

The Go-Between

by Sue Hitchcock

“Phoebe, I need to ask a favour of you.”

The formal tone immediately alerted her, their friendship over eighteen years since they had shared a room when they were students had been the closest. They had instinctively responded to each others moods, needy or exuberant. Whatever could be so important?

“It’s Deirdre. She left home, gone as a groupie with some pop group, a weird, anarchic lot, taking drugs and all.”

“Have you called the police?”

“I don’t want to do that – they won’t help. I am in touch with her, she always wants money.”

“I’m not sure I can fund her, we’re only just managing ourselves.”

“No, I’ll get the money to you, but I would like her to collect it from you, just so I know she’s ok.”

The arrangement wasn’t arduous. Freya had put her house in Devon on the market and planned her move to London. Deirdre came each week, sometimes accompanied by a boy, skinny, black jeans chained leg to leg, piercings in ears and nose. Phoebe was mildly amused by the kids, who seemed grateful for a bowl of spaghetti and politely thanked her. Phoebe’s own daughters, just six and eight weren’t even surprised.

As the years passed Freya and Phoebe got closer, even working together for a few months. Deirdre descended into the self-made hell of drug addiction.

Freya described driving her home from the accident department where the doctors had not treated her because of her violent aggression to them. A pattern emerged between mother and daughter. Deirdre would promise to reform after each major transgression, driving her mother up a hill of hope, descending to the slough of despond. There was a court case after a drug dealer was kicked to death. All Deirdre's shoes were taken by the police for inspection.

Freya moved back to Devon and there was a lapse in the contact with Phoebe. When many years later they met again, Freya was even more unhappy. In those years Deirdre had had a little boy, but committed another crime resulting in a three year prison sentence. Freya had cared for the boy, learning how to love a child as she had never experienced with Deirdre. But Deirdre had a way of punishing her mother. She got her Social worker to legally prevent Freya from seeing him.

Once again Freya moved to London and tried to build a new life. Phoebe tried to be the friend she had been, but Deirdre still spoiled her mother's life. Without allowing contact with the growing boy, she wanted to speak with her mother, whose health was now failing. A conversation was only effected through Phoebe, as go-between. It resulted in nothing.

The final break in the forty-year friendship occurred in a Pret a Manger cafe.

"I need you to be the executrix on my will. I'm going to leave everything to the R.S.P.C.A."

Phoebe was stunned. "What about Deirdre?"

"I'm not giving it to her! She'll just spend it on drugs!"

"And your grandson?"

"She'd get her hands on it anyway."

"I'm sorry, I think you're wrong. No, I can't."

And that was the end of the friendship.