

The Leaflet

By Hazel Cooper and Peter Ellway

[written in 'Consequence' style as a Lockdown activity for two people or more.]

Mary was on her own when the bundle of leaflets advertising local services was pushed through the letterbox. Jim had gone to work, grumbling because the car would start first time, and the children were waiting outside for the school bus to arrive. Some of their friends had just joined them and there was chatter and laughter. She herself was just about to get ready for work but she flicked idly through the pieces of paper until one caught her eye. She stiffened. It might have been intended for her. She sat down and nervously read it through carefully. What should she do?

The leaflet began dramatically with a bold red headline which said: "ARE YOU LOST IN THE CLOUDS???" Underneath the message began, "We know that you are an intelligent person, but do you forget things too easily? Does this cause problems in your life? Would you like to easily remember funny jokes to tell at parties, interesting facts, and even your new mobile phone number? Well, PLEASE READ ON. We are a team of qualified psychologists who have hit on a new way to improve your memory, and it's aimed especially at mature citizens who are a bit afraid that they used to recall things more easily than they do now"

There was a good bit more in the leaflet, but Mary instantly felt a surge of excitement. Yes, this was indeed her problem, that things just went out of her head however much she tried to recall them.

She decided to put her apprehension behind her. It was true that she was getting more worried about her intermittent memory loss but this might be her salvation. It was not quite as bad nowadays as it was when she was suffering from mild depression, when going to the shops she couldn't remember which day it was and the only answer was to stop at the newsagent's and look at a newspaper, but she had got through that with medication. What the leaflet offered was completely off-piste for her but she was prepared to give it a go. Resolutely she picked up the 'phone and dialled the number. It rang several times, then "Hello", said a distant voice, that sounded more like a fairy than a real person. "How can I help you?"

Mary stammered out a reply. "W-well, I saw your leaflet, the one that came through my door this morning, and it says you can help my memory improve. I would like to know more - if that's possible of course". The voice replied, "Yes of course dear, could I take your details please? Name and address, and age if you don't mind this. All information you give us will be kept in the strictest confidence". Mary duly provided these, and the voice at the other end said "Thank you: now I will give you a very short test if that is acceptable. I plan to tell you three numbers, and I would like you to repeat them back to me in your own time". Mary was a bit frightened to hear this, not expecting her memory to be tested so quickly and in this way. But she knew somehow that this was a real chance to learn more about her own mind and

abilities, and how they and she might improve, so she said "Um well, yes, I think so", and waited eagerly but tremulously for what was about to happen.

"Right", said the Voice. "Let's begin with some easy ones", and it reeled off several quite easy numbers at short intervals. "Can you repeat those for me?" "Oh yes," said Mary and proceeded to do so. "You didn't write them down, did you?" asked the voice suspiciously, who had not identified itself. "We don't want a paper trail". This seemed strange to MARY, but she went along with it. "Now," continued the Voice (or TV as she now thought of it) "In future I shall contact you at intervals with more numbers but then, when you have remembered them, I want you to ring a number that I shall give you and pass those numbers on and continue to do so until I tell you to stop." Still doubtful Mary complied with this request. There was never any other response from the other end of the new phone number after an initial "Hello" and all proceeded comfortably until one morning Mary and her husband were woken at 6 a.m. by a fierce banging on the front door and the words, issued in a stentorian voice, "Police. Open up".

Mary and her husband tore down the stairs and, white faced, confronted the Police. She could hardly speak for her terror and tremblingly held the door open for them to come in. Inside the house she found she was accused of being an accomplice in a fraud scam where one cell member passed on coded details to another via a middleman (or woman) whom they found at random via their leaflets. Mary, shaking, managed to convince them that she knew nothing more than that she was an innocent victim and fortunately the Police believed her and departed with stern warnings about being too gullible.

A few days later Mary was sitting at her kitchen table when she heard the familiar sound of the letter box as post fell to the floor. Picking it up she riffled through the letters, suddenly noticing a sheaf of door drops amongst them. She froze for a second, her heart pounding, then, treating them as though they were hot metal, she carried them back into the kitchen where without further ado she tore them up into minute pieces and thrust them forcefully into the recycling bin.