

Chapel Arts Creative Writing Group

presents

“The Secret Gardens”

Celebrating 150 Years of the Pavilion Gardens

in stories, poems and a short play



VOLUME 3

Texts of the third YouTube video

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Sophie Goes to the Pavilion Gardens

Nina Jane Hart

Today was meant to be my special day. I was going to show Mum and Dad that I really am a dolphin. Right now, they should be watching me swim twenty-five metres without stopping. Instead, I have to hold Dad's hand in the gardens while he talks to another dad about BBQs.

Mum says we can try again next week. She doesn't understand that next week it will be too late. Emily is going to swim her twenty-five metres today, and it's my own stupid fault. I forgot my special goggles, and my stupid sister gets to take my place.

Dad's hand feels sweaty. He's not even really holding mine. I wait until he needs to use both hands to make a sign for the other Dad.

"Don't go too far Sophie! And don't go taking off your glasses!" I hear him shout after me.

Stupid glasses.

Down by the boating lake, the mother duck is quacking loudly. Her ducklings aren't paying much attention. They're in a line, quacking amongst themselves. Perhaps they're having a race.

The sun has snook in from between the cover of the trees. It's warm on my head.

I want to watch the ducks to see who wins the race. I want to be a duck, a duck who doesn't need glasses and can swim all day on the lake.

Dad is still talking. I take off my pink-framed glasses and tuck them neatly into my pocket. It'll just be for one minute. No one will know.

The world looks funny. The ducks are all fuzzy and the trees all look like one. If I squeeze my eyes tight shut, maybe it will all look clearer when I open them again.

I wish I was a duck.

One. Two. Three.

When I open my eyes, I'm no longer sitting on the bench by the lake.

I'm actually *on* the lake.

I scream to Dad for help but what comes out sounds more like a *quack!*

"Dad!" I try again, "Dad!" But it is no use, there are just more quacking sounds.

From here I can see the other ducks, still waiting in their line. I try to reach into my pocket for my glasses. Only I don't have pockets. My body has been replaced with yellow fluff. Underneath the water I can see little yellow feet and they're attached to me.

A sound is coming from the bushes. I don't think I know how to use these feet; and then suddenly I do and I'm gliding over the water. It feels fast, and fun.

"Hello," I greet the little ducky who is hiding in the overgrown grasses, "what's the matter?"

It looks like he's trying to hide his head in the grass so no one can hear him, but I still know he's crying. Like when I put my head into my pillow after being told off.

"Hey there," I say again.

From here I can still see the other baby ducks flapping around.

"Are they your brothers and sisters?" I ask.

He turns to look at me. He nods.

"They're waiting for me," he says.

"Right." I look again at the line of ducklings in the water. So they aren't racing after all.

"Well, why don't you go and catch them up?"

He looks at me. I wish I knew his name.

"I'm Sophie, by the way," I offer.

"Peter," he tells me. "And I don't want to catch them up. I can't do it. I just can't swim."

The sun has gone away and here in the grass it suddenly feels cold.

"What do you mean, you can't swim? You're swimming right now!" I cheer.

"It's not the same," he says. "When they all set off in that line and the wind comes, my head keeps going under water and then I lose my place."

"But I'm sure they wait?"

I think about when I get stuck in the swimming pool and the teacher tells me to move out of the way.

He shakes his head. "I don't want them to wait. I want to be able to do it."

"I see."

I have had the same feeling. It was Emily who suggested I should always start last when we set off on a group swim, so when it's my turn I'm not scared about being overtaken. Now, I kick away from the wall and I watch the feet of the swimmer in front.

Left arm over, right arm over, breathe.

"Peter," I say, "where in the line do you swim?"

He looks at me, his eyes suddenly clear.

"At the back. Oh, it's terrible Sophie-duck. I get all confused and I mess it up for everyone else, and then they all have to wait for stupid me."

"I understand," I say, because I really, really do. "Perhaps you could try a different position. I swim at the back because it helps me to concentrate on my stroke. But for you, I think if you ask to go in the middle, your brothers and sisters could protect you from the wind and you'll be able to keep up."

I can tell he's thinking it over.

"Go on," I say, "ask your Mum."

He waddles through the reeds and I watch as he swims around in a circle in front of his Mum. He might be explaining but I can't hear. Ripples of water swim out all around him.

Next - and it happens so fast - they all swim past, Peter included, in what looks like the perfect line.

"You're the best, Sophie-duck! Thank you!" he shouts.

His brothers and sisters weren't going to leave without him.

With my eyes squeezed shut, I wish with all my might to be a little girl again. I'm not sure whether it will work, but when I open my eyes, I'm here. I'm standing next to my Dad with my hand in his.

"Dad," I say, when he's finished talking, "why don't we go and cheer Emily on?"

He smiles at me and says, "What an excellent idea."

Memories of Buxton Pavilion Gardens

Sarah Lionheart

The ducks are a-dabbling, tails up in the air. Small children are paddling with shrieks and laughter. Idyllic. This is why Miriam comes to the Buxton Pavilion Gardens: it is her place of memories. Miriam and her Daddy once had glorious days of fun here.

The miniature train hoots as it trundles by. Miriam walks steadily but slowly towards the waiting queue and buys her ticket. A little girl with fine blonde hair comes by and her Daddy scoops her up. The giggles rain down and float high. It is the signal of the magic descending all over again.

‘What if you hadn’t died, Daddy? What if you’d lived to a ripe old age? What if you had been my dear Daddy until I was 80? It’s horrible missing you this much.’

The child and man look uncomfortable.

‘Oh, goodness, did I speak out loud?’

The man smiles: ‘It’s okay, it’s okay to miss him. That might be this little girl one day, decades in the future.’

‘Why did that she say that out loud? Why did she do that, Daddy?’ says the little girl.

‘Because she misses her Daddy, who is not here.’

‘Why is he not here, Daddy?’

The lady steps forward and bends low to the little girl’s level: ‘He was ill and he died, when I was young.’

‘Oh,’ says the little girl. ‘I am sorry he died. My rabbit died and I miss him very much.’

The man and the lady smile a little smile to each other.

‘Daddy, can we all go on the train together?’

‘Absolutely, little one.’ He turns to the lady. She nods. The train hoots and arrives. Bundles of families get out and those waiting tumble in. The little girl takes the lady’s hand. They settle sitting close, leaning against each other.

‘My Daddy used to buy me an ice-cream and we would sit on that bench over there and watch the people go by.’

‘My Daddy does that,’ says the little girl.

‘My Daddy would call me “honeybunch” except when he was cross with me. Then he called me “Miriam Mary Ann”, which is my full name.’

‘My Daddy calls me “Freya Elizabeth Louise” if I’m naughty.’

Freya and Miriam laugh, but Freya giggles and wriggles with the jiggle of the laughter coursing through her body.

‘Freya Elizabeth Louise,’ says Daddy in a pretend gruff voice, which makes Freya whoop.

‘Naughty Daddy!’

Miriam continues: ‘My Daddy would say “Absolutely” instead of yes. He would buy special duck food. We would go over to the lake and make stories about each different duck. One duck was a mischief and would waddle up behind us and try to peck the duck food bag open.’

‘There he is!’ cries Freya. Mr Mischief Duck was indeed committing a stealthy theft of an unsuspecting family’s duck food bag. ‘Is that him?’

‘I think that might be his great-great-grandson, Mr Mischief Duck III.’

Freya’s Daddy sat back, watching their interaction; the elderly woman and his daughter. Miriam liked to wander through the park most days. There was an air of nostalgia about her. She would stop, seeming to watch scenes from the past. He realised that one day this could indeed be his daughter and he would be long dead, just a collection of memories to be tenderly recalled, tucked close in her heart.

Miriam was telling Freya about how they used to see dogs, stop and talk to the owners and get to know each dog’s name. Her Daddy wouldn’t let her have a dog. She remembered his logical reasoning that they were out a lot and dogs needed attention. He would pretend to be a dog and run around and wag his arm behind him pretending it was a tail.

‘We would go to the pantomime at Christmas and shout louder than anyone, “He’s behind you”, and once I got asked to come up on stage with two other children and sing a song. We would bring a picnic and listen to the brass bands at the bandstand. He called the tree that is now a sculpture Mr Majestic. I came each day several years ago to see the woodcarver create the animals in the wooden stump.’

‘You loved your Daddy, didn’t you?’ says Freya.

‘Very much.’

‘Why do people have to die?’ Freya asks, sucking the end of her sweater and looking away at the fountain.

‘I don’t know, little one. I don’t know. I wish it didn’t have to happen. Maybe our planet Earth would just get too full if we didn’t.’

‘Why can’t we all live until we are 100? That way we’d have enough life to feel we’d had a fair enough amount of time with people?’

‘Yes, Freya, I agree.’

‘My Mummy says we all meet up in heaven after we have died, if we are good. Do you believe that?’

‘I would like to, but I don’t actually know. Some people think we may come back and live another life. Some people believe we are kept alive in other people’s memories.’

‘What do YOU think?’ Freya asks, turning her face towards Miriam’s. ‘What do YOU believe?’

‘I believe that my Daddy lived and loved me. He brought me here to the park most weekends and he and I spent lovely hours together. We would even come when there was thick snow and it looked like Narnia. The footpaths would be buried. He died too soon, but every day I feel him with me as I turn over a shared memory like a precious gem, examining it and feeling his love for me all over again.’

‘And now, where is he now?’ Freya asks, her fingers inadvertently digging into Miriam’s hand, such is her intensity.

‘He is here now. I can sit here and talk to you and feel a gentle tenderness towards you because he loved me. He exists in my ability to love you, a little girl I have just met.’

‘I like that,’ says Freya. ‘I like that a lot except of course you haven’t just met me. You are my Grandma, silly. Will you still love me even though you keep forgetting who I am?’

Miriam looks confused. ‘I think I forget because I am older now. Will you remember me until you are old, too?’ she asks Freya.

‘Absolutely,’ says Freya with grin.

‘Well, ladies,’ says Freya’s Daddy, ‘I think it is time to get ice-cream.’

Off the three of them go towards the pavilion, skirting around the people sitting on the grass, the dogs doing their doggy frolicks, the babies peering out of their pushchairs and toddlers toddling and tripping, eager to get to the swings quicker. More memories coming into being in this moment. Even those that are forgotten were caressed in someone's heart once upon a time.

'How old was Grandma's Daddy when he died?' Freya whispers close into her father's ear.

He bends low and whispers back, 'Miriam was only five when he died so he was very young. She has missed him for a long time.'

'I'm five, Daddy. Can you live a long, long time until I am old?'

'I'll do my best, little one.'

'I want more good memories with you than it is possible for one person to remember.'

'Let's do that, Freya,' he replies.

'And if I forget some?'

'They will still have happened, little one. Somewhere in there, your heart will still know them'.

Miriam is watching the people passing by.

'Would you like a rum and raisin?' he asks her.

Turning towards him, she smiles politely and says, 'No thank you, my Daddy will buy me one when he arrives. I am not allowed to accept things from strangers.'

'Absolutely,' he says. 'May I tell you some stories about my lovely mother, whilst me and my daughter sit here with you while you wait for him?'

'Absolutely,' Miriam replies.

Then Miriam wakes up, groggy and feeling unusually old and sad.

'I dreamt I was old and had dementia and had a son and a grand daughter. I dreamt I was in the park with them.

Her husband helps her over to the chair by the window.

'There, you can see the park now. We will all be old one day but for now put your feet up.'

'I'm terribly tired,' Miriam tells him as he kisses her.

‘Nine months pregnant and a baby due any day does that to a person. Maybe your dream means we are going to have a boy. We could name him after your dad.’

‘Oh, absolutely!’ says Miriam. ‘That would be just lovely. We can take him to feed the ducks in the park, hire a rowing boat, eat ice cream and listen to the bands play. So many lovely memories still to be made.’

Miriam dozes contentedly watching the sunlight flit through the tree outside. When the first twinge of a contraction comes she feels as though a wave is sweeping her up into the next chapter of her life’s story.

We are Observing

Pete Stelling

The flat bed truck parked beside the Buxton theatre did not raise undue suspicion, its cargo a metallic-looking clam shell with a nodule. To all intents and purposes it seemed like a theatre prop yet to be installed. It was not far from the Pavilion Gardens with its many attractions: a lake, benches where the dominant bipeds gathered and sat, and groups with smaller versions that made squeaky noises - some of excitement, others of sadness when their enthusiasm was rebuffed.

As I made my way over to the lake, no one really noticed me. I was interested in the propulsion of the water pods. Some had sticks with a flat blade, others with some crude method of mechanics processed by an adult. No worries here, then, about superior technology!

What was interesting was the number of people who had some sort of communication devices, which appeared to be very addictive to the younger element. Occasionally they compared the illuminated screens with each other.

No one saw me taking notes. I had to make adjustments to understand the verbal communications. And I must mention the quadrupeds, who seemed to greet each other by smell. The thought of one of us sniffing the disposal end of another's body did not appeal. Their language was mostly gesture and posture with the occasional guttural rebuke.

I felt I should move on with my observations. The creatures on the water to which the bipeds offered food; now, they were interesting. They had telepathic skills.

The mechanical thing confined to a particular area took my attention. It was inanimate, coming to some form of life only when one of the bipeds manipulated certain appendages that were turned or pulled. Its shriek was a cry of pain but it was definitely not alive. The younger elements were excited about riding on it and expressed their version of its shriek when they couldn't.

There was a quieter period when the bipeds left the area, only to return after the light dissipated. Some elements proved entertaining. Their dark outer garments matched the disappearing light. They appeared to want to hide from each other. There were those who shed some outer garments below the main torso, fusing together and breathing rapidly. I

found this strange as darkness descended. One or two lone bipeds seemed to hide away; I think they were attempting to observe those who were fusing.

My brief time here was over. Quietly, still without being noticed, I climbed back on to the vehicle where I had parked my interplanetary craft. I made the necessary co-ordinations and was on my way silently and efficiently. With our technological superiority we need have no fear of the dominant bipeds here.

It would be interesting to compare the notes of others sent to observe.

Buxton Pavilion Gardens would make an interesting folder.

A flat bed lorry stood outside the theatre, innocuous and empty.

Tea Dance at the Pavilion Gardens

Simone Hubbard

George put his new dancing shoes into the tote bag that his granddaughter Alice had bought him a year ago for his 75th birthday. It had musical notes on it; a reminder of another passion, playing the cornet in a brass band. Having a musical background had helped him to pick up dancing easily. Today he was going to a Tea Dance at the Pavilion Gardens in Buxton. It was strange how one place could pull you back over and over again. It didn't seem right, though, today. He was sad and his heart was heavy. He'd protested about going, but Alice had insisted.

'It's what Grandma would have wanted. She didn't buy you those new dancing shoes to sit in the box. She'd want you to carry on and enjoy your life.'

Umm... that was easier said than done now Brenda wasn't actually here. He'd vaguely promised Brenda that he'd get on with life. But this felt too soon. He wondered, though: when *was* it the right time to socialise and pick up the pieces?

He heard a car horn pip. It was his daughter, Paula, with Alice. He could picture Brenda ushering him out of the door like she did when he was playing in the band.

'Come on, George, don't keep our Paula waiting. And don't be worrying about me. I'll be making a steak pie for tea. Your favourite.'

George and Paula exchanged pleasantries on the journey while Alice listened to music on her phone. It was always good to hear the family news. Of course, that had been Brenda's job. She'd made it look so easy. Birthday cards and presents all organised, along with family meals, and looking after Alice when she was younger. And not to mention Christmas. He'd not coped at all well with it.

'Right, you two,' said Paula, 'I'll meet you back here at 5.00. Enjoy yourselves.'

Alice leapt out of the car. She was like a coiled spring, raring to show her Grandpa all her dance moves. George lingered. Paula reminded him so much of Brenda. He hadn't realised it so much when Brenda was alive but now it hit him hard. The same voice and mannerisms.

'Try and enjoy yourself, Dad. Alice is right, Mum would have wanted you to come to this. Get some use out of those new shoes that Mum drove me mad about buying. And if you get asked to dance, even if it's just Alice, please just do it for me and Mum.'

‘I’ll try, love. Thanks for the lift.’

George was feeling anxious just walking into the Octagon, but he couldn’t admit it to Alice.

‘I have a lot of memories in this hall, you know. I got to see the Beatles by default in 1963. Newly recruited to the St John’s Ambulance I was. What a night! I met your Grandma that night. She’d fainted like dozens of others and I had to look after her. She settled for me after fainting for a Beatle.’ George laughed, remembering poor Brenda coming round to the sight of his face looming over her. ‘And then we came to the dances here before your Mum was born.’

He could tell Alice was only half listening.

‘Look, Grandpa, my friends are over there. They’ve saved us a couple of seats.’

Quite a few people were already there ahead of the 2.00 pm start. Lots of excited chatter. Alice introduced her Grandpa to her friends.

‘This is Chloe and Annabel, who are twins.’

‘And this is our Nanna, Mary,’ one of the twins said. George couldn’t tell the identical twins apart.

‘Hello, Chloe, Annabel and Mary. Lovely to meet you.’ George shook all their hands.

‘Oh, look, here’s Michael and Jackie, getting ready to start the afternoon’s dancing off,’ Alice announced.

George had known Michael and Jackie for donkey’s years. He’d gone to the social dances on a Wednesday night with Brenda.

Michael and Jackie got the dancing under way, inviting everyone to join the square tango sequence; a simple start to ease everyone into the afternoon’s dancing.

‘Right, Grandpa, can you remember this?’

‘I’m sure it will come back once we get going.’

George and Alice joined the dance floor and the steps came back just as he’d hoped. He remembered how Brenda had loved stamping her foot in the tango. The dance finished and they returned to their seats.

‘Okay, now the 11-18s are going to demonstrate the Emmerdale Waltz, but they need to see it danced with some finesse first. Can I have two couples from the social evenings to demonstrate?’ Michael looked around the room.

One couple appeared on the dance floor, and Mary also volunteered, but with no partner.

‘Come on, George, you can do this one,’ Michael’s voice boomed through the mic.

George was shaking his head, but he could hear Alice shouting from the dance floor, ‘Come on, Grandpa, show us how it’s done! With finesse,’ she added cheekily.

‘I’ve not done this for over a year,’ George protested to Michael.

‘Don’t worry, Mary is our Saturday night superstar. She’ll keep you in step.’

The music started. Michael was right; he needn’t have worried. Mary was an expert, and the beauty of the sequence dance was being able to follow the others. He could hear Brenda’s voice: ‘Watch my toes, George, I don’t want my shoes scuffing.’ She’d loved the waltz. The rise and fall of the feet. The ballroom hold and posture. God, he missed her so much! He thought his heart would break.

His attention returned to the present and he started thinking about Mary and why she was here on her own. Life was so cruel sometimes. He’d maybe get a chance to have a chat with her when the tea and sandwiches were served later.