

Chapter Five

Let's get this meeting started

People are still talking and laughing as they move around the room looking for a place to sit down. Some people have taken off their coats, but Amy wants to keep her jacket on. She needs to keep her hat on in case it gets too noisy and then she can pull her hat down tight over her ears. This is something Amy always does when she is around lots of people.

Amy looks around the room and is happy there is somewhere to sit where she can touch the wall if she needs to. She watches as people sit down and then Tariq stands up and starts to talk.

Tariq asks everyone to stop talking and reminds them that the meeting is about to start. Then he tells the group "we have two people here today who I would like you all to give a big welcome to. Please welcome Amy and Brenda to the group." When everyone starts clapping, Amy puts her hands over ears and looks at Gary. He feels really happy when Amy looks at him and is glad Brenda is sitting on the other side of the room. This means, he has Amy all to himself!

While Tariq is talking, Brenda gets out her favourite key-rings from her handbag and puts them on the table in front of her. Then she looks across at Jack and thinks he looks much

nicer than Gary. And there are lots more nice men in the room.

Brenda watches as Jack leans over the table and says something to Tariq but Brenda can't hear what he says. Jack picks up a piece of paper from the table and speaks to the group.

"Hello everyone, you all know me, don't you?" Jack says in a loud voice. There is lots of shouting and clapping and someone shouts out, "Yes, we do Jack! Get on with it."

Jack laughs and shouts back "alright, alright. Here we go! I just want to welcome Brenda and Amy to the group and tell them I'm the chair-person for Stronger Voices!"

"What's a chair-person?" Brenda asks.

"It means it's my job to make sure everyone has their has a chance to speak and make sure we do the things that people in the group want to do" Jack replies.

Brenda smiles at him and Jack continues, "Stronger Voices is a group for us to speak out and tell people how we feel about things. We do training, we give talks, we have nights out together and we raise money for our group."

Then Jack tells her that he works on the computer with Tariq and helps to plan the things they do.

Someone shouts out to Jack. "Jack, you forgot to tell them a joke!"

Jack laughs and then looks across at Brenda and laughs. "Brenda, why are ghosts bad liars?" Jack asks her.

When Brenda tells him she doesn't know, Jack says "because you can see right through them."

Everyone laughs and someone tells him he's told that joke before.

Tariq stands up again and says, "let's make Amy and Brenda feel welcome and tell people our names."

Amy looks across at Brenda who is still staring at Jack. She listens carefully while all the people in the group say their names.

There are some people in the group she knows well but there are a lot of people she doesn't know. When it is Brenda's turn to speak, she tells everyone she lives with Amy. Amy is hoping Brenda won't tell them what happened when she went shopping last week.

Then Brenda tells everyone that Amy's real name is Vera. Amy looks down at the floor when everyone turns to look at Amy.

"Go on then, tell them why you changed your name" Brenda says to Amy.

Amy doesn't know what to say and puts her hands over her ears.

Tariq says "it's alright if you don't want to speak yet Amy. You can talk when you feel ready."

Amy looks up at Gary and then at Brenda. "My name is Amy and I live with Brenda" she says very quietly.

Everyone claps and Amy looks away.

Jack asks Amy why she wanted to join Stronger Voices. Amy looks up at him and says, "Gary told me all about Stronger Voices."

"It's good fun" Jack tells her "and you will learn lots of new things as well, won't she?"

There are a few people who shout out "Hello Amy, it's good to see you."

“What about me?” Brenda asks.

Jack tells Brenda everyone is happy to see both Brenda and Amy here today.

When everyone has finished talking, Tariq asks Jack to remind people about the rules for the group. Amy and Brenda listen carefully while Jack reads the rules out.

“These are the rules of the Stronger Voices group” Jack says.

Only one person can talk at a time

No swearing or shouting

No bullying

Help each other

Listen to what people are saying

Ask if you don't understand

Amy looks at Brenda and thinks that Brenda will find it hard to keep to these rules



Amy asks you this

Who is the chair-person at Stronger Voices?

What was the joke that Jack told everyone?

What does the chair-person do?

What are the rules of the Stronger Voices group?

Why do you think Brenda won't keep to the rules?

Chapter Six

Amy gets a shock

After they have all heard the rules, Amy listens as everyone in the group takes it in turns to speak. They each talk about something interesting they have done since they last met.

Two people in the group say they can't think of anything to say. Sasha says she has been out for a meal with her best friend. Some of the men say they have been to a football match together and one man called Jamie says he went to the cinema with his girlfriend.

Gary tells the group he met Amy in town and that they went to the Yellow Brick Cafe for a cup of tea. Then Gary talks about his Doctor Who magazine and proudly pulls it out of his jacket pocket.

Amy doesn't know what to talk about so she just keeps quiet. When it comes to Brenda's turn to speak, she tells everyone that she nearly got run over on the way to the meeting tonight. Then she says it was Amy's fault because Amy wasn't walking fast enough.

Everyone turns to look at Amy.

When someone asks Brenda what happened, Amy looks down at the floor and Gary takes hold of her hand and squeezes it tight. Amy hopes Brenda doesn't tell them about the girls in the shop last week.

Jack says something to Tariq who stands up and says it is time for someone else to have their say.

After everyone has had a chance to talk, Jack says he has something important to tell people.

"There has been a man going around Magnolia Street, knocking on doors, asking to mend the roofs on their houses," Jack tells them.

Amy is so surprised she looks across at Jack. She can't believe what he has said. She listens carefully to what Jack has to say.

"These men have been asking to mend the roof and then ask for lots of money" Jack says. He reminds the group they should not open their door to anyone they don't know. "If you are not sure, don't open your door," he tells them.

Amy does not feel well. She looks down at the floor and thinks about the man who came to their house this morning after Brenda had gone out. He said his name was Bill and told her he was doing some work across the street and saw the tiles on the roof of her house were broken.

Jack is still talking but Amy is finding it difficult to hear what he is saying. She thinks about Bill telling her their roof was dangerous and if she didn't have the tiles fixed soon someone might get hurt.

When Bill told Amy he needed £100, Amy didn't know what to do.

Bill kept talking and talking and Amy just wanted him to go away. To stop him talking, Amy gave Bill all of the house keeping money they kept in the jar in the kitchen cupboard. Then she shut the front door and went upstairs to her bedroom.

"Amy, are you alright?" Jack asks her.

She looks up but Amy doesn't say anything. Then she looks across the room at Brenda who is looking in her handbag.

Without saying anything, Amy gets up and walks out of the door.



Amy asks you this

What did Sasha tell everyone?

What did Brenda say had happened to her?

Who is Bill?

Why didn't Amy tell Brenda about Bill?

What would you do if Bill came to your door?