

## G for Gossip

I wasn't party to the gossip exchanged over the washing lines in our communal back yard; I had to go to school. But, because I always 'had my head in a book' I could be overlooked whilst adults talked over tea and biscuits, never anything stronger in our house. So the plight of Amy or Beth in "Little Women" or the Famous Five's adventures were interspersed with self-righteous certainty that the new neighbours were slovenly...."have you seen the state of her front step?" or, heads together, voices hushed, they would discuss Alice who was having problems 'down there' or that chap Barber who was playing foot-loose with that 'floosie' who worked in Boots.

If you sat in a corner, being seen but not heard, you could listen to someone's whole character being picked to pieces, judged, then chucked in the bin. Occasionally there'd be a redeeming factor. So, my mother, in a chat in the back yard with our neighbour, would say that "Mrs X showed a touch of the martyr ( "kettle calling pot black" here). The neighbour would be nodding her head in agreement until Mrs X's bones lay bare. Then my mother would say, "By heck though, you can't fault her Victoria sponge!" The conversation would then move on to more mundane matters like the price of spuds

My childhood was spent with people who were disappointed. They'd married the wrong person, failed to get a good job, been manipulated by others. They took fierce pride in knowing themselves for what they were. Not for them the rosy view, the helpful excuses that might explain or mitigate. They gave each other labels : " brazen hussy" , "skin-flint", "hysterical baggage", looking like the "Wreck of the Hesperus". People were either dead-common or a cut above themselves.