

Tales from the Mills

(Monologues)

by
Lee Phillips

Lee Phillips
! Pendragon Terrace
LS20 8ED
0795 739 7967

SCENE ONE.

1954. ALAN, a 17 year old Apprentice, addresses the audience.

ALAN

'ere... 'ave you seen that young lass in enamels? Marge? She's crackin'. In all my days I never dreamt I'd meet someone like that... I say meet... I've not actually met 'er yet, but... but, I will. I mean, I keep bobbin' in... but I ain't got the balls - ooh... sorry lass... I mean the, er... the courage to ask 'er out. She's a reet bobby dazzler. An' t' see 'er spraying them knobs with that enamel! Not many girls ever get to do that. She's reet natural at it. So I keep finding excuses to walk through... any excuse really... and there she is - like a ray of sunshine. I'm gonna ask 'er out. I am. Honest. See, her cousin works in the enamel shop as well. And 'e said t' the Foreman that I'd, er, I'd 'caught her eye'! So... it's in the bag really. I just need to find the right time...

First time I saw 'er she was in the millin' shop. They'd put 'er on key cutting... You know what I mean? Cutting keys? Not with scissors you daft 'aipeth! On't milling machine. Tell you what, ya took ya life in ya hands when you went in there an' she was on the machine!! There were pieces flyin' all over the place!! I'm surprised no one got killed!!! Anyways, she wont there f' long. They soon moved her on and learnt she was a natural at enamel spraying. She mostly does door knobs, but they sometimes put ashtrays 'er way too. 'ave you seen those ashtrays? They're reet bonnie, but they weigh a ton. You wouldn't want one o' them droppin' on ya foot! An' y'dont' want t' upset anyone if they've got one o' them in their hand!!!

Anyway, I've been 'ere f' about 18 months now. Apprentice - that's me. Got about 6 months t' go. I work in Castors. I'm learning how to cast 'em... it's hard work, and bloody 'ot, but I get to work with a good bunch o' lads. That's what makes it. It's like another family. We 'ave a laugh. And at weekend we go t' the park - y'know, the one the Boss made for us workers... so we'd 'ave somewhere t'sit out in - wi' trees'n'flowers. 'e's looked after us our gaffer. I mean, we work bloody 'ard for 'im, but 'e looks after us in return. I've seen Marge there sometimes. May be that's where I'll ask 'er. Ask 'er out. 'cos I'm gonna. You see if I don't. I'm gonna ask 'er t'go t'the pictures. Seven Brides f' Seven Brothers. Yeah. That's what I'll do.

FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE TWO.

2018. MARGE, an 82 year retired factory worker, addresses the audience.

MARGE

You never know what life's gonna throw at you, do ya? I mean, when I were a lass, you never had any expectations. You didn't in those days. You did what everyone else did... ya left school and got a job, and it was in the factory, or the mill, an' that were it. Ya got married, and 'ad some kids, an' then it were back t' work. When I started, the place ya worked pretty much laid out ya life for ya. Don't get me wrong... there were changes. I worked at one place and they moved me around from one department to another... I also 'ad friends who would move round from factory to factory, mill to mill, but it was pretty much the same wherever they went.

But I 'adn't banked on meeting the boy I was gonna marry when I started! This young lad - apprentice - 'e'd come through every day... whatever department I was in - key cutting, enamels... 'e seem t' follow me! 'e were right cheeky n'all! I think it were that what won me over! An' 'is smile! Anyways, I told our Stan... 'e's m' cousin. I think 'e must've said something 'cos it wont long before Alan summoned up the courage to ask me out. I'll never forget it. There was this park, see. It were provided for us by the factory. And we'd go there at weekends in the summer to sit out in the sun. Them lads were hilarious... it were like peacocks strutting up'n'down, trying to outdo each other and catch the eyes of us girls. Alan wont like that. That's what made 'im stand out. That, and 'is smile. And 'is cheeky sense of humour.

So... he plucks up the courage to ask me out. I didn't want to make too easy for 'im, so I kept 'im guessing for a bit. Then I said yeah. And he took me t' the picture'ouse. Seven Brides for Seven Brothers. Trouble was, it wont for a few years 'til I ever saw the end of it... we had to leave before it finished so I could get me bus! Can you believe it! In fact, when I think back, there must've been half a dozen films I never saw the end of 'cos I 'ad to get off. And Alan were a right gent. 'e always saw me 'ome. I didn't learn til much later that m'cousin always went along to see the film as well... with his girl... he was keeping an eye on me! Well, Alan... make sure he behaved himself... that 'e treated me proper like. 'e must've been alright 'cos just about a year later we got engaged, and then another year later we was married.

We 'ad a right send off from the lads'n'lasses at the factory... it was like 'aving a huge family. They were great. Still in touch with some of 'em now. And we've lost a few along the way. Stayed at the factory for years after. It were great. Hard work, but we knew 'ow to 'ave good time. I left to 'ave our kids, but when they were at school I were able to go back. Thing was, it changed... as the years passed... it were all this health and safety. When they started bringing that in, all the fun went. It got stricter and stricter. Felt like they were watching us all the time - the gaffers. So, time came for me to move on. Alan stayed a bit longer, but then even 'e got a job in another factory. That lasted 'im 'til 'e retired... but they've all long gone now. Closed down. Turned into houses or supermarkets! Don't like to think about it. I remember watching... knocking walls down... and as they fell, I got goosebumps. I could feel the memories of all those people - all the lives of those who'd passed through them gates, going back 'undreds of years, all gone.

Just like that. But I still have lots to be thankful for... cos if it went for that place, I'd never 'ave met my Al.

FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE THREE.

1974. JUNE, a 28 year old worker that worked in warping address the audience. She has her hair in rollers under a headscarf.

JUNE

Ooh... 'ello love... yer lucky. You just caught me. I were clocking off! Home time. We're off out tonight. Got a bit o' a do at Town Hall. Works do. Me an' our Tommy 'ave got a night out. Me mam's looking after the bairns. Me an' the girls popped 'ome at dinner time t'put rollers in so we can be ready in time. They're good with us like that... the bosses. Take us tea breaks when we like - they don't watch over us. It's like, as long as y'do the work, they don't mind. I mean it's piece work anyway, so if we don't do it then we don't get no money!

I'm in warping. That's what I do now. That's m'main job. But I move round to where I'm needed. I started off on cops... y'know what I mean, don't ya... little bobbins... but it don't matter where you go in't mill - I've worked in spinning, winding, twisting, packing, all over't shop! You can walk round anywhere n'everyone knows everybody... it's right casual, an' we 'ave a right good laugh. T'other day, right, they put me in one o'them big baskets - the ones on wheels, and bloody 'ell, they ran me round't mill so fast! I couldn't stay upright!! Tore all m'tights!!!

They're right buggers! An' d'ya know, they learnt I don't like mice. Saw one a while back an' made a bit o'a scene. So a few days after, Micky Tolsen, 'e got one in 'is 'and and 'e started chasing me w'it. I made such a noise - screamin' me 'ead off! An' our Tommy, 'e comes racin' in looking dead panicked. 'e thought I'd got caught up in one o'the looms! 'e didn't see the funny side... but it were only a laugh! Micky's moved on now... gone t't mill down't road. Things got a bit quiet so 'e's bobbed down there for a bit. Don't imagine it'll be f'long though. That's what they do. They do the rounds o'the mills. Leave one on a Friday, go knocking on't door and start at one't other mills on the Monday!! But e'll be back when things pick up. They always do, 'cos they like workin' 'ere. I've been lucky. There's always been enough for me to do to keep me on. I mean, pays not great, but at least there's always a job in one or other o't mills.

Some won't come 'ere. They're a bit superstitious. See, we've 'ad a couple fires 'ere, an' both times it were on a Good Friday. So some folk won't come 'n work 'ere. Even the boss were a bit freaked out, so they stopped working on Good Friday... mill shuts down. I mean, it's all stuff'n'nonsense in my book, but you know what they say, there's nowt so queer as folk.

I've been 'ere near enough 10 years on and off. I left for a bit t' 'ave me girls, but they kept me job open for us. An' I can honestly say, it's been a right laugh.

It's like 'avin a huge family. I love it. We've 'ad some right laughs. But I do worry. There's some changes that're coming. Sommit t'do wi' 'ealth 'n safety... I've 'eard a few things... whispers... an' I'm a bit worried. All sounds a bit too strict to me. 'avin t' tow the line. 'ave t'see what 'appens. I think they call it progress. We'll see. Anyway, gorra dash... need t' get misen ready... finish me 'air and put m'frock on... see you there, yeah? Town Hall? Great.

FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE FOUR.

1987. NOEL, a 52 year old transport and distribution manager for a pram factory, addresses the audience dressed in a works overall, carrying a clip board.

NOEL

'owdo. Caught me at a bit of a bad time, I'm afraid. Sales 'ave been on t'me. We've 'ad a customer make an enquiry about their order, so I'm goin' about checking all the bill tickets. It 'ad t'be blue didn't it, eh?!? What is the colour most people want their pram t'be? Blue! So we've got to sort through 'undreds of the buggers! Now. I've got the bill ticket from the paint shop, and I've got the bill ticket from't fitting department, so I know it's in upholstery... I'm on my way there now t'see if it's waiting t'be finished. If it is, I'll put t't front o't queue! Then I can get it packaged up n'sent off on RedStar tomorrow. I'm in transport y'see. It's my job t'make sure all these prams get delivered. And I've got twenty odd vehicles t'make sure that 'appens, and that means twenty odd vehicles t'look after. An' by 'eck, they need some looking after! Sometimes we send 'em off t't body shop in Warrington to 'ave 'em stripped down t't chassis an' then one o' our lads brings 'em back 'ere and we rebuild 'em - all nicely liveried up. It's a proper fully operational garage we got 'ere... best o't class. In fact, even't Minster o'transport brings people along to show 'em 'ow a garage should be run.

Been 'ere nearly 30 years now. Started as a driver and worked m'way up. Not by design mind you... opportunities just presented themselves - people leaving an' the like. I became traffic manager, then transport manager, and now I've got distribution n'all... that's my pigeon. I've got 24 drivers now. I 'ave t'say, I do miss it sometimes... being out on't road. We used to get well looked after by't customers - still do. Sometimes, if one o'our lads is off poorly, we get parcels sent through for 'em! From't customers!! That said, some 'ave it better than others. I once 'ad to deliver a pram to Gatcombe Park - where Princess Ann lives... she'd just 'ad her first and I 'ad to deliver a pram, an' when I got there I 'ad a right t'do wi' the young security lad on the gate. 'e wont gonna let me take m'van up t'the 'ouse. 'e said I 'ad to unload it at the gate! I said "I'm not wheeling this pram all the way down that drive! It's a Silver Cross pram! It's the Rolls Royce o'prams!!!". 'e said "y'ave to". I said "in that case, I'm gonna leave it 'ere an' you can wheel it down y'self". He said "y' can't do that!" an' I said "watch me!". 'e

e let me down in the end, but the 'ouse keeper weren't best pleased and soon sent me off short shrift. When I got back I 'ad a word wi' Tony Gill. 'e 'ad a delivery to Buckingham Palace - the Queen wanted a low wheeled one. I told 'im what 'ad 'appened, expecting it t'be the same f'im, but he'd only been invited in for a cup o'tea an' a bun!

Anyways, I don't get out much on the road these days. We each 'ave our season, and mine is now to make sure all these prams get to wherever they're meant to be. All over the world now. An' that's plenty to keep me goin'. It's been good to me this place, but like all things, it's changing. As its passed down from one generation to the next, they all 'ave their different ways of doing things. Some good... some not so good. But they've come a long way since the days o' the factory on Silver Cross Street in Leeds... that's how it got its name... purpose built factory by William Wilson which 'e called the 'Silver Cross Works'. Who knows what the future 'olds... though I won't 'ave a future if I don't this order sorted!!! Tara.