

A Conversation

A woman has taken the path off the street to the side of a suburban house that she is obviously quite familiar with.

She calls "Hello"

A second woman is loading her washing machine.

"Julie. What a nice surprise." The two women embrace, kissing cheeks warmly not just the surrounding air. "Come in, shouldn't you be enlightening the country's youth this morning?"

"Not today, we do have the occasional day off. Anyway, our term hasn't started yet and I had to come and tell you my news."

"Here, let me move the boys' sports stuff, I've got to wash it for tomorrow. What is your news? Would you like a coffee? "

"Yes please," Julie pulls a chair from under the kitchen table and sits down. "I had a letter today and it looks as though she wants to get in touch with me."

Sue looks puzzled. "She?"

"My daughter!"

" Daughter ?"

Sue puts the coffee beside kettle, turns towards her friend and says," But Julie, you've never wanted to know anything about her. You were only saying, not long ago, that you were relieved you'd decided not to have had contact, and that you have never told Jack. You haven't, have you, said anything about the baby? "

"Baby, she's twenty and a student in London, and no I haven't told him, I hoped you'd help me, I have to tell him now."

Sue busies herself with making drinks, her mind buzzing. She remembered that summer when they were half way through the sixth form. Julie had managed somehow to ignore what was becoming more and more obvious.

"Susie, you know that if you and especially your mother hadn't helped me I'd never have coped. I need you just as much now."

"You always said that you would have left it in a phone box somewhere."

"It sounds awful now but I meant it. Dad had no idea what had happened, he was hardly over losing mum and I really didn't think I was pregnant."

"What about the father? Did Alan know? The baby, your daughter, might want to contact him."

“Oh I’ll face that when I need to, and no my cousin didn’t know, Gran wanted me to tell him but we were both sixteen and you know how mixed up I was, Dad had sent me to Granny’s for that half term holiday from school. Poor man, Mum had just died and he had to do something with me.”

“Getting drunk on your granddad’s whiskey didn’t help you don’t even remember your first sexual experience.”

“Oh lord, you sound like one of those leaflets they leave around the student health office at college, for the kids.” Julie looks questioningly at her friend. “You have never been critical of me. I thought you understood. Did you blame me for getting pregnant?”

“No, of course not, it was a terrible time for you.” Sue looks aimlessly out of the kitchen window wonders whether she had been more affected by the birth of that baby all those summers ago than she had ever admitted.

” In the event it was your Gran who helped you.”

“You’re right, but only after your mother spoke to Dad and contacted her. Gran organised everything. I went to that mother and baby place in Yorkshire and I was back for the second year in the sixth in September without anyone knowing what had happened. But Gran can’t help this time.”

“Your ‘A’ Levels were better than mine too. It’s always been a bone of contention with me”

Susie sits beside Julie at the kitchen table and clasps her hand tightly looking at her troubled friend she unable stop herself asking,

” Are you going ahead with this Julie? Don’t do anything too soon. Give it a few days to sink in. You’ll have to tell Jack and, goodness knows what she is like, what sort of family she has grown up in or how they will react. Do you know where she grew up, was it near York?”

“No idea, the letter is very formal. It gave an address with a telephone number for me to contact. A place where they give advice about these things and just that my daughter is a student and as you said, that I should take things slowly.”

“I’m here when you need me love.”

The women embrace, both have tears on their cheeks. Sue gently wipes her friend’s face.

“You always have been Susie. Help me now, what should I do?”