

Characters – The Yellow Hollyhock

- Jenny (F)** - A single independent minded woman, seated on a park bench with a firm purpose in mind. Stage age approx. 20's-30's.
- Oscar (M)** - A single man, out for a jog, smitten by the sight of a girl sitting alone on a park bench. Stage age approx. 20's- 30's.

Scene 1 – Park Bench

(Jenny enters with bag. Places bag on floor. Sits on bench. Checks her watch. A few seconds elapse. Jenny checks her mobile phone. Looks around. Oscar enters jogging. Jogs past bench. Notices Jenny. Exits jogging. Jenny fidgets. Checks watch and mobile. A few seconds elapse. Jenny checks watch and mobile again. Sighs. Looks around despondently. Stands up as if to leave.)

Oscar: (Enters jogging. This time, he is carrying a yellow hollyhock. Sits on bench.) Hi.

(Jenny frowns puzzled.)

Oscar: Sorry I'm late.

Jenny: Pardon?

Oscar: You're, er, expecting me? (Shows her the yellow hollyhock.)

Jenny: (Frowns) Um, why are you carrying a yellow hollyhock?

Oscar: (Lies) I forgot my buttonhole.

Jenny: (Looks at Oscar's tee-shirt) Your tee-shirt doesn't have a buttonhole.

Oscar: That's right. I also forgot to wear a buttonhole to put my flower into.

Jenny: (Looks at her watch) And you forgot the time.

Oscar: (Smiles) I'm here now. (Gestures) Let's sit down.

(Jenny and Oscar sit on bench)

Jenny: So, you went back to get one; a flower that is. I saw you jog past a minute or two ago.

Oscar: Yes.

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(Jenny looks very puzzled. Opens mouth, but can't think what to say.)

Oscar: (Contrite) OK. I hold my hand up; I pinched it from the formal gardens. What's it called again?

Jenny: A hollyhock – (looks at hollyhock disparagingly) well, it's a wilted bloom, roughly plucked from a hollyhock.

Oscar: (Shrugs) Best I could do in given time I'm afraid.

Jenny: (Perplexed) Why do you need to wear a flower at all in your buttonhole – well not in your buttonhole?

Oscar: (Surprised) You're wearing one. I should do likewise.

Jenny: (Glances down at the red flower in her lapel. Stares at Oscar.) This is a rose, and it's red.

Oscar: Well, I guessed it was; I'm not well up on flowers. (Ruefully) I'm sorry, I'm not doing very well am I? In a minute, you're going to tell me I don't look a bit like my photograph.

Jenny: Am I?

Oscar: Aren't you?

Jenny: **(Lost for words)** I – er –

Oscar: You were probably expecting some muscular hunk. Photographs are a bit deceptive aren't they?

Jenny: **(Trying to understand the situation)** Have you er –

Oscar: **(Equally trying to second guess her thoughts)** Er, been on the site long?

Jenny: Yes.

Oscar: No, not really. Have you?

Jenny: Oh, years.

Oscar: **(Looks surprised)** Really? That's not a very good advertisement for them, is it?

Jenny: **(Stares)** I think it's an excellent advertisement. Recycling.

Oscar: **(Amazed)** I beg your pardon?

Jenny: Taking what somebody else doesn't want; avoiding waste.

Oscar: **(Taken aback)** Oh! Well, I suppose that's a pragmatic if not a very romantic view of things. Me, I'm a romantic at heart. **(Gestures to park gardens)** I expect the gardener is a romantic at heart; which is why I'm sure he'll understand about the hollyhock.

Jenny: **(Looks puzzled. Tries to think of something to say. Blurts out)** Flowers have a language of their own you know.

Oscar: They don't actually don't talk to each other though, do they?

Jenny: No, but they do communicate, as do trees. The Victorians, if they sent someone flowers, there would be a meaning in them, like a secret language.

Oscar: Red roses for love – **(points to Jenny's buttonhole flower)**. Tell me another meaning.

Jenny: Um, yellows carnations for disappointment and rejection.

Oscar: **(Frowns)** Really?

Jenny: **(Smiles)** In the days when girls had to be chaperoned, and had little chance to talk to young men, flowers would be sent to speak for them.

Oscar: **(Looks at his wilted yellow hollyhock)** I hope my yellow hollyhock doesn't signify disappointment and rejection.

Jenny: I think a hollyhock means ambition.

Oscar: **(Smiles reflectively)** That's true, in a way.

Jenny: Er, do you, er, have many plants at home?

Oscar: **(Shakes head)** No. I kill them. Not purposefully I may add.

Jenny: **(Perplexed)** Oh dear! You probably overwater them; that's the usual mistake people make. **(Overcoming curiosity)** Um, has someone asked you to come to meet me tonight?

Oscar: Asked me to come? What, like a bet?
Jenny: **(Frowns)** No, just asked you to come, instead of them?
Oscar: **(Firmly)** Certainly not. I wouldn't agree to that!

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Jenny: **(Surprised)** You wouldn't?
Oscar: No. I don't approve of deception. **(Scratches head)** Not unless I had an ulterior motive. I mean, if you don't want to meet someone, you should be honest and let them know; not just fob them off onto someone else.
Jenny: **(A bit puzzled)** I've have had a few let downs. Time wasters are such a – waste of time. **(Rhetorical)** You do get some of those on the site don't you; email you, and then you never hear from them again.
Oscar: Oh absolutely. On the other hand, I wouldn't think anyone starts out meaning to waste somebody else's time. To travel in hope is sometimes better than to arrive. Or is it to travel hopefully?
Jenny: But that's rude!
Oscar: **(Taken aback)** Rude?
Jenny: Yes! If someone offers something, and the other person accepts, and then just doesn't bother turning up that's impolite. If they changed their mind, they should text, or email.
Oscar: **(Trying to clarify)** That's right. It's unkind to stand somebody up.
Jenny: If you want to use that analogy.
Oscar: **(Smiles)** They could at least send a yellow carnation.
(Jenny smiles.)
Oscar: **(Curious)** When you – when you say you've been on the site for years, have you found it useful? Met any interesting people?
Jenny: **(A bit puzzled)** My experiences have been mostly good. It's handy there are local groups, so no-one has to travel far.
Oscar: Distance shouldn't be a barrier, should it? I know it makes things more difficult logistically.
Jenny: I wouldn't mind travelling for something special.
Oscar: **(Romantically)** For something special, the ends of the earth wouldn't be too far.
(Jenny looks at Oscar strangely)
Oscar: It's very difficult to tell from a photograph isn't it. I expect some people post a photo from years back, before hair starts to go.
Jenny: **(Nods)** Or springs.
Oscar: **(Amazed)** Springs?

Jenny: Yes. Or a wonky leg.

Oscar: Do you get many wonky legs?

Jenny: You'd be surprised.

Oscar: **(Looks confused)** I certainly would!

Jenny: Some things you can overlook, or fix. Despite that it's a marvellous idea isn't it; helping to reduce global warming.

Oscar: Really? I would have rather thought it increased it!

Jenny: Eleven million people can make a big impact.

Oscar: Eleven million – on the site!

Jenny: That's globally of course.

Oscar: **(Trying hard to understand more.)** You have to, er, take online profiles with a pinch of salt too, don't you. I mean, if someone describes themselves as superman, you know they're a liar.

Jenny: Are you talking about the online descriptions? Well, I suppose some people are more honest than others. **(Shrugs)** Others just want to get rid.

Oscar: **(Shocked)** Get rid? You mean the recycling bit; like if you're fed up with your husband or boyfriend, or girlfriend, you er – see if anyone else wants them?

Jenny: **(Amazed)** You do use the oddest analogies! I'm really wondering if you got my photo mixed up with someone else's?

Oscar: **(Smiles romantically)** I don't need a photo when you're here in front of me.

Jenny: **(Distracted and attracted by Oscar)** I don't know what that's got to do with anything at all! **(A bit flustered)** What were we talking about? Oh yes, people can get their description and their photo mixed up sometimes. You think you're looking at a photo of a sideboard say, but the description is for a ceramic sink.

Oscar: **(Shakes his head)** I would never describe you as a ceramic sink! Although you do seem to be a bit potty! **(Invites comment)** Now we've had a bit of a chat, what do you think about me? Do I meet your expectations? Are you disappointed? I promise you, I haven't got a wonky leg!

Jenny: **(Surprised, blunt)** Well, of course I'm disappointed. You know nothing about plants or flowers, apart from how to kill them!

Oscar: **(Dejected)** I don't profess to have green fingers. I guess that was in the profile? But you could teach me.

Jenny: **(Interrupts)** Why should I teach you? I don't give lessons in floral appreciation!

Oscar: **(Sadly)** That's a pity.

Jenny: **(Annoyed.)** I'm beginning to think this is some kind of joke. Why couldn't Jooles come tonight? We were going to meet after work. He didn't email to say he was sending someone else.

Oscar: Ah, Jooles was the lucky chap was he? Superman Jooles! Well, I'm afraid I have a confession to make. I'm sorry that Jooles stood you up. When I jogged past, and saw

you sitting alone on the bench, I suddenly thought I'd impersonate the rotter who'd let you down.

Jenny: You thought I'd been stood up?

Oscar: **(Gets up to leave)** You were looking at your watch and your phone, and about to leave. You had a flower in your buttonhole, obviously waiting for a date from a website, unless you were a spy, and –

Jenny: Wait a minute! If you're leaving you may as well take this. **(Reaches down for her bag. Withdraws plant pot with the red plant in it.)** I've written the instructions for care on a little label. I knocked one of the flowers off when I put it in my bag, and **(points to flower in her buttonhole)** stuck it in my buttonhole. **(Stands up.)**

Oscar: **(Points to plant)** This was for lucky Jooles?

Jenny: **(A bit exasperated)** I was coming home this way, so I arranged to wait on the bench, so he could collect it. Saves petrol. He said he'd love to have it. **(Shrugs)** He was obviously a time waster.

Oscar: It wasn't a date?

Jenny: Freecycle isn't a dating agency. It's a recycling charity! It was a date to collect the plant I was giving away!

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Oscar: **(Embarrassed)** I've made a right twit of myself haven't I!

Jenny: You certainly had me confused. **(Hands plant to Oscar.)**

Oscar: **(Takes plant.)** Thanks for this. I'll try not to kill it. **(Moves to walk away.)**

Jenny: **(Smiles and puts her hand on Oscar's arm)** Tell you what, oh – what's your name?

Oscar: Oscar. What's yours?

Jenny: Jenny.

Oscar: Hi Jenny.

Jenny: Tell you what Oscar, buy me a cup of coffee and I'll give you a primer in floral appreciation – and you can tell me all about yourself. We can call it recycling!

Oscar: **(Smiles and accepts plant.)** We can call it a date.

(Oscar and Jenny exit together.)

The end.

Characters – Moving on

Alicia (F) - Sophisticated. Worried. Of an age to have schoolchildren at home.

Kay (F) - Down to earth. Worried. Of an age to have schoolchildren at home.

Scene 1 – Park Bench

(Alicia enters looking thoughtful. Notices bench and suddenly decides to sit down. Breathes deeply as if anxious and trying to relax. Closes eyes. Kay enters looking worried. Notices bench and Alicia, and suddenly decides to sit down. Alicia opens eyes and looks at Kay. Smiles briefly and looks away, as if engrossed in her own thoughts. Closes eyes. Kay taking rather noisy deep breaths.)

Alicia: **(Opens eyes and looks at Kay. Concerned)** Are you OK?

Kay: Yes, yes, I'm OK thanks. I've been getting these panic attacks lately. I'm alright I'm - well I've got to move house soon, and it's a come as a bit of a shock.. **(Continues taking deep breaths.)**

Alicia: Would you like a drink of water? **(Points to her handbag)** I've got a bottle in my bag.

Kay: No, it's easing now. Thanks. **(Calmer)**

Alicia: Have you been renting your house?

Kay: Um, well, sort of. We've had it on a lease for the last five years. My husband runs a pub you see, 'The Railwayman'. It's a lovely little pub, in a suburb of London. The railway line doesn't exist anymore, and we're in a bit of a backwater. There aren't the facilities to do food, and people don't go out for drinks as much as they used to. **(Sadly)** We've been putting on different events to attract customers, quiz nights mostly; we've tried karaoke. You can only do so much can't you, without getting into a load of debt.

Alicia: **(Wryly)** That's very true. How did the karaoke go?

Kay: Painfully! You wouldn't think there were so many people who can't sing in tune. I think it put other drinkers off. Quiz nights are quite popular, but there are other pubs doing those with bigger prizes.

Alicia: So, you're packing it in?

Kay: **(Upset)** We're not packing it in. The brewery's not allowing us to renew the lease. They're going to knock the pub about, modernise it, put in a kitchen and get a sort of landlord/chef in. They've found someone they think will do a better job.

Alicia: I'm sorry; that must be hurtful.

Kay: Yes, it is. My husband's worked really hard to make a go of it. The pandemic hit us hard, but we struggled through. Like other businesses we got help from the government, and there was the furlough scheme. There was the 'Eat Out to Help Out', which didn't help because we don't do food.

Alicia: We're probably having to move very soon too; similar reasons. We've been there five years too. I'm Alicia by the way.

Kay: Oh, hello, I'm Kay. Do you have a pub Alicia?

Alicia: **(Smiles ruefully)** No, no but er like you, there's someone with ideas more popular than my husband's. The writing's been on the wall for a little while. The good you do is soon forgotten, isn't it?

Kay: People have short memories.

Alicia: People vote, I mean, they ask for something, then when they've got it, and it doesn't run as smoothly as they hoped, they're not kind. If we're lucky we'll have two days to move out; if not one day.

Kay: One day! Blooming heck; that sounds impossible!

Alicia: **(Shrugs)** You just have to have things organised in your mind, so everything can be put into crates quickly. If the person taking over wants you out in a day, that's how it has to be. It depends how they've got on the past really.

Kay: That sounds pretty mean. But what do you do about hiring a furniture van?

Alicia: They have to be on standby too.

Kay: So, you don't know if you're staying or going?

Alicia: **(Smiles)** Or coming or going. We've always known it's not our forever home of course; but people put down roots don't they, and it's painful each time they get pulled up.

Kay: At least we've got one month. We're going to move into rented for a bit, while we look for work.

Alicia: Do you have children Kay?

Kay: Two girls. They love where we are, and they go to the local school. Then there's the dog, cat, two guinea pigs and a rabbit – oh hang on, four guinea pigs. We thought we'd bought two females.

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Alicia: **(Smiles)** We have two boys who are settled. We've just got a cat. He's not ours, he sort of goes with the place, a mouser. He came from the Battersea Dogs and Cats Home years ago. He likes doing front of house things too, meeting and greeting. He's quite aloof, like an old butler; observant of protocol.

Kay: You've got mice?

Alicia: Rats too. It's an old building; over three hundred years. He's a bit of a local character. He's had a few stand offs with Harold next door.

Kay: Harold?

Alicia: **(Laughs)** Their cat; named after Harold Wilson.

Kay: I can't stand politics, or politicians. They're all the same.

Alicia: **(Slightly awkward)** A, er, lot of people feel like that. Quite a big percentage of people don't bother to vote at all. Have you, er, voted today?

Kay: What do you think Alicia?

(Alicia smiles wryly, nods understandingly)

Kay: Our cat's called Buddy, after Budweiser. We get mice in the cellar.

Alicia: **(Brightly)** I do hope that you manage to find jobs; there are quite a few about at the moment, what with the B word.

Kay: Brexit.

Alicia: Yes, but let's not talk politics.

Kay: I'll second that!

Alicia: **(Confiding)** It's the hurt isn't it, that someone does their best, under really difficult circumstances. I suppose it's whoever's the best and luckiest at making the books balance, and keeping people happy at the same time.

Kay: Making the books balance, oh my word! After a day's work finishing after eleven at night, my husband still has to do the book keeping.

Alicia: **(Commiserating)** Burning the candle at both ends. My husband's just the same.

Kay: It's all about the money isn't it.

Alicia: A lot of it is. **(Laughs a little grimly)** My husband didn't have grey hair when we moved in. It's not just us who have to move out, it's our next doors neighbours too, who were part of the team.

Kay: That's brutal!

Alicia: **(Shrugs)** Not really; we all knew the deal; but sometimes people forget that you're a human being.

Kay: **(Wistfully)** I'll really miss the street; it's got a nice cosy feel. The railway cottages are lovely. Where the railway line was, they've made a trail for walkers and cyclists. There are always people walking or riding by. Is it busy where you live?

Alicia: Yes, pretty busy. But there's a lovely park, St James nearby. It's one of eight royal parks. **(Enthusiastic)** If you're ever that way, take your kids to see the pelicans.

Kay: Pelicans?

Alicia: Yes, there's about forty. My husband says they were a gift from the Russian Ambassador in the seventeenth century. The wildlife officer feeds them fish every day.

Kay: Is that somewhere near Buckingham Palace?

Alicia: Quite near. **(Regretfully)** My husband will probably have to go there tomorrow to hand in his resignation.

Kay: Is he the wildlife officer for the park?

Alicia: **(Laughs)** The wildlife officer? No, he works for the government. It's a formal thing. Tradition. **(Stands up.)** Well, it's been nice chatting Kay. It's taken my mind off things for a little while. We're never alone with our worries, are we? Good luck, with the move and everything. I'll think about you.

Kay: Thanks Alicia. Good Luck with your move too, if you have to move. **(Stands up.)** When will you know by?

Alicia: After the votes have been counted. I'll have a good idea when I get back home. I've been trying to avoid listening to the news. Goodbye. **(Exits.)**

Kay: Bye. **(Looks puzzled, then turns to watch Alicia go with a wondering expression. Exits looking thoughtful.) The end.**

Characters – A night under the stars

- Luke (M)** - A young(ish!) man taking on the challenge of sleeping out for charity.
- Stuart (M)** - A rough sleeper, who is actually a ghost.
- Will (M)** - Park keeper. Small role; a dozen lines at end of play. Could be doubled by Stuart.

Scene 1 – Park Bench

(SFX. Hooting of owl. Repeat. Luke enters with sleeping bag and backpack. Heads to the bench. Lies sleeping bag on bench, places hot water bottle inside. Unpacks book, torch, flask and opened packet of biscuits from backpack; arranges them tidily around the bench. Sits on bench on sleeping bag; shivers a little. Gazes up as if admiring the stars.)

Stuart: (Enters with an old thin blanket and well worn ‘bag for life’. Heads for bench, looking increasingly annoyed at the sight of Luke.) Hey! What do you think you’re doing?

Luke: (Innocently) I was just about to have a cup of cocoa.

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Stuart: Not there you’re not; that’s my bench!

Luke: This is a public bench in a public space. Anyone is entitled to sit here.

Stuart: (Enquiringly) You’re leaving, after your cup of cocoa?

Luke: Er no, I thought I’d settle down here for the night.

Stuart: Not there you’re not; that’s my bench!

Luke: (Sticking up for himself) We’ve been through this. (Gestures) – There are other benches. I’ve just got myself sorted out on this one.

Stuart: (Stubbornly) Yes, but this is my bench.

(Stuart picks up Luke’s book and torch, switching torch on and off)

Luke: (Stands up) What are you doing?

Stuart: I’m moving you on. This is my bench.

Luke: (Challenging) What makes this your bench?

Stuart: Because, I always sleep here. Every night I sleep here, and I’ve been doing it for the last – for ever! Now clear off, before I duff you one!

Luke: You mean you’re not doing it for charity?

Stuart: (Amazed) For charity? Why should I do it for charity?

Luke: That’s why I’m here. My friends and family have sponsored me.

Stuart: Have you ever thought they’re trying to get rid of you?

Luke: Of course they’re not; it’s only for one night.

Stuart: One night! That’s not much of a commitment! How much are they paying you? Perhaps they’ll pay me too – then I won’t have to sleep on this hard bench!

Luke: The money’s going to help people off the streets – including you.

Stuart: Bah! I don’t want any nosy parkers helpers helping me; they can mind their own business. (Says wonderingly) Money to sleep rough! That takes the biscuit that does!

(Puts down Luke's book and torch. Picks up Luke's packet of biscuits and reads writing) 'Bourbon'. **(Takes biscuit. Rhetorical)** You don't mind do you – though I'd have preferred a Garibaldi. **(Bites biscuit.)**

Luke: Help yourself.

Stuart: **(Takes half a dozen biscuits and puts them loose in his bag.)** Thanks. You haven't got a drink, have you?

Luke: **(Gestures to flask)** Yes, I've got cocoa; it's made with milk. I thought it might help me to sleep.

Stuart: Cocoa won't help you sleep; a drop of the hard stuff is what you need. Got any?

Luke: I was told alcohol was the last thing to drink when sleeping rough. It numbs the senses. It could cause hypothermia.

Stuart: **(Quiet for a couple of seconds.)** I like my senses numbing. **(Looking up as if at stars.)** It's going to be a frosty one. On a clear night like this, the stars look like shards shattered from a cut glass decanter. They say we come from the stars. **(Shivers.)**

Luke: Yes, I've heard that. **(Points as if to sky)** Is that The Plough?

Stuart: **(Gazing upwards)** No, that's Orion the Hunter. Four stars make Orion - Rigel, Betelgeuse, Bellatrix, and Saiph. Then there's Alnitak, Alnilam and Mintaka in Orion's belt. Have you got any then?

Luke: **(Puzzled)** Got any what?

Stuart: **(Nods at Stuart's backpack)** Hard stuff.

Luke: No, sorry. I don't drink hard stuff; I enjoy a glass of wine, or half a beer.

Stuart: **(Rhetorical)** I'm not going to have a very merry birthday then am I?

Luke: It's your birthday?

Stuart: January 5th, Christ's birthday.

Luke: December 25th is Christ's birthday.

Stuart: That's a modern convenience due to the changing of the calendar. January 5th it is in Old Style timekeeping. I had a very good birthday a few years ago. I went to this house for a glass of water; people never refuse water.

Luke: Water?

Stuart: Yes. **(Proudly)** I never ask for food; I'm not a beggar. This woman gave me a glass of water, then told me that her husband had gone off with this other woman, and he'd left behind three bottles of his aged whiskies. She gave them to me; said it served him right. Nectar, pure nectar! How's the war going? I haven't seen a newspaper lately.

Luke: Ukraine?

Stuart: **(Puzzled)** No – the Falklands.

Luke: The Falklands! But that was over years ago; Argentina's still quibbling over it.

Stuart: **(Frowns)** That's odd. Last newspaper I read was full of it. I must have picked up an old one.

Luke: About forty years old! It's all Ukraine now, and the trouble in the Middle East.

Stuart: **(Scratches head thoughtfully)** Middle East; that rumbles on. I hadn't picked up about Ukraine. Are you going to move then? There's other benches in the gardens **(points)** up by the old peach house. I want to get settled. I like to think about the stars before I go to sleep.

Luke: Do you mean where the old peach house used to be?

Stuart: What do you mean used to be? It's over there! You used to be able to get into it at night; keep warm near the pipes. Then they started locking it up.

Luke: It's not there now. I think it was vandalised so much, they demolished it.

Stuart: **(Frowns)** Demolished it? But I only saw it, only recently it was – **(looks a bit confused.)** Anyway, clear off, that's my bench. **(Points to all Luke's stuff)** Take all your chattels with you. Have you got some newspaper?

Luke: I've got a book thanks.

Stuart: **(Patiently)** I can tell you're a newbie at sleeping out! Newspapers for keeping you warm. You put a thick wad under you, and a thick wad over you.

Luke: **(Smiles)** I don't need newspaper thanks. **(Points to sleeping bag)** This sleeping bag is five seasons. It keeps me warm up to minus 45 degrees - or rather down to 45 degrees! **(Starts packing his belongings away into his bag.)**

Stuart: **(Gets old looking wads of newspapers from his carrier bag and lays them on the bench.)** What a lot of fuss you make for one night! **(Waves an untidy wad of other newspapers from his carrier at Luke. As if lecturing)** Newspaper - thermal – and sterile. You could deliver a baby on these newspapers!

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Luke: **(Looks doubtful. Suddenly notices headlines in newspaper that Stuart has laid on bench. Stares at it. Picks up paper.)** How old is this newspaper! **(Reads incredulously)** 'Election Victory for Margaret Thatcher'! **(Laughs. Scans top of paper for date, reads)** 4th May, 1979!

Stuart: **(Annoyed. Grabs newspaper back roughly. Smooths it down on bench. Smooths it down again as if he is unsettled.)** It's not old at all. It's a good newspaper. If you've got money to burn buying a newspaper every day, then I haven't! I look after what I've got!

Luke: **(Apologetic)** I'm sorry. I've never seen a paper with that date before; it's way older than me. My parents probably saw it when they were children.

Stuart: **(Stares)** Older than you? Oh, I can't understand you, with your five seasons sleeping bag and your Ukraine. **(Holds his head as if in pain)** You're doing my head in. I need to sleep now.

Luke: Sorry, I'll get going to one of the benches where the old peach house was. Perhaps I'll see you in the morning? **(Holds his hand out offering to shake Stuart's hand.)** I'm Luke.

Stuart: **(Shakes head as if perplexed, but hold out hand to shake Luke's hand.)** Stuart.

(Luke and Stuart shake hands.)

Luke: **(Exclaims as he's shaking Stuart's hand)** Man, you're freezing! Will you have a cup of hot cocoa Stuart?

Stuart: **(Somewhat agitated)** No, no. **(Indicates the bench)** You can sleep there. I'm going to have a look at the peach house; it's there, I know it is. **(Quickly removes his newspaper from bench and stuffs it into his carrier. Walks away.)**

(Luke looks troubled. Starts to lay his sleeping bag down again on bench. Interrupted.)

Will: **(Enters)** You can't sleep there!

Luke: **(Doesn't realise Will is a park keeper. A bit annoyed)** Don't you start, I bagged this bench first and I'm not moving!

Will: **(Firmly)** I'm locking the park gates. It says quite clearly on the gates that we close at dusk.

Luke: **(Can't see the problem)** Well lock us in then; you can let us out in the morning, can't you? We're not doing any harm.

Will: **(Frowns and looks around)** We?

Luke: Yes. This other chap, you've probably seen him, says he sleeps on this bench every night. He's let me have it tonight; he's got a bit upset about the peach house. **(Gestures)** He's over there somewhere. Stuart.

Will: **(Suddenly alert)** Stuart!

Luke: Yes.

Will: What's the date?

Luke: It's 5th January.

Will: **(Meaningfully)** Ah.

Luke: **(Querying suspiciously)** Ah?

Will: Old gabardine raincoat, canvas shoes, carrier bag?

Luke: Yes. What about him? He wasn't doing any harm. I offered him a cup of cocoa. He was absolutely freezing.

Will: You're right. He was freezing. **(Points to plaque on back of bench. Reads.)** 'Stuart. A gentleman of the road. Froze to death here 5th January, 1983. He loved looking at the stars.'

Luke: **(Incredulously)** So – he was – a – a –

Will: **(Finishes sentence for Luke.)** Turns up around dusk this date every year. Back in 1983 they didn't lock the park at night.

(Will and Luke look up as if at the stars.)

The End