

Stories for Lipreading



ABOUT A STORY by Pat Kelly.

[This text is read aloud at the beginning of this video:]
Welcome to Stories for Lipreading. If you haven't used our website before, we suggest you look at our 'How to Use' page before you begin. We hope you enjoy this story, which is called 'About A Story' by Pat Kelly. It has been filmed in two episodes. Here is Episode One.

About a Story by Pat Kelly. Episode One.

This is the place. It is waiting, holding its breath. Dust motes glitter in the air. Jewel colours from stained glass windows gleam on stones polished by centuries of faithful feet. I wait too. Surely something will happen soon? Perhaps a grey-robed monk with a skeletal face will creep from behind the tapestries. Or maybe the last abbess will glide down the aisle, beckoning me to follow. But finally, I decide to give up. Romsey Abbey won't reveal its secrets today.

Maybe a walk in the park will inspire me. I really hope so, as I'm under pressure. In the street, a young woman hurries towards me with a chubby toddler in his pushchair. I wonder what it's like to be a baby. Maybe they have profound thoughts, perhaps even remembering life before birth? Is there inspiration for me there? Desperation is beginning to set in.

Entering the Memorial Park, I walk over and sit on an empty bench opposite the statue of a grave young soldier in World War One uniform, leading his tired horse.

It's warm and peaceful, and I'm trying not to doze when I sense movement. A pungent smell wafts towards me as an old tramp sits down and settles his filthy rags around him, stretching his legs out. I notice blackened toes protruding from gaping holes in mud-encrusted boots. As he shuffles along the seat towards me, I edge away.

"Got a light, mate?" he croaks.

"No, sorry."

"I've lost my Vesta, see: lost it here somewhere." I must have looked puzzled because he explained, "You know, to light my fag."

"Ah." There wasn't much else to say.

"I've got to find it. My wife gave it to me just before I left. Said it was lucky and would keep me safe. She'd had my name engraved on it. I daren't go home without it."

I started to get up, but a grimy hand in a fingerless glove grabbed my jacket. The old man seemed determined to keep talking.

"I'm George Turner." He stuck his hand out.

"Pleased to meet you, George," I reply, ignoring the proffered hand. "I'm afraid I've got to rush off...."

Stories for Lipreading



George was having none of it. “I used to come here all the time with my pals. We’d bring the horses down for a bit of a gallop and a good feed on some fresh grass. We were camped up there.” He pointed to somewhere invisible, in the distance. “Course, it wasn’t a park then, more of a meadow. A lot different to the Mile End Road, I can tell you. I met my wife here: my Mary. She’s a local girl.”

“That’s lovely.” Best to humour him, I suppose.

“We got married up there, in the Abbey, just before I was sent off to the Front. Got a letter a few weeks later telling me she was in the family way. Had our boy christened there too, called him Alfred. I haven’t seen him since, nor my lovely Mary.” He wiped his eye with his filthy hand.

“What about you? You married?”

“I was.” I swallowed, as Ellen’s face floated into my mind. “The doctors couldn’t save her. Or the baby.”

“Oh. I’m sorry to hear that, lad.” I just nodded, and stood to walk away.

“Do me a favour please, mate. If you find my Vesta, could you leave it somewhere for me? Hide it in that bush?” He pointed towards a laurel bush next to the bench. “I’m always down here so I’ll pick it up. Ta.”

I nodded and strolled off.

[About a Story by Pat Kelly. Episode Two.](#)

I didn’t sleep well that night. I had an appointment in London next day with Daniel, my publisher. It was an uncomfortable meeting. “Where is it then?” he demanded. I made a hopeless gesture with my hands. “Oh, come on. You must have the first chapter surely? A synopsis? An idea even?” He sounded even more desperate than I felt. “Look, I know things are difficult, but get stuck into your work. It’ll help. Anyway, if you don’t come up with at least the synopsis by the end of next week, you’ll have to pay back the advance.”

Walking in the park next day, I looked for the old man. I bought a cup of tea from the kiosk and sat down, contemplating my situation. Daniel was right about not just wrapping myself in grief. Then, a gleam of sunlight glinted on something in a nearby flowerbed. I went over and saw the corner of a metallic object just peeping out of the ground. Scraping the soil away, I found a small, silver box with some engraving on it. “George B. Turner”. His Vesta? I slipped it into my pocket and went over to the agreed bush, shaking a bit. Making sure nobody was watching, I half-buried it in the earth. Then I walked across to the war memorial, and read the names. There he was. “George B. Turner.”

Had I really met a long-dead old man in this park? Maybe my story had found me? I decided to do some research and see where it led.

I discovered that the Memorial Park had been the site of an Army Remount Camp, preparing horses for the Front. I tracked George Bernard Turner through the military records and traced his descendants. Everything fell into place. He’d been quite a hero, killed at the Somme in July 1916,

Stories for Lipreading



aged twenty-three. His widow, Mary, never remarried. Their son, Alfred, was christened at Romsey Abbey in April 1916.

I telephoned a Mr Bernard Turner, who was still living near the park. I said I'd picked some names from the war memorial to research. He was Alfred's son. Delighted at my interest, he showed me old photographs, papers, and war medals. Before enlisting, George had driven a horse-drawn London 'bus. Photos revealed a handsome young man, posing proudly in his uniform. Son and grandson both resembled him.

I went back to the park, hoping I'd see him. I felt I knew him now, wanted to ask him more. I sat on the bench waiting. When nobody came, I decided to check under the bush. The Vesta had gone, but in its place was a chunk of old brick, as rusty-red as dried blood, crumbling with age. A reminder that the rubble of the demolished camp formed the foundations of this peaceful green park. I put it in my pocket. It's sitting on my desk now, on top of my new book! The synopsis and first chapter were with Daniel by the deadline, to our mutual amazement. I called it "A Meeting Across Time."

I've never seen George again. Is he happy that his story has been told? Has he been able to go home at last? I often sit on the bench, waiting and hoping. If I could meet George, maybe one day Ellen will visit me with our baby son. Standing by the statue of the sad young soldier and his horse the other day, I thought I smelled cigarette smoke, and heard a whisper: "Thanks, mate." But perhaps it was only the rustle of leaves in the breeze.