

An education in life

Elizabeth Shove

Sharon

I waved as the train pulled out, but Will had already disappeared. I'd made him some ham sandwiches and a box of sausage rolls, but what would happen when these ran out? He'd got a couple of saucepans and he knew how to make spaghetti Bolognese, but you can't live on that alone. Pot Noodles maybe?

Back home, the house was strangely quiet. I sat on Will's empty bed and had a little cry. The Christmas holidays weren't far off, and he'd soon be clattering around as usual, but from now on he'd be a visitor. He'd always have somewhere else to go. After a few minutes I pulled myself together. No time for self-pity. I'm sure he'll have a fantastic time, making new friends and finding his way in the world.

Will

I kissed mum goodbye on the station platform. She'd provided me with enough food to feed an army and it added to the weight of my luggage. My green bag included a few things I thought I couldn't live without, a change of clothes, some bedding and now a huge number of sausage rolls.

The walls of my new room were a standard duck-egg blue, there was a small desk, a lamp and a bookcase. I could see a huge copper beech tree in the garden beyond, but other than that there wasn't much of a view.



I unpacked my favourite quilt cover and immediately the place seemed more familiar. One step in the right direction.

My housemates explained that I'd have to do the laundry in the bath and be sure to keep my saucepans under the bed. My course didn't start till the following week, and between now and then I was on my own. This was the start of my new life, but I had no idea where to begin. I was surrounded by strangers, miles from home and apart from everyone and everything I knew.

Frank

Practical experience, that's what he needs, not some cosseted existence in some so-called study bedroom with nothing to do all day. Our Sharon works all hours to pay for his university education, but what's the point. It's money down the drain if you ask me. I've never travelled more than a few miles from where I was born, and it's not done me any harm.

Will

Grandpa says I'd get a better education if I stayed at home - but look at him! Married at twenty and never seen the world. He's never eaten spicy food and he hates garlic and aubergines. What does he know?

Now that I've settled into the course, I don't phone home as often as I should. I know mum worries about me, but she wouldn't understand. I can't tell her how excited I am when I come back from the library brimming with new ideas and a haul of books by authors from all around the world. In the last few weeks I've learned to cook. My housemates love my roast chicken with all the trimmings. I do a tasty Nasi Goreng as well. I got the recipe off the internet. But that's nothing compared to the spring rolls that Ruri makes, they are to die for.

Frank

I left school at fourteen and never looked back. A few swots stayed on, but lads like us couldn't wait to leave. We stuck together, we learned on the job, and we had a laugh. After a few years we settled down: got married, had kids, and that was that was that. I don't have any regrets. None at all.

Our Sharon's boy, Will, went away to university last year and now she doesn't hear from him for weeks on end. When she does, it's all about what he's read or what he and his friends are making for dinner – she can't make head nor tail of it and nor can I. Of course, she's proud of him, but what good will come of it? If he had any sense at all, he'd have got a job in town, he'd give his mother a share of his wage, and he'd learn what life is really like.

Sharon

Will came home this week-end with his boyfriend, Ruri. Ruri is from China, and he is a fantastic cook. As Will keeps saying, Ruri's spring rolls are to die for. It was like a breath of fresh air, having these two around. They are planning to visit Vietnam this summer, and who can blame them. I can't tell you how much I've learned in just a few hours. I've got over the fact that Will has finally left home, and I love it when he comes back, full of stories about life outside our narrow little world.