had a notorious reputation and had returned for a disciplinary hearing!

Sophia found this hard to believe and was flummoxed.

The Eddy that she met had been so kind and helpful and he'd even paid her share of the taxi fare... going on her instincts she decided to ring him. But when there was no answer despite many attempts, Sophia wondered if maybe he did not want her to know his history. Sophia still wished to thank him and did not want to believe that he was guilty.

Over the next few weeks, Sophia busied herself settling into her life as an art student and making new friends. She still thinks of Eddy from time to time and then when looking through her sketch book realised that she has a sketch of him that she drew on the plane. Sophia gets on with her course. She is doing well and enjoying life in Brussels...

Then, as time goes by, Eddy managed to clear his name. He wondered about the girl he met in the taxi. One evening, after a couple of drinks, he decided to phone Sophia.

Sophia was also out in a wine bar with her friends. Her phone buzzed and she looked at it. It was a call from Eddy. Should she answer it now? Or call him back when she's alone? The phone call disconnects... leaving Sophia... flummoxed...



# THE MISSING LINK

By Brenda with Graham

I had that dream again last night, the one I have almost every night. It leaves me so tired and drained. I feel ill and I can't concentrate. It's been happening for almost a year now. I'm in a crowd, rushing around and I cry out but no one hears me. I have to get somewhere but I don't know exactly where. I'm looking for someone but I don't know who and then I just want to go home but I can't.

Here I am in the park trying to calm down and make sense of this craziness which won't let me sleep. I'm sweating and out of breath. I'll just take a seat on that bench over there and try to calm down. The park is busy today, lots of families with kids and people walking dogs. I head towards the bench and as the crowds part I see her sitting there on MY bench. My feet turn to lead, my heart is pounding hard against my chest. I want to scream out: *"it's you"*, but no sound emerges. Instinctively I wave at her but I quickly pull back my hand. I don't know her. She doesn't know me. Yet! I want to hold her hand.

*"Whoa Brenda"*, I say to myself, *"What are you doing? Just sit down, be quiet, be normal."* Though nothing is normal today. I sit down. She looks up with a kind smile in her eyes. She speaks: *"I couldn't help noticing we have the same taste in clothes."* She glances at me expectantly. I look down. We are both wearing black trousers, very similar shoes, black patent with a little heel and red cardigans with a pattern of black dots. Bizarre!

*"My name's Brenda,"* I stutter. *"How do you do? Do you live round here?"* She smiles again and takes a breath before speaking.

*"No dear. Apparently I was born in this area but I was adopted as a baby and moved away with my new parents. Sometimes I come into town to do a bit of research. It seems I have two siblings and I would dearly love to meet them one day. Perhaps I will bump into you again?"*

I can barely speak, but in a breathy high pitched voice I say : *"Fantastic."* I feel the red blush colouring my cheeks. I think perhaps she is just being polite, but she doesn't seem to notice my embarrassment. She speaks again;

*"I wish I could stay a bit longer, dear, but I must catch my train. Would you give me your number for the next time I come into town? Perhaps we'll find some more things we have in common. Who knows?"*

She reaches in her handbag but it slips out of her hands and some of its contents fall out. A voice in the crowd cries out and there is a great surge of people heading towards us. When I look up she is gone... The bag is gone too but a pen, her mobile and an old photograph are lying under the bench. I put them in my pocket and return home feeling strangely hopeful, a feeling I haven't had for a long time.

At home I place the objects on the kitchen table as my mother walks into the room. *"What's that you've got there?"* she asks and picks up the photograph. She slumps into a chair, her face a ghostly white, tears quietly streaming down her stricken face.

*"it's time"*, she says.

*"For what?"*, I manage to ask.

She wipes away the tears and begins: *"I have a copy of this same photo in my little memory box upstairs. (she points) Here I am with you and your brother at my side, your dad behind us and your baby sister on my lap. Hard times then. Your dad out of work. No money. Bills pouring in. We decided to have the baby adopted. It broke my heart."*

It all begins to make sense – the dreams, the nightmares, the searching. I've found the 'missing link'. The mobile on the table starts to ring. I answer. It's her. We arrange to meet tomorrow at OUR bench in the park. So much to catch up on, share, explain. No more bad dreams and nightmares and baseless fears. I'll tell her everything!

# THE GHOST OF THE OLD EXCHANGE

By Charles and Glyn



Time: The Future

Place: Manchester

Ricky Rhymes stirred in his bed. His sleep was disturbed by the distinctive sound of a mother calling her young.

“Ricky, Ricky, get your sorry backside out of your pit”.

Ricky turned over; didn't she know a young lad needed his sleep.

“Ricky, get down here NOW!”

Judy Sparkes surveyed her face in the mirror. She noticed that little lines had appeared at the side of her eyes. How long had they been there? Is this what happens when you reach twenty-five, she pondered. It'll be downhill all the way from here on in.

Leanne Rhymes buttoned up her usher's uniform as she watched her young son trooping down the road, off on his first big date. At forty-two she suddenly felt incredibly old.

Brendon Rhymes stood outside the New Exchange Theatre in St. Anne's Square. As Ghost Hunter Extraordinaire, he was determined to track down The Ghost of the Old Exchange.

Young lovers Ricky and Judy sat two seats apart in the top gallery of the New Exchange Theatre, social distancing was still in place. Judy was feeling queasy but tried to hide it from her boyfriend as she had not let him know about her fear of heights. She reached into her pocket and pulled out a toffee dummy and placed it in her mouth, having something to suck on always calmed her down.

Brendon Rhymes took his seat in the front row of the theatre as the production of Thornton Wilder's "The Skin of Our Teeth" began. Every nerve in his body was jangling, he could smell and breathe The Ghost's presence.

Leanne had momentarily deserted her usher's station to chat to Joe at the Information Desk.

“What on earth is going on in there, Lee?” The sound of ringing telephones began to invade the auditorium, and Joe was concerned.

Leanne rushed into the theatre to be confronted by a frightened audience and a wall of sound.

Ricky screamed out “It’s the Covid – 25 alert, everybody’s infected!”.

Almost without being noticed the pale figure of a bearded man took centre stage. He began to speak in a clear voice which had just a touch of an Essex accent.

“There was a young man on the phone  
Who hated being alone  
He cried in his milk  
Which turned into silk  
And produced a cup of cologne”

The audience sat transfixed. The ghost started to fade away until all that was left was its smile.

“Does that make sense?”, it said, before disappearing entirely.

The phones stopped ringing and a peace descended on the theatre. Brendon jumped up from his seat and took to the stage singing “My, my, my, my Staying alert, Staying alert!”

A startled Ricky shouted out “That’s my dad!”

“Ricky, Ricky love you my son!”

Brendon Rhymes! Leanne couldn’t believe what she was witnessing. Well, she thought to herself. you’re not going to get away again, not with 17 years of child support. The world was suddenly a much better place.



# WALLESEND

By Elena with Don

Bill and Maggie had lived in Wallsend since they were born. Bill, like many generations of his family, worked in the shipyard. He had started work as an apprentice at 16 and by the time he married Maggie, he was a skilled tradesman earning a decent wage. Maggie had taken a part-time job as a care assistant in the nearby care home run by the local authority.

In the past, working in the shipyards had been a job for life, but due to competition from abroad this was no longer the case. In 1974, Bill was made redundant. Other engineering firms in the area were dependent on the shipyards for business and were also in decline, so Bill found himself on the dole. Maggie increased her hours at the care home to help make ends meet; but Bill, having been brought up in a patriarchal family typical of the time, did little to help around the house.

Then in 1975 Bill heard about the planned construction of the Keilder Dam which would create a huge reservoir to supply the North East with water. Bill went along to an information and recruitment event in Newcastle and was enthusiastic about the opportunity. He went home and discussed it with Maggie, but there was a problem: the site was 50 miles away – too far for a daily commute; and, being a sparsely populated area, there were no schools nearby for their children Elizabeth and Andrew. After much consideration, Bill and Maggie decided that Bill should take the job, live in digs during the week and return home at weekends.

Initially, Maggie found it tough. Looking after the home and the children during the week; getting Bill's clothes washed over the weekend; *and* continuing with her part-time job at the care home. But she was a strong, resourceful woman and soon adapted to the additional responsibilities.

Bill wasn't much company at the weekends: he was often tired from the long, hard hours working on the dam project, and when he did feel like doing anything, it was usually going down to the pub to catch up with his mates and talk about football. Maggie and the children soon became used to life with a largely-absent husband and father.

In 1979, with encouragement from her supervisor at the care home, Maggie embarked on further education study to become qualified as a State Registered



Nurse. The extra money this brought in made a difference – managing the household budget no longer meant having to watch the pennies. Elizabeth, now in her first year at secondary school, was receiving excellent reports from her form teacher; and Andrew was performing equally well in the upper years at primary.

In 1982, Queen Elizabeth unveiled a plaque to commemorate the completion of the Keider Dam. There was cheering and (many) celebratory drinks, but it also meant the winding down of the workforce. Bill returned home to find fewer job opportunities than in 1975 – most of the shipyards had closed and the secondary industries that depended on them had gone too. He had always seen himself as head of the house, but Maggie had become the decision maker and independent wage-earner in his absence, confident in her new role. Bill's self-esteem suffered and he became tetchy, depressed and took to spending more and more time in the pub. Rows at home became more frequent, not just between Bill and Maggie but also between Bill and the children. Eventually, Maggie told Bill he had to leave. To have had the courage to do that eight years ago would have been unthinkable, but her confidence and assertiveness had grown over the years through having to cope largely on her own. Bill was devastated – he knew things weren't right at home but he never thought it would come to this! He reluctantly agreed to move back in with his parents, hoping it would be temporary.

Two years passed and Bill finally accepted that there was no going back. He retrained and got a skilled job in manufacturing. Maggie thrived on her independence and was so proud of their children who studied hard and eventually went on to further education. Life is a rollercoaster with its ups and downs, but for now they were all on their way up.



# THROUGH THE WINDOW

By Helen with Sandy

The sign by the side of the road said “Flash – Welcome to the Highest Village in England”. Gerald had always been proud of living there: somehow it made him feel special and he needed that. Since his father had left, nearly a year ago, nothing had seemed right and now he and his mother were moving away, going to live in a big town, going tomorrow. There would be no moors, no farms, no river where he could go fishing. On this, his last day, he wandered round the village saying goodbye to everything that meant home. A grey mist was coming in from the moor, seeping into the village streets. There was no-one around. He walked up the hill to the small, stone building that had been his primary school until two days ago. There was the familiar date carved above the entrance – 1819. He noticed that the door was slightly open. He had said goodbye to his teacher and classmates two days ago, but the school seemed to draw him in. He pushed open the door and went inside.

The schoolroom usually had a clean scent of polish and disinfectant, but now it smelled airless and musty. The school’s only computer was silent in the corner. A mobile phone slept on the teacher’s desk. There was half-erased writing on the old blackboard and chalk dust hung in the air. Gerald sat down at the scratched, wooden desk that had been his since he started school four years ago. He ran his fingers through his damp, fair hair, then started picking at a pulled thread in his grey woollen jumper. He liked school. He liked learning about new things. He didn’t really like people, he was happy on his own, doing solitary things, like fishing. He was always curious to know what would be on the hook. The loose thread had become a hole. His mother would be cross. He stopped picking and turned his thoughts to the wooden surface before him. His finger traced the rough message carved into the desk top many years ago by another boy, someone he never knew. It had been as much a part of his life as the books, the pencils and the daily bottles of milk.

“Dad came home 1919 Gerald”

He had always been pleased that the unknown boy shared his name. Perhaps he could carve his own message before he, too, was gone forever. He felt for his penknife. There was a hole in his jacket pocket: his mother had been too distracted

to sew it up. Luckily, the knife was in the other pocket, with his compass. He pulled them both out. A half eaten fruit pastille clung limpet-like to the knife. He detached the sweet, inspected it and put it into his mouth. He opened up the knife. Just his name would do, and the date – “Gerald 2019”.

A noise interrupted his concentration. A car engine, coming nearer. He put down the knife and went to the dirty window. The drifting mist had shifted for a moment and he could see the road winding down from the village and along the valley. There were no cars, except for a Royal Mail post van heading up the hill. “The once-weekly delivery,” he thought. But why did he think that? That was stupid. The post came every day. The red van pulled up outside the school. Gerald could see that it was ancient, like the old motor cars you saw in museums or in old films on T.V. A man got out. He was old, too. He was carrying a small package. Gerald watched. The man vanished around the corner of the building for a moment, and then he was in the classroom.

“Hello,” he said, “I’m looking for Gerald Duffy.”

“That’s my name,” said Gerald, “It’s the same name as my granddad. He died a long time ago, before I was born. He was Gerald, too.”

The postman smiled.

“I know.”

The old man came slowly down the aisle to the desk where Gerald had been sitting. He ran his fingers over the deeply incised words.

“Still here.” he said, almost to himself.

The boy came nearer.

“I was going to put my name there, too. So people will remember me.”

“Why do you want people to remember you?”

The dark, unknown future came flooding back.

“We’re going away.” Gerald couldn’t stop the tears. “It’s tomorrow. I won’t belong here anymore. If my Daddy comes back, he won’t know where to find me.”

“I’ve found you.” said the old man.

He held out the package.

“Here. These are yours, now.”

Curiosity got the better of Gerald and he stopped crying.

“What is it?”

“Letters,” said the old man. “Letters written a long time ago. From a man who had gone to war, to the little boy he left behind. Telling him not to be afraid and that he loved him, even though he wasn’t there. Telling him that his mother needed him and that he had to be strong. Telling him that one day, everything would be alright.”

The man came nearer and reached out, almost touching the boy’s shoulder.

"It will be alright, Gerald, one day. I promise you. Be patient. One day you will come back to the village. And you will find me here if you need me."

The old man turned, was silhouetted for a moment against the light from the open door, then was gone. Gerald ran towards the door.

"Wait," he cried, "Wait! I don't know who you are. What's your name?"

A voice came from behind him, from the classroom, from beside the wooden desk.

"I'm Gerald Duffy, child. Your granddad."

No-one was there. Gerald ran outside, but the post office van was gone. Modern cars came and went on the road through the valley.

"I'm dreaming," thought Gerald, "I must have fallen asleep. I'd better go home, Mum will be wondering where I am."

He remembered his compass and pen knife and went back inside to retrieve them. Sunlight was streaming in through the clean window: the room smelled of polish and disinfectant. The knife and compass lay where he had left them on the desk, but next to them was a package. He picked it up. Beneath it, newly carved on the desk top, were the words "Gerald 2019". He pocketed the penknife and compass and, clutching the precious letters, left the old school for the last time, closing the door firmly behind him. He paused for a moment, watching the cars heading down the road through the valley and out into the world beyond. Then he walked briskly home, beginning to feel, with a quickening of anticipation, that everything might, after all, be alright.



# CRAVINGS (PART ONE)

By Judith

Maureen sheepishly entered the corner cafe, cautiously turning from left to right like a fugitive on the run. What if there was someone here that knew Charles? Then the fat would be in the fire. She grinned at the aptness of the phrase and her own silliness. She loved this place. It was bright, cheery, clean - no airs and graces - the last place Charles new found" friends" at the Golf Club would frequent.

The café was packed, possibly with other escapees from the obligatory Sunday morning jog!

As she inched up the queue to the counter she wondered if the obligation was theirs or their partners!

That conversation, or rather dictate, exactly one month ago, burned in her brain. Charles was cock a hoop because he'd just been appointed Captain at the Club. She had been pleased for him and about to congratulate, when he joked "You'd better shape up - Captains wife and all that - or I'll be swapping you for a younger model!" There was a time when she'd found his jokes funny; not any more!

Subsequent Sunday mornings had been Golf Club for Charles and slogging round the park for her! Sunday lunch at the Club for Charles - lemon tea and a fat free yoghurt at the café for her!

As she moved nearer the counter the delicious aroma of frying bacon assaulted her nostrils and her mouth began to water. (It was smoked too - her favourite). Those lovely Sunday brunches in the caravan - mmmm... bacon, eggs, mushrooms, tomatoes- just her and Charlie and the rain hammering on the roof! Mmmm that smell....

"Same as usual love?" Maureen was about to nod but instead she blurted out " No Florrie, no, I'm having a change - a large bacon buttie with extra ketchup and a mug of Builders please". A wicked grin stretched from ear to ear at her 'anti Charles' terminology.

Florrie's face lit up " Good for you- that will cheer you up!"

Shocked; Maureen realised she hadn't been 'cheery' for a long time. In fact there had been no joy in her life for a lot longer than the past month.

As she made her way to the one free table, she startled her fellow diners by letting out a huge hearty laugh and beaming round the room. She sat down, still smiling, vowing to make some major changes and 'food' would not be first on her list!

Maureen looked up to see a slim, attractive, woman approaching her table and realised she no longer envied her svelte figure, for at last she felt comfortable in her own skin.

## CRAVINGS (PART TWO)

By Jackie

I'm loaded down with shopping, it's great being a size 10 going into shops with upto the minute fashion, I'm in heaven I can buy what I like and it fits. It's taken 18 months to shed five stone, thanks to my pals at slimming club, Ben my Personal Trainer, he's cute, a little young, definite eye candy, yum candy...

Shopping done now entering my favourite café for lunch. My... it's busy, I spot an empty seat my bags are hitting people as I make my way, when I reach the table there's a woman sitting there. I say do you mind and plonk my bags on the empty seat. Al, the owner shouts over usual Pam, yes please I reply, he's flustered and shouts back I'll have to make up the salad it might take a while, I'll send over your black coffee. I smile at the woman as I sit down then my eyes are drawn to the display of chocolate.

Al's beckoning me, I'm slowly walking towards him, as I get nearer a door opens and like an obedient child I enter, the door slowly closes behind me. I'm inside a huge box of Liquorice Allsorts, I shout can I eat them and without waiting for a reply I'm grabbing them and munching quickly, I'm thinking where's the jelly pink and blue ones with the 100s and 1000s they're my favourites, magically blue and pink jellies are bouncing in front of me and I'm eagerly stuffing my face. They fade and I'm being bombarded by finger of fudges softly hitting me and springing back off me. I'm tearing impatiently at the wrappers and gorging on smooth chocolate and sweet fudge, feeling almost satisfied they start disappearing. In seconds Quality Streets are spiralling around my body, they're teasing me asking to be caught. I spot the flat bottom, humped sides, twisted crinkley purple wrapper. I'm chasing it,

I'm desperate for what's inside, I'm jumping higher and higher I latch onto one side of the twisted bow, it's coming towards me, it's getting bigger. I'm struggling to keep hold, my feet are leaving the floor, it's moving so fast it's swinging me from side to side like a rag doll. Without a bite, it vanishes and I float to the ground.

Out of the corner of my eye I spy pink and yellow, it's a pear drop tree, they're just asking to be picked. 'Which colour do I choose, I close my eyes and leave it to fate, popping it into my mouth I bite down, ouch... I can hear a voice saying are you okay, it's the woman sitting at my table, I look towards her she's enjoying the last delicious mouthful of a bacon buttie. I reply just day dreaming as I look down at my salad.'



# FRIENDSHIP BLOSSOMING

By Liz with Jacquie

Brenda looked across the road towards the Coffee Shop from her seat on the bench. Like most of the other shops in the Village, it was closed. She missed her afternoon coffee and a cake, which was always homemade. She was thankful there were none of those chain coffee shops in Ashton Village. It was unnaturally quiet, pleasantly peaceful you might say, but Brenda missed the daily bustle of the passers-by. Some people were still out and giving polite nods in greeting, and one or two even stopped for short chat before they continued their daily exercise. She had strolled out later in the day than usual, to miss the heat of the sun, and had paused to rest for a while on her favourite bench. It stood outside the florists. That too was closed, but a tub of cheerful begonias was on the pavement outside the door. Someone still cared.

Jack was taking his daily walk, always at four o'clock, along the High Street. He favoured later afternoons when the Village was usually beginning to quieten down. At ninety-two years, he had the inevitable slower movements that came with older age, but his walk was smartly upright. Despite the heat he wore his tweed jacket, a shirt and tie, and his flat cap.

Jack came to the bench outside the florists. He always stopped here to rest for a while. Seeing a lady sitting at one end of the bench, he sat down at the other end. He lifted his cap and said 'Good afternoon'.

Brenda smiled back at him, 'Got to keep our distance'.  
They looked at each other and laughed.

'I could say do you come here often?' said Jack.

Brenda laughed again. They sat quietly for a few moments then,

'Strange times,' remarked Jack.

'Yes indeed,' sighed Brenda.

'I was thinking about when I was a teenager, and the War', said Jack, 'and remembering the glowing skies over Manchester, and the droning sounds from the planes, and of course the bombs.' He gave an involuntary shudder.

'I do remember the noise, and the fear', replied Brenda, 'but I was very young then and I can't remember a lot about it.'



'I was thinking to myself that at least we could see and hear the enemy. We knew where it was. Were warned when it was coming... so many lives lost.' He paused, then, 'The enemy we have now is invisible, soundless, and can strike anyone, anywhere, without warning'.

Again they sat quietly for a while, thinking.

Then Brenda continued, 'I remember being frightened of the noises overhead, and my mother would pick me up and hold me close until I felt safe'.

'We can't even hold each other now' responded Jack. 'No human touch, not even for the dying.'

Silence

Brenda broke it, saying cheerfully, 'This won't be forever. Look it's a lovely day. The sun is shining; we have a clear blue sky. We should make the most of it while we can'.

'You're right of course,' he responded, sounding more cheerful himself, and looked directly into her face. He regarded her closely for the first time, noticing the neat row of pearls on the navy jumper, the powder pink coat reflecting a flattering glow onto her cheerful face. Soft grey hair immaculate with its curls and hint of blue.

'Make the most of today', he thought to himself. Out loud he said, 'Perhaps we could meet again tomorrow for a chat and a stroll?'

'I'd like that '.

'Four o'clock here?'

'Yes that will be fine.'

They both stood up and he watched her for a while as she walked away. He took his pipe from his pocket, tapped it on the back of the bench and put it in his mouth. An old habit and a comfort, and something he did when he felt content, although he never actually lit it now. Then he read the familiar text neatly inscribed on the bench, 'Friendships Blossoming'.

He thought, 'Once all this is over perhaps we'll sit closely side by side on this bench. After all we are never too old to have Friendship Blossoming into love.'

0161 973 83

By Therese  
Petite Fleurs

Les Petite  
Fleurs

OPENING HOURS

9.30am to 5.30pm  
TUES to SAT

CLOSED

MONDAY + WEDNESDAY

THANK  
YOU  
NHS



Friendships Blossoming



# THE PARK

By Norman with Tony

It's Easter Monday, it's a lovely sunny day and Heaton Park is heaving with people. There's joggers, children at the fair and the dog walkers are out in force.

At the cafe by the lake are the regulars engulfed in chit chat. Swans and birds are searching for crumbs. Maurice sits having a coffee on his own. He's looking very cheerful, he's a journalist and has just been asked to do some articles on wildlife, which he is very happy about.

Maisie arrives, she is in her forties, she's been depressed since her boyfriend accepted a job in Saudi Arabia. Her psychiatrist has told her to try to find work, she's qualified in I.T. She starts talking to Maurice and they start to laugh.

Next to arrive is Jack, he's been in Canada for years managing a Garden centre (or so he says). We know he's been in prison for 12 years for armed robbery. He joins in the conversation. He's glad to talk as he lives alone in a hostel not far from the park.

Last to arrive is the very attractive Lola. She's 45, wears designer clothes, goes to a top class hairstylist. Rumour has it that she is a high class escort. She been seen going to top hotels with various men: M.P's, famous actors and sportsmen.

They are all engaged in conversation, discussing the new ownership of the cafe. Maurice asked Maisie about doing some I.T. work on a regular basis. She is over the moon. He then asked Jack if he would do an interview for the paper, but Jack is not keen at all.

Lola bursts into tears, her mascara, runs down her face as she puts her head in her hands. She tells them she is desperately lonely and seeks attention from other men as the man she loved was killed in a motorbike accident two years ago. She agrees to do an interview with Maurice about her life. He says he will try and help her as much as he can as he has a lot of contacts.

Jack has asked Maisie to go out for a drink with him and Maisie has agreed. The four of them have agreed to keep in touch with each other.



# MISS MULVEY

By Pat with Dudley

Miss Mulvey was formidable. Her class of first years, in Bankfield Primary School, Salford knew she was the ruler of the classroom, who would not accept any excuse for poor behaviour or lack of scholarly application. Her personality dominated the infant department of the school, which had miraculously stayed intact despite the wanton bomb damage to the nearby docks and homes in 1941.

She was twenty six years old. Her purse, carefully placed on her desk, nearby at all times, gave a clue as to her character. A memento from the Shrine at Walsingham, her rosary beads, and a few coins, suggested faithfulness to the Church, but didn't reveal that teaching was her second choice of vocation. A religious life had called in her youth, but having to support her mother when dealing with her father's drunken rages had put paid to that. She knew it was wrong to think it, but Father's death in the war was a blessed release to her and her mother, Alice.

'I fell in love with a handsome man,' mother used to say. In the years that followed his death his good qualities began to outweigh the inebriation, the violence and his disappointment that there would be no more children, and no son to take over the family haulage firm.

She and Alice lived quietly in a small terraced house a short bus ride from the school. She had no choice. Mother seemed weak and unable to attend to her part time job at the local Coop, so she spent her days waiting for Miss Mulvey to return home from school.

Miss Mulvey attended the early Mass at St Bede's on Sunday, and for a short hour, lost herself in the ritual of the faithful. The Latin cadences spoken by the priest soothed her mind, and left her refreshed. She rarely spoke to others in the congregation, except to Fr James, of course, thanking him for the homily.

Returning home from church, she would change and take her only form of recreation, walking away from the scarred town out into the countryside.

It was on those 'rambles,' as she liked to call them, that she considered her life. What would happen if mother died? Dr Watson had prescribed a nerve tonic, but she felt her mother's health was not strong. If mother passed to her reward, what would happen to her? The house? Her life? Many of her school friends were married; they seemed happy, they had children, but memories of her father played

on her mind. The screams, the shouting, the wailing were all too vivid. Nothing seemed to fit.

Later that day she would return to the house, have a cup of tea and cake with mother, and then go to her room, where she would dry the field flowers she had picked on her walk, annotate them, and place them into her scrapbook. It rested on the bookshelf, next to the scrapbooks for 1944, 45, 46, 47, and 48. Would 1949 be any better, she thought, as she listened to classical music on the 3rd Programme and dreamed.

The following Tuesday, she returned home, to be greeted by her mother, waving an envelope in front of her face. "Read it! What is it? From France! You can read French- read it!"

She put her bag down and sighed. The post mark was badly smudged, but she could make out 'Montpellier'

"It's from a city in the south of France, Mum." She slid the letter out of the envelope, and unfolded it. "Cher Madame Mulvey.. that's you Mum." She quickly scanned the note. How long had it been since she took that French for Beginners course? 1947. She thought it might be a way to meet people, but..

She read on, translating as she went. "Dear Madam," she read, "My name is Michelle Hubert. I used to live in Paris, and had an art studio there before the war. When the Nazis arrived, I stayed, but it was hard. We waited for liberation, and when it came, we were so happy. It was 'incroyable,' incredible. We were mad, so free. The next days were insane.

And that was when I met Jerry. He stopped his truck, and asked for directions. He had no French, I had little English. He seemed friendly. I showed him a route, and he started to drive off. He leaned out of the cab and said 'tomorrow Bar Olympique.'

I knew the place; I thought, why not? Later, we met, shared a meal and wine. He told me lived in a Northern town, that he was married and had a grown up daughter."

Miss Mulvey bit her lip. Her mother drew closer. "and?" She tried to read the funny French words.

"She, Michelle, goes on to say - They met twice more, and then he drove off. Nine months later... she had a boy, mother. Armand."

"Help me to a chair, Cecily. How could he? That hussy. All those French women, no shame. She will have slept with the Germans, you know. She's grasping for money. How do we know it was his? The b-"

Miss Mulvey turned the envelope over. A small photo slipped out. It was dad, and Michelle. He looked happy. Different. Content.

"She goes on to say, Mother, that she knows Daddy is dead. She has investigated. She wants to meet."

"I won't see her."

"But, Mother--"

"Never."

But Miss Mulvey replied, using the school address.

Six weeks later, a train pulled into London Road station. Waiting on the platform, Miss Mulvey, in her walking clothes - trousers, Oxford lace ups, blouse, scarf. She felt that it showed a more 'comfortable' side of her personality. Miss Mulvey noted a young woman, almost her age, she thought, with a young boy, clinging to his mother's hand as she tried to manoeuvre through the arriving crowd.

Miss Mulvey waved tentatively; Mme Hubert looked up and, her face brightened.

"Cecile?" she queried.

"Oui. Mme Hubert?" Miss Mulvey so rarely heard her Christian name. She bent down to greet Armand. "Comment allez vous, Armand?"

She decided on a taxi to take them home. A bit of an expense, but it was an occasion, she felt. She felt she should apologise for the ruins that surrounded them as they drove towards her house, but she became engaged, speaking to Michelle and Armand. Such a lovely boy, she thought. Polite.

The taxi arrived at her house. Mine now, she thought. Mother had declined steadily since receiving that letter, and was now in a nursing home, and was, said the Sister in charge 'very frail.'

She opened the door. "Entrez, tout le monde" she said proudly. Every room was full of flowers, their scent filling the rooms. The last vestiges of mother's disappointment and shame were being swept from the home.

"Welcome, welcome, welcome."