**Monday: Meet the Folks**

It is a sunny morning in March in 1976 and Nigel Eldridge is making his way to the station for the daily commute into Kings Cross. It is going to be another day in another week at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food as he taps along the avenue down towards the station with his briefcase and rolled umbrella. There are meetings today and meetings tomorrow, papers to write and letters to answer - just another week. As he walks, he thinks about his life which might be better and might, then again, be worse. He loves having a daughter - he dotes on her - but is less sure whether he likes the effect it has had on his wife and the years of interrupted nights that came with her. Still, Katie is a little bit older now and has started school and, maybe, things are going to change.

Then, he is distracted by the two young women walking in front of him bustling along in short black coats heading for the same train. He often sees them walking in step together. The daily commuters never speak but they all recognise one another and Nigel is particularly aware of the minority of them who are female. In fact, he is particularly aware of women. He can't seem to help this and thinks it is probably something to with his age, being married and not being able to touch, and having a wife whose main preoccupation is her 4-year-old daughter. He looks again at the two women and imagines being stuck next to them in a crowded slow carriage and thinks about the way that they would move backwards and forwards against him with the movement of the train.

Meanwhile, his wife Caroline is chivvying their daughter Katie out of the door on the way to school where she has just started to go full days. Caroline seems to be just as busy as ever but she knows that she is approaching a decision point - another child or a job. It makes her feel unsettled and she has been like that for a few weeks now. Has Nigel noticed? No chance. Time on her own seems to involve a lot of staring at her face and body in the mirror and wondering how she can get back to where she was or, instead, find her way to somewhere different. She is also worried that she might be turning into her mother and she thinks, when she reads some woman's magazines as she has a bit more time for them now, that her sex life could be better in ways she doesn't quite understand.

She doesn't see Steve Armitage, who she knows quite well, drive by in his newish Ford obviously on his way to work. Steve doesn't see her either as the start of a new week needs all of his concentration. The house selling business is going okay in a town with lots of new development unlike much of the rest of the country but you can't take your eye off the ball if you want to make the next sale and he certainly does. He is also a bit tetchy today as his wife, Linda, has asked him to drop James and Chloe off at school and that involves a slight detour and a long hold up on the way back into town crawling along in the school traffic. He knows he shouldn't complain and should support Linda in building her career but he can't help how he feels. The two children pick up on his mood and are being prickly in the back. It all feels too much like Monday.

Linda is already in work. The new director of the Town Development Group thinks it is rather American and exciting to have team meetings early in the morning to establish focus, whatever that is. So, on Monday, everyone struggles into work for half past eight and sits around in a meeting drinking coffee and bitching about whoever is late. Linda could do without the meeting as she has a full day ahead and needs to find time to go shopping for bread and milk and then has to cook tea when she gets in. She loves her job and even though she still works for the Council it all sounds that bit more exciting and she likes that as well. It makes her and Steve better off than some and she likes her house as well, the pick of a new development of executive homes which is the envy of her friends.

One of these friends, Jeanie, is also at work or, at least, drinking coffee in the staffroom at school. A gloomy silence fills the room, people are busy – maybe toiling would be a better word – sorting out paper, planning lessons, filling diaries. By morning break time they’ll be ready to talk about the highs and lows or the mere humdrum existence of the weekend but for the moment it is catch-up time, racing against the bell which will go off any minute releasing a flood of noisy pupils into the quiet corridors. When that happens, the teachers rise like automatons, collect their registers from the table at the bottom of the stairs and start another week.

In contrast, Jeanie’s partner Bill has barely started his day at the local university. He has a lecture to give on *Florence and the Medici Family* but not for two hours and it is well trodden ground for him so that even the jokes and asides are well honed for his second year group. There is not much to prepare. Later, there is a faculty meeting and long drawn out discussions of administrative protocols and journal articles topped up by a presentation from one of his colleagues on their recent research. The term recent is a bit of a joke since anything they have pottered about doing within the last fifteen years will qualify as long as it is a bit of unknown history in a backwater of Europe. He can take his time over coffee.

So can Joe, although Bill hasn’t met him yet. Joe should probably be up and looking for work. Instead he is lying in bed rolling up a tight little mix of tobacco into a narrow, mean looking imitation of a cigarette and listening to a cassette tape featuring his own Led Zeppelin favourite tracks. He does plan to get up and have a wash soon but beyond that his plans for the day are a little blurred and he would rather think back to a month ago when he and Maggie were in Goa and the sun was hotter, the beaches were endless and so were the days. He could happily have stayed there but Maggie had other ideas.

Maggie is already up, dressed and ready for action. She has a letter inviting her for an interview at a local estate agency tomorrow for a clerical-cum-secretarial and dogsbody post. She needs to polish her CV today gently elevating the chambermaid’s job in Perth into a receptionist role where, yes, she did lots of administration, managed - almost single-handed - a thirty bedroom hotel – well, almost - and dealt with a variety of trades people. All that experience got her the job in an English clinic in Bombay and should stand her in good stead tomorrow and no-one is likely to think about checking references over that geographical distance so the rest is down to her and her personality. She is hopeful. She would also like to see Joe making more of an effort to find a job as well. The big idea is to make enough money in England to take them across the USA on their way back to Australia.

For all of them, this is just another week or, there again, perhaps not.