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My childhood seems to belong to another world

by Sue Haffenden

The aliens advance into the room one on either side and direct me to the middle seat of three. The tallest one places a cup in my hand and I feel slightly unnerved to be sitting between them.

The tallest (let's call him No.1) leans closer to me and the younger one (No. 3) lifts my arm and drapes it across his shoulder whilst keeping his eyes on the device he holds in his hand.

I take a sip of the drink and begin to explain phone boxes.

There is much confusion and misunderstanding around the concept of keeping a phone in a box on the pavement. They repeatedly make eye contact over my head and just stop short of rolling their eyes.

No.1 asks for details of the box and I begin, but when I mention the windows on three sides No. 3 breaks into a strange snuffling sound and clutches his stomach. Regaining his speech he is astonished that the phones were not stolen from the boxes when they were clearly on display. I explain that they were land lines and not mobile phones. Another meeting of eyes above my head takes place.

I explain calling these boxes and a passerby would answer and try to find the person you wished to speak to. If you had a message for Joe at no. 47 they would go to no.47 and tell him there was a call for him at the box on the corner.

Disbelief is evident on both their faces at the thought of one total stranger running an errand for another.

I slump further in my seat as both rise and leave the room to confer. Snatches of conversation filter through the open door and the phrase "Lost the plot" can clearly be heard above a loud hissing noise.

They return to their seats and place another cup of liquid and a plate containing a two-tone confection in front of me.

Turning they ask how we paid to use the phones and I try to make them understand about inserting old pennies and pressing buttons A and B would allow you to make a call.

No. 3 once again makes the strange snuffling noise and when I look at him his eyes seem strangely moist.

Were there other means to contact someone, they smilingly ask, if no handy passersby were near?

I tell them how we could give the phone number of a neighbor with a land line and they would call you or pass on a message. You could also go to a neighbor's house and ask to use their phone.

Both shake their heads at this point and stand up.

Turning to me No.1 says, "thanks Nan, tea and cake ok for you?"

As they leave the room I can hear them laughing and slapping each other.

I was right about there being aliens, but it was the one sitting in the middle.