

My Little Red Book (Winner, WriteInvite, May 2014)

I keep your phone number on the back of an envelope.

My Gran gave me a tiny, leather-bound address book for my 5th birthday. She told me I should use it for all the 'special people'; the people I don't want to lose; the people who are important to me. She'd started the collection by putting her own details in there, under G - which seemed a little odd, as her name was Hilda Jones, but I knew what she meant.

"That's so you'll know where to send the thank-you letter to," she said with a smile as I flipped through the gold-edged pages and stroked the tooled red hide with my thumb. Even though she's gone now, I still open the book at that page and read the address to myself sometimes when I'm lonely.

I put my dad's address in there too, even though he left mum and me behind when he moved to Chicago. I put it under W. His name was Michael Jones, but I didn't want mum to know I was in touch with him, so I hid it from her. Then, when he married that other woman and stopped answering my letters, I tore him out and burnt the page in the garden.

Mum's address isn't in there. Why would it be? I lived here with her - all the time I was growing up; and then as I got older and her mind got younger, she lived here with me.

So my little book is nearly empty. Just G for Gran; the vet's number; and a couple of old school friends. I don't see them very often - and never telephone them; but every December, I write a long letter, telling them what's happened during the year. They do the same too. I look forward to those letters, even though these days, there always seems to be a death or two to report.

I've only known you for a little while. We met at art class. My pastel-coloured landscape looked insipid beside the violets and purples of your storm at sea, but you were kind enough to compliment me on my brush-strokes. Afterwards, we went for coffee and talked for hours. When you saw me to the bus-stop, you asked for my phone number and gave me yours.

I don't know yet if you will become a special person, someone I don't want to lose. So I keep your phone number on the back of an envelope. But I'm keeping that envelope tucked safely inside my little red book.