

True Story



Helen made her usual dramatic entry, letting the closing door thud behind her. Perhaps one or two eyes were raised for a moment but her arrival made no difference to the volume of sound in the Church hall where the regulars were freely engaged in coffee-time gossip. The half hour earlier in front of a mirror had been wasted time. Nearest the door, as usual, were the obligatory bric-a-brac and cakes tables. Helen peered down from her six-foot elevation at the contents and at little Miss Diggle who was licking chocolate sponge-filling from her fingers. Helen's disdainful look most surely curdled the cream filling though it was lost on Miss Diggle who stiffly raised her head till smiling eyes mused gently at the mass of tight blue-rinse around Helen's over-painted cheeks *'I know you don't eat cream, but you must have some fruit cake. There are samples on the tables for you to have with your coffee. Do look at the bric-a-brac too. We had a rather odd little man in this morning and he brought a lot of new things for the stall.'* She moved to the other end of the table where Mary James was ready to buy fruit cake and Helen used the opportunity to look along the ridge of her nose at the new bric-a-brac arrivals.

'Just more of the same sort of rubbish,' she said to herself, but just as she was about to move away, her attention was drawn to a strange looking object lurking in the bottom of a small blue vase. Her long fingers plucked it out - a small delicate porcelain floral brooch. The flowers were gathered to give the impression of an impish face, one eye half closed and the mouth turned up in both a *'knowing'* and an *'I dare you'* look. Miss Diggle sold it to her, mouth wide-open in disbelief.

'I thought it could be a talking point,' Helen explained. She pinned the brooch on her jacket lapel. It looked just right on a bright green background.

There was an empty chair at the nearest table. *'Hello Janet. Can I join you?'* *'Of course,'* replied Janet for herself and her companion. *'This is my new neighbour, Barbara. I brought her along to get to know a few local people.'* Helen expressed her pleasure at seeing Barbara just as Maureen brought her coffee. *'Hello Maureen. I do love your outfit. Lovely new jeans!'* Before Helen heard Maureen say 'thank you' she was aware of her own voice continuing. *'It's a pity you couldn't get all of you into them!'* Helen knew her lips hadn't moved, but it **was** her voice. Worse, she knew it was what she had been thinking! It was certainly her voice. It sounded so close - in her ear - as close as the brooch on her lapel! She clasped her hand over it. Her hand was shaking - or was it the brooch. She could imagine that floral face - laughing!

Helen smiled as Maureen said, *'thank you'*, and passed on to deliver another coffee. She dared to look at her table companions. Had they heard? They were looking at her - waiting for her to continue. Were those questioning looks? - *'Why have you stopped?'* or *'What did you say?'*

Janet pushed the plate of cake towards her. *'You must have a piece of Miss Diggle's fruit cake. It's awfully good!'* Helen, her high colour fading, took a small piece, biting into it straight away to avoid saying anything.

'What do you think?' asked Maureen after a few moments.

'What about?'

'The cake. Lovely, isn't it?'

'Oh, yes.' Helen replied. Her smile quickly faded as her new voice went on, *'But I'll have to have a mouthful of coffee with it. It's so dry. Miss Diggle's always so mean with the fruit in her baking.'* This time she did not look up. She clasped her hand over her coat lapel and the little brooch, then, overcome with an embarrassment she wasn't sure was necessary, she stood up, picking up her cup with the rest of the cake in the saucer. *'Excuse me. I must catch Jean before she goes.'* This time the voice did not continue. Perhaps when she clutched the brooch she had turned it off somehow? She left the table and immediately she was confronted by Dorothy. whose walking frame made it impossible to pass her without speaking.

'Hello Helen! How are you my dear?' Dorothy smiled her sweet motherly smile up into Helen's face. Dorothy exuded compassion wrapped up in gossip. *'O, I'm fine, thank you!'* She heard her 'voice' continue. *'But I'm not going to tell you about my bunion. You'll have my foot amputated by next Thursday. And I really haven't time to listen again to that story about how your seventh operation went wrong!'* Helen clasped her jacket lapel in horror while looking straight into those kindly eyes which simply went on smiling.

'Are you sure you're all right my dear? You look a bit worried.'

'I'm all right,' Helen said very quietly. *'Just a bit tired. I must be going now and I have to see Jean before I leave.'*

She negotiated the walking frame and made straight for Jean who was standing with her husband Richard, near the exit. Richard and Jean were both broad and tall and full of fun and Helen felt somehow - safe - with them.

'Hello Jean,' she began. 'I'm so pleased to see you.'

'And so relieved,' her 'voice' continued for her. 'You've got me out of a very difficult situation'

Jean gave her a questioning look which could have meant *'What on earth do you mean?'* or *'Why pleased to see me?'*

Helen thought quickly. *'Didn't you want me to sponsor someone for something?'*

'Yes.' Jean pulled a paper from her shopping bag. *'It's my grandson Jack. You know little Jack, though he's not so little anymore. He must have stretched with all the swimming! He's doing a sponsored swim for a Meningitis Charity. Would you like to sponsor him?'* Jean held the form in front of Helen.

'Yes, of course I will. Let me read the details.' Helen looked at the form and her 'voice' added, *'Let me just see what others are giving first. I don't want people to think I'm giving less than them.'*

Jean gave her another enquiring look which could have meant *'Why do you need to read 'all the small print?'* or alternatively, *'Really Helen!'*

Before Helen had time to escape again, half-turned away she heard Richard's deep voice through his whiskers, *'Shall we see you at Church tomorrow morning Helen? Remember it's a united service. It's not with us. We're all going the chapel. Isn't it good how we are all trying to work together now?'*

'Yes. Yes. of course.' Jean grinned at Richard, but her 'voice' wouldn't leave it there. *'I can't really see why they can't come to us. I hate sitting in that dreary chapel. They don't have any candles or kneelers - and such long sermons!'*

Helen knew it really **was** her voice which said. *'I'll see you then'* as she pushed herself back into the outside world. She stood still for a moment breathing deeply in the fresher air before un-pinning the brooch. Her first intention was to throw it over the church hall fence, but then she thrust it into her pocket. Curiosity had always troubled her. She would make a thorough inspection of it when she got home.

She did. She turned it over and over in her hand. She found a magnifying glass to look more closely at its detail. In the glass the flowers made an even more hideous face with its curling mouth and laughing eyes. She turned it over. There were words engraved on the silvery back under its pin. Helen read. *'Truth Detector: God hears the unspoken words.'* Her face went through various shades before reaching dark beetroot. Had they heard the voice? Surely they would have replied? Surely they would have said something, or shown it in their faces? But did they? What did those looks really mean? *'Well,'* Helen told herself. *'I'll have to see tomorrow'.*

Putting the brooch on her hall table, Helen paused, and grinned - a little grin-not unlike that among the flowers of the brooch. *'I know'*, she said aloud. *'I know what I can do. It's my turn to clean the vestry this week. While I'm there I'll pin the brooch inside the vicar's cassock!'*