

The Unwanted Visitors

The first time we went I stood close beside Charlotte and would have held her hand but I thought that now I was ten I shouldn't mind being in a strange place and besides we were with Miss Black who arranged the visit for Community Service, my favourite subject. Mother had been annoyed that the school had decided that this term we should go to the sheltered housing flats in Duke Road. Last year our form helped with the church play group. Although I had overheard my parents discussing our last project, when mummy wondered why school couldn't place us in the pre prep department in our own school if we needed to practice playing with small children. I really didn't think we were practicing, we were helping and the year below us would be going to the play group instead of us this term. Daddy had been sure that no harm would come to us by being involved in the activities in the church hall where ever the children came from. I am not sure where the children live who go to St Margaret's although our church is in the village.

Our first visit to the flats in Duke Street was on a Tuesday. All the girls from our form went together, we walked there from school, in ten minutes. The building is nice, it has pretty gardens with some old trees which remind me of granny Lockhart's house, there is even a bench just inside the gate like the one grandpa sits on to read his newspaper in the mornings. Granny and grandpa don't have a big gate like the one that had opened silently, a bit spookily, when our teacher rang the bell even though there was no sign of anybody nearby. I was going with Charlotte to visit Mrs Blaine properly that day, last week we had met our 'resident' as Miss Black had called her, in the day room where other ladies sat waiting for their visitors, I don't think any men live there. We, in pairs, had been introduced to the ladies and after only a few minutes said goodbye and went back to school. But this time the visit was to be in the flat where Mrs Blaine lived and we girls had each brought a small gift the lady we were visiting.

As soon as I saw them I knew, stuck up little brats in their maroon uniforms. I said to Joan, the manager here, I did not want visitors especially no one doing me favours. Why should I be a part of their good work project. I'm not like that Ivy Brown in flat four, she can't get enough of them, "We're part of the 'Big Society,'" she told me.

She had two of them here every week last year, even went to Christmas dinner up the school and had a hamper with all sorts in it she says, I'll be sure to be invited this year. Not if I can help it, it's not for me, they can keep their charity I don't want none of it. I only came here because the social said I couldn't cope at home. If my Marilyn lived nearer I'd be fine.

Mrs Blaine's room is so pretty, with red curtains and sofa, I can't believe how like granny's house it is. Granny has her photographs on her piano and I didn't see Mrs Blaine's piano but she has just as many photographs, all around. It was very cosy although there was no fire place, besides Granny says it is a nuisance to have to get Harris to light the fire and clean out the grate every morning in the winter. We made a cup of tea, with Miss Black's help. Mrs Blaine said we didn't have to but she liked it when we did and the cup cakes we made for her were much appreciated and would be eaten after her tea. Mummy only lets us have cake at tea time so I understood she might like to wait until then.

I put them cakes straight in the bin when they went. You should have seen them all lop sided. I'll bet they brought me the ones they wouldn't eat. And that Miss Black, she only wanted to have a good look around, soon as they got here she offered to make tea just so she could nose

in my kitchen. I can make me own tea I told her, but she said, oh no part of the project. And the girls were as bad, I saw the taller one looking at my photos, eyes all over she was.

This week we went to Duke Street alone, well not actually alone Miss Black took us and waited in the office downstairs while we went to flat 10 to visit Mrs Blaine, we had not cooked any cakes so we took some flowers, I know how much granny likes them and daddy helped me pick a very nice bunch of roses. He took the thorns off so that Mrs Blaine would not prick her fingers when she arranged them, he does that for mummy, she has a bowl especially for them.

Back again, thought they'd get fed up, but no, here they were.

"Some visitors for you, Alice." Says Joan at the door, it could only be them. As they came in I could smell the flowers, beautiful, roses. The only flowers my Ted ever brought me, grew them specially. "Here you are gel." He'd say. "I shouldn't have roses no where near my broad beans, breeding place for black fly but I know you like 'em."

We could see she hated the flowers, she cried and we had to go and get Miss Black. It was a shame because they were really lovely and had been growing just an hour before. We had to wait in the office and while we did, we arranged the roses in a vase from a cupboard there because Joan was not sure whether Mrs Blaine had one in her room. Then we went up to say 'goodbye' and she said liked the vase of flowers although she had tears in her eyes again and I wanted to hug her to say sorry if we had brought the wrong flowers, there are lots of others in our garden and in Charlotte's if she would prefer them. But she didn't seem to want a hug and she said thank you and that the flowers were nice.

I was taken aback by them girls. Once you get to know them they aren't half bad. Even came in half term week. Both their mothers came which was a bit different, Miss Black is on holiday one of them told me but the girls so wanted to come. Young Charlotte explained that after last week they had decided to stick to something to eat so they brought biscuits. A lovely big box from Waitrose, chocolate ones, I'll take them down to the day room tomorrow and show that Ivy Brown. Then they asked if I would like to go to the coffee shop in the high street and have a 'Latte', and I did. Frothy coffee, I prefer a nice cup of tea.