

SONGS MY MOTHER TAUGHT ME

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TELEPHONE ANSWERING MACHINE:

(BEEP) I think you're a cruel, selfish, heartless man! (*Hangs up*)(BEEP) You're also blind, stupid, and inconsiderate! (*hangs up*)(BEEP) I deserve to be treated an awful lot better than you've treated me, and you know what? So does Dorothy! (*hangs up*)(BEEP) And... before you start shirking your responsibility for the way you treat people and blaming it on your mother and your so-called neurosis, let me tell you the reason you have two women on a string is that it flatters your... (*tape rewinds*) ... blaming it on your mother and your so-called neurosis.. (*tape rewinds*) ..blaming it on your mother, and your so-called neurosis, let me tell you the reason you have two women on a string is that it flatters your disgusting ego! (*hangs up*) (BEEP)

BROOKES: (sighs) It's always like this. Sooner or later, my mother comes into it.

MUSIC: *'Why are the stars always winkin' and blinkin' above,
What makes a fella start thinkin' of fallin' in love.
It's not the season, the reason is plain as the moon
It's just Elmer's Tune... [fades under text]*

BROOKES: Once upon a time, there was a woman who lived in London, and her name was Phyllis Elmer. But her real name was Elsie.

I've set out a series of her photographs here on the table in front of me, like playing cards in the opening sequence of a game of poker. Is this a 'royal straight flush'? Or an ordinary straight-faced bluff? The young flapper posed in front of a *trompe l'oeil* backdrop. The seventy-year-old standing with her husband by a fireplace in St. John's. The pictures of bombed-out London, marked "passed by the censor". She kept everything: diaries, dance cards, the torn-up photo of a lover - she kept the pieces! The wristwatch of the Australian aviator - the man she might have married if he hadn't been shot down over the English channel. The ration book. The pressed flower corsage. The fortune cookie.

SOUND: crinkling of paper

ELSIE'S VOICE My fortune: You will be a princess. You'll marry a prince and live happily ever after.

BROOKES: Well, all it really says is: 'you will have good luck in your personal affairs'

COUSIN #2: I don't think it ever came across to us, I mean as children, that Auntie Elsie was embroidering the facts.

COUSIN #1: We purely had to go by what Mum told us about her, didn't we?

COUSIN #2: Poor thing was probably hampered, wasn't she, in those days by all her circumstances. She obviously had the intelligence and the looks and the social ability. The one thing she lacked unfortunately was the background. So I suppose she had to invent it.

COUSIN #2: I wonder where she got it from, which of her parents?

SOUND: *World War II "buzz bomb." passes overhead.*

'Songs my Mother Taught Me' --.....page 2

WARBRIDE 1: The most frightening was the buzz bombs. They were terrifying. You could hear them coming, you couldn't mistake it, it was a very clear sound. And um, when the engines stopped you knew...

WARBRIDE 2: They cut out.

WARBRIDE 1: They cut out. When you don't hear them is when they're about to drop. If you heard it stop, as it were (laughs) that's all

WARBRIDE 2: That's all there was to it. It was alright all the time you heard them going, but when they stopped, if it was anywhere near you, well, you knew you could get it.

BROOKES: It was just such a bomb, she said, that blew up her past.

SOUND: *[buzz bomb stops]*

BROOKES: Killed both her parents, she said.

ELSIE'S SISTER: Huh? How could... why would she say that?

BROOKES: Leaving her an only child...

ELSIE'S SISTER: I suppose she didn't like them to know that we were her family!

BROOKES: Thirty-two years old. Blonde. Single. In London, in World War II.

SOUND: *High heels tapping down street*

ELSIE'S SISTER: And yet we weren't common!

BROOKES: With no family to trace her footsteps back.

ELSIE'S SISTER: We weren't nasty people. We were just an ordinary little working-class family.

COUSIN: We didn't know that you never knew anything about us. All those years.

ELSIE'S SISTER: She just didn't know what to do about us. And that was it.

SOUND: *Traffic sounds*

1940's RADIO ANNOUNCER: *[big band dance music] "It's fifteen minutes before midnight and that's the wartime closing hour for Saturday night. And any American who thinks the British are a phlegmatic race should see them dancing around me here tonight. They love dancing, and these shopgirls, these workers, these grocers clerks, these people who make up the stuff of England -- they dance wonderfully well. They're not all English by a long ways. The New Zealanders, Australians, and Canadian soldiers and sailors are here, and I just met a couple of Texans now in the RAF. There's a few French and Polish soldiers, and there right in front of me is a grave looking Dutch officer in his well-tailored greens... [announcer fades out, music continues]*

BROOKES: As long as you can hear it. As long as you can hear that sound, you're alive. It's when the sound stops...

MUSIC: *"...Then like an echo far away..." [music stops abruptly]*

SOUND: *Waves*

'Songs my Mother Taught Me' --.....page 3

BROOKES: ..That's when you know you may have... had it. Stepped off that shore called life. To cross the vast grey ocean of forgetting. To that far shore.

SOUND: *Waves, foghorn, faint tinkle.*

BROOKES: In such a place, does time exist?

SOUND: *Faint tinkle*

BROOKES: Do years pass?

SOUND: *Women laughing, chatting*

WARBRIDE (May): (*tinkles teacup*) I would remind you that our next lunch meeting is on the 11th of September. And I'd also remind you too to think very seriously about the article of 200 words maximum to be provided for the booklet which we are having printed to mark our fifty years in Newfoundland. And, ah, please think about it and don't neglect it, as I have done. And if no one has anything else to talk about, then I'll sit down, and that'll be wonderful, and we can sit and chat, okay? [laughter, table noise continues]

BROOKES: If years did pass, half a century later she might be sitting here, at the New Moon Chinese restaurant in St. John's. Sampling spring rolls and fortune cookies at the monthly meeting of the British-Newfoundland War Brides Association.

WARBRIDE (Margaret): It's fifty years since we came, because the majority of us arrived in 1946. 800 came, and possibly 400 stayed.

BROOKES: 400 stayed? What happened to the others?

WARBRIDE (Margaret): They went back.

BROOKES: So do you think of yourselves as survivors?

WARBRIDE (Margaret): Absolutely! [laughs]

WARBRIDE (May): [*tapping on cup*] Okay, Kay is going to start the singalong, please give her support. [*others calling out in background*] And Audrey!

WARBRIDE (Kay): Audrey, you said you'd like a song. Now how about we have a song. What's everybody's favourite war, war one?

BROOKES: Her voice might be one of these. If she'd lived to sing at this 50th anniversary.

WARBRIDE (Kay) Pick one out....

BROOKES: She didn't. And so all these voices, all these lives, are hers.

WARBRIDE (Kay) White Cliffs of Dover! (*chat, laughter, begin singing*)
...There'll be bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover
Tomorrow, just you wait and see...

[*song continues under*]

WARBRIDE (Joyce): I think that they should have gone back to marry their own, and we should have married our own. Too late. The war is responsible for a lot of unhappiness, isn't it, really.

'Songs my Mother Taught Me' --.....page 4

SOUND: *Buzz bomb, faint.*

WARBRIDE (Barbara): I mean, not everyone is as satisfied and happy as I have been. But I'm not alone, I know that. I mean, some people think love's a joke, but it's not. It's, there's just nothing you can do about it. Sorry, but you can't [laughs]. There's nothing you can do about it. I can't think of anything you can have better than a Newfoundlander and a Brit mixed up, you know [laughs]. Oh dear.

SINGING: "...tomorrow, just you wait and see..."

SOUND: *Buzz Bomb stops*

TELEPHONE ANSWERING MACHINE:

(BEEP) I don't think you ever allow yourself to empathise with how I feel. Over and over you ask for my patience. You say you're going to be weird because of her, or because of the documentary. Or because of her again, or because of a new documentary and I accept that and I wait. Well I'm sick of waiting! (BEEP)

SOUND: *Street noise*

BROOKES: Excuse me, I'm looking for number 25 Gwendour Road.

WOMAN: Gwendour? It's right -- Gwendour, ah...

BROOKES: What I'm looking for, this was the address of a woman I'm researching, a woman who lived here in the '40s, at number 25 Gwendour Road.

WOMAN: Yes, but you see...

BROOKES: It's as if it should be there...

WOMAN: Yes well, those were all bombed. Those have been like that for fifty years. That is not a natural green place. It's grown up since the bombing, and we had whatchamacallit housing on it.

BROOKES: Oh. Because she lived there in, I think, the late 1930s, early 1940s, perhaps 1941.

WOMAN: Yes, what was her name?

BROOKES: Phyllis Elmer.

WOMAN: I don't know the name. I've lived here for thirty years, but I know quite a lot of people round about.

SOUND: *Car passes*

MALE VOICE: February 14th 1939. Dear Miss Elmer: Further to our recent interview, at the moment I see no great scope for you on the exhibition/promotion side of our business. But I am prepared to start you at £5 per week on the standfitting side, with promise of an increase immediately you make good on it. If you accept, the sooner you can commence work with us, the better. Yours faithfully, Ewart Watson Exhibitions Limited, 19 Charing Cross Road.

SOCIOLOGIST: I mean, she would have to have started work at about the age of fourteen. I mean, very few girls stayed on at school beyond the age of fourteen. And since the majority of families were hard up, I mean, she had to get out to work and get a job very quickly. And the actual material expectations of a young, intelligent working class woman in the 1930s were very limited.

'Songs my Mother Taught Me' --.....page 5

WARBRIDE (Joyce): Well, you went into domestic work or you became a cook if you were in the lower classes. You didn't become a secretary or anything like that. Or you worked in a shop, a shop assistant, but you never went for anything better. That was your place. You worked for the people in the next rung up the ladder. There wasn't much for the lower class to do, apart from serving.

SOUND: *[on street, traffic noise, then door opening]*

BROOKES: Excuse me, hello! I wonder if you can help me. I'm researching a life of a woman who lived on Nevern Place in the 1930s and 1940s, and her address...

WOMAN: I have no idea, I've only lived here two years. [laughs]

BROOKES: Okay, thank you.

WOMAN: Thank you. *[Door closes]*

ELSIE'S SISTER: Oh, she was wonderful, my sister. She was about nineteen when she left home. I was only very young child then. But my dad, I think he adored her. He always thought of Elsie as... But he didn't fit in, you see. She had these friends that were, sort of, they were, definitely, they were above us. She had a good life, she made herself a good life and met nice people, and we were just, we were just ordinary working class people.

BROOKES: Was that why she left home, do you think? To better herself?

ELSIE'S SISTER: Oh yes! Definitely! She wanted to be something better than that, to be staying at home and getting married to someone, you know, some local boy. Oh no, she didn't want that. I don't know where she got it from, I don't know honestly. It must have been in the family somewhere.

MALE VOICE: 29th May 1939. Dear Mr. Bannerman: May we introduce Miss Elmer, who is seeking a post as newspaper representative. She recently came before the notice of our clients, Messrs. Moss Brothers, who were greatly impressed by her capabilities as a saleswoman. Yours faithfully, Arthur J. Owen, Ltd. Advertising Service Agents, 133 High Holborn.

SOUND: *"Big Ben" clock strikes in distance*

ELSIE'S SISTER: You see she got this good job, she was secretary to Mr. Cook. And um, he, you see he must have fallen for her. I think he was too fond of her, you see.

BROOKES: Do you think she was his mistress?

ELSIE'S SISTER: I don't know. I don't think so. She didn't want to be. He had a wife. He was married.

[Music starts]

ELSIE'S SISTER: I expect that's why she left him. Because she didn't want to be that. She wasn't like that. But I think he was enamoured with her.

SOCIOLOGIST: It's very hard to escape the realities of class in Britain today, but in the 1930s they were, the divide was sort of almost unpassable. I mean, the British propertied classes had affairs with domestic servants or factory girls. They didn't marry them. And whatever the truth was about class divisions in the New World, I mean, what people imagined was that you could escape those class divisions, by traveling somewhere else, by going somewhere else. And becoming part of the New World.

MUSIC: *"...Ain't what you do it's the way that you do it,*

'Songs my Mother Taught Me' --.....page 6

*Ain't what you do it's the way that you do it,
Ain't what you do it's the way that you do it,
Mama, mama...*

SOUND: *(radio static)*

FEMALE RADIO VOICE: We are interrupting our programme to bring you a news flash.

MALE RADIO VOICE: The following official communiqué has been issued from 10 Downing Street. At 9 a.m. this morning, His Majesty's ambassador in Berlin informed the German government that, unless not later than 11 a.m. British Summer Time today September the 3rd, satisfactory assurances had been given by the German government, a state of war would exist between the two countries as from that hour. His Majesty's government are now awaiting the receipt of any reply that may be made by the German government. The Prime Minister will broadcast to the nation at 11:15. That is the end of the announcement. Please stand by for a few moments.

MUSIC: *Beethoven, Egmont Overture [music stays under following]*

ELSIE'S DIARY: Sunday, September 3rd 1939. War declared 11:15. *[sound of plane, dog barking]*
Air raid 11:30.

SOUND: *[Voices during London air raid]* "Can you see them? Come this way, look!"

WARBRIDE (Helen): I felt someone pulling me out of bed, and I heard the sirens. That was Mother. Quick, she said, there's an air raid, you know. War's just been declared, she said, and there's planes overhead. So we got up and we all went out in the garden and looked and watched [laughs], you know. We didn't go into any shelters or anything.

SOUND: *[Voices during air raid:]*

Look! Look! Look at those! Oh, yes! Millions of them. Yes, look there's another one! Those are bombers.
I think they're bombers, Sid. Yes they are, they're German bombers! There's another one going down, behind that cloud! Behind the cloud, look! With smoke pouring out of its tail...."

ELSIE'S DIARY: Bomber crashed 12:30. *[sound of bomb]* I crashed 1 o'clock. Injured face and right leg. Taken to Hampstead Hospital. Confined to bed.

WARBRIDE (Dierdre): Well, I was very excited when the war started. I remember my mother crying and my father swearing, and I remember thinking what's wrong with them, to be upset like that.

WARBRIDE (Bea): It was going to be exciting...

BOTH TOGETHER: It was going to be exciting!

WARBRIDE (Helen): This went on, you know. I mean, every night, you know, we used to have raids, you know what it's like. Mum and I used to sleep underneath the table in the dining room. Because you felt safe underneath something, you know?

SOUND: *Explosion*

WARBRIDE (Barbara): And all I could hear was the ak-ak guns going off. Big, big guns we had...

SOUND: *Explosion*

WARBRIDE (Barbara): ...you know [laughs]. I said I can't do this, I cannot be enclosed and can't see what's going on here. I'll go mad. And so I joined, as an Air Raid Warden.

'Songs my Mother Taught Me' --.....page 7

WARBRIDE (Helen): I was in the Civil Defence, the ARP. I mean, the Civil Defence was big in London. And we all, we worked hard because you had long shifts, and [sigh] a lot of burned, people that were burned. Because they dropped the phosphorus bombs.

WARBRIDE (Joyce): I went in the Army because I felt that I wanted to fight for the country. We were with the heavy ak-ak, 3.7s and 4.6 guns. I was a sergeant in charge of about a hundred girls. We used to plot the planes coming in.

WARBRIDE (Dierdre): Well of course it wasn't... it wasn't normal living, by any means. I suppose we really ran on adrenaline.

WARBRIDE (Joyce): It was a funny kind of life to lead. Well away from your parents and, ah, well, you just didn't know whether you would be here the next week.

SOUND: *"All Clear" air raid siren*

ELSIE'S DIARY: Saturday, September 16th. Allowed to go home from hospital, but limping with much pain. Quite alone.

MUSIC: *"London pride has been handed down to us
London pride is a flower that's free.
London pride means our own dear town to us
And our pride, it forever will be..." [fades under following]*

FILM SOUNDTRACK:

Jean Harlow: Are we here?

Man: Well, it's number 27.

Jean Harlow: Want to come up for a cigarette and a drink?

Man: Oh really, you must be awfully tired.

Jean Harlow: No I'm not. Come see my room. I've only had a place of my own for a week. It's a new toy.

ELSIE'S DIARY: Saturday, September 23rd. Petrol rations started. Had dinner with Don after pictures. Saw *The Spy in Black*.

FILM: *Man:* Well, this is jolly.
Jean Harlow: Sit down and I'll get you a drink.
Man: Thanks.

SOCIOLOGIST: *(Sally Alexander)* :

The imaginative possibilities of growing up as a young woman, a working class woman in the 1930s, were huge.

FILM: *Jean Harlow:* Say when.
Man: Oh. When! When!

SOCIOLOGIST They were reading about romance, they were going to the movies and imagining lives very different from their mothers. If you think of the, I don't know, Jean Harlow or Marlene Dietrich, the heroines of the '30s, they weren't exactly domestic women, and they weren't domestic romances...

FILM: *Jean Harlow:* Would you be shocked if I put on something more comfortable?
Man: I'll try to survive.

'Songs my Mother Taught Me' --.....page 9

SOUND: *People marching in street, trumpet.*

PATERNAL AUNT: ...I remember the day he went off to war. Because I remember the men marching down Long's Hill. I guess I was five, and I remember standing on the sidewalk watching Lewis, and I had a red, ah, a red coat with a piece of red and white ribbon...

SOUND: *Marching band, "It's a long way to Tipperary" tune.*

PATERNAL AUNT: ...and he's somewhere in the front line of a rank of eight or ten across. And he had a herringbone tweed coat with a belt. And he looked really quite smashing.

SOUND: *Band marches past*

PATERNAL AUNT: But I don't think when my brother went off to war that I really had any sense of the danger, just the feeling of loss and, as I said, the anxiety that it caused within the family. And it seemed to me to be such a huge crowd. Young Newfoundlanders, yes, marching away together.

SOUND: *Band, people talking on street Snare drum roll, cymbal crash.*

TELEPHONE ANSWERING MACHINE:

I know you don't want to talk about this, because you don't want to admit to yourself truthfully how much pain you are responsible for. You've made me feel like a stuffed toy to be put on the shelf every time you and she feel the need to another emotional tango. If you don't want to hear me talk about this then don't call me.

(BEEP)

MUSIC: *Orchestral crash. Theme from "Gone with the Wind". Fades under:*

ELSIE'S DIARY: Tuesday October 1st, 1940. Murray called at 4.40 and took me to a picture, "Gone with the Wind." Dinner, and 11 o'clock on to Paradise Club with Veronica and Willy. Home together for late meal. We lay on top of bed fully clothed until the telephone rang. Feel terribly in love with Murray.

ELSIE'S DIARY: Wednesday. 7 o'clock Captain Basil Smythe, dinner dance. Heard nightingale at 2 a.m. in Berkley Square. Marvelous evening.

ELSIE'S SISTER: She just had that way with her, dear, like some girls do. Some girls are attractive to men. And no doubt about it, she was very attractive, your Mother.

ELSIE'S DIARY: Thursday. Met French officer. Dinner. Should have been at French club but this place bombed. Very serious air raids all night. Fires burning. Rene stayed, left at 5.30 in the morning.

WARBRIDE (Barbara) Oh yes, it was a romantic time. You see, you were young. And ah... well...

ELSIE'S DIARY: David on leave! Walked in park. Lunch at Silver Grill. Supper dance at Romero's. Home at half past three in the morning.

WARBRIDE (Dierdre): It was all great excitement. Meeting people that we would never have known. people from New Zealand and Canada and Newfoundland and Australia. All the dances that you went to, you met all these kinds of people.

WARBRIDE (Jean): The whole world was kind of stirred up like a great big stew, and everybody was somewhere different and doing things that they never expected to do.

'Songs my Mother Taught Me' --.....page 10

WARBRIDE (Dierdre): And there were ten guys to one girl. I mean, if somebody said to me 'you could live at any period that you like', I would have been that age, and gone through exactly what I did then.

WARBRIDE: (Helen): You lived your life in case you weren't there the next day. Why worry about tomorrow? You might not be here.

SOUND: *(RADIO) ...this is the BBC Home Service. Good morning everybody. Here is the first news bulletin for today, and this is Allen Howland reading it.. German air attacks on this country last night were widespread but not heavy..*

ELSIE'S DIARY: Saturday, October 5th. Up at half nine. Davidy still asleep.

SOUND: *Telephone ringing.*

ELSIE'S DIARY: Did shopping, and tea at home.

(Telephone conversation) :

AUSTRALIAN VOICE: ...61642 can I help you?

BROOKES: Yes I hope so. I'm calling from Canada, and I'm researching the Second World War.

AUSTRALIAN: Okay.

ELSIE'S DIARY: At half six went to Overseas Club with Davidy.

TELEPHONE: *BROOKES: And I have the wristwatch of an Australian flyer who was shot down over the English Channel during the war.*

AUSTRALIAN: Okay.

ELSIE'S DIARY: Bombs dropped very close by as we tried to leave.

TELEPHONE: *BROOKES: and there is a number and three letters engraved on the back.*

AUSTRALIAN: Right.

BROOKES: And I'm wondering if you can tell me what they might mean.

ELSIE'S DIARY Waited for quiet period, and went home with Davidy after Club people had been worrying us to go to the shelter.

TELEPHONE: *AUSTRALIAN: Fine, what three letters are they?*

BROOKES: A... T... P...

AUSTRALIAN: ATP. Do you know the name of this fighter, this pilot at all?

BROOKES: Yes his name was David Fletcher, so its not his initials.

AUSTRALIAN: No.

ELSIE'S DIARY Davidy leaves at 12 Monday from St. Pancras Station, or what is left of it.

TELEPHONE: *AUSTRALIAN: Okay, um, look you'd have to leave it with me. I'd have to do some looking for you. I've got a book here on military abbreviations. If you'd like to give me a ring probably about 4 o'clock this afternoon.*

ELSIE'S DIARY: Sunday, November 23rd. David phoned and was so very sweet. Nearly proposed.

TELEPHONE: *MAN: What are the letters, actually?*

BROOKES: ATP.

MAN: ATP.. Um, yes. That's something timepiece. Hold on a moment, let me just check this for you, won't keep you a moment...

'Songs my Mother Taught Me' --.....page 11

- SOUND: *(Radio) This is the BBC Home Service. Here is the news. News agency sources...*
- TELEPHONE: *MAN: Hello, sorry to have kept you. It's 'Army Time Piece', although the fact that a flyer had it obviously doesn't make any difference in that it's a military issue watch.*
BROOKES: I see.
MAN: So that means 'Army Time Piece', the War Department mark.
BROOKES: Thank you very much.
MAN: Okay, good. Glad to have helped. Bye Bye.
- SOUND: *(Radio) ...enemy aircraft have been reported over towns on the South coast, the west of England., the North Midlands and the Northwest, as well as over the London area...*
- ELSIE'S DIARY: Monday, December 22, 1941. Up at 7.30 for breakfast. 9 o'clock, heard radio news. "Aircraft of the Coastal Command last night attacked objectives at St. Nazaire..."
- SOUND: *(Radio) ...objectives at St. Nazaire. One of these aircraft is missing.*
- (Background music stops.)
- ELSIE'S DIARY: One o'clock received wire. Post Office Telegram, priority 43...
- VOICE: ...priority 43, December 22, 1941. Miss P. Elmer, 27 Linton Court, Holland Park Avenue, West 11. Regret inform you that flight-lieutenant David James Fletcher is missing and is believed to have lost his life as a result of air operations on the 21st December. Officer Commanding 201 Squadron.
- SOUND: *Buzz bomb approaching, stops.*
- SOUND: *Small noises.*
- ELSIE'S DIARY: Tuesday, January 6, 1942. They've given me David's wristwatch. Still on his arm when they pulled him out of the Channel. Stopped dead at a quarter to four. Like him. ATP 55263 it says on the case. Swiss made. Stainless Steel back. Heavy little thing.
- SOUND: *Winding watch*
- ELSIE'S DIARY: I've had it repaired.
- SOUND: *Watch ticking*
- ELSIE'S DIARY: Life goes on.
- MUSIC: *Glenn Miller Band, "In the Mood"*
- WARBRIDE (Dierdre): Quite a number of boys that I knew well, and danced with and was very fond of, were killed. And, you know, you'd go home and you'd have a little grizzle (cry) and my mother'd say 'It's no good crying about it. Stiff upper lip and everything. It's done.'
- WARBRIDE (Jean): Today, when they say "Oh, people have had these dreadful experiences" and they have counseling, I think "Well, why didn't we? And why weren't we all mad?" Oh, I expect we were.
- ELSIE'S DIARY: February 5th. Tiny came and took me to the Clarendon for lovely meal with Burgundy. Home by half ten, and then to bed. He is really grand. 3 mm's.

'Songs my Mother Taught Me' --.....page 12

COUSIN: It's a bit of a nasty thing to say, I suppose, but all those uniformed men, I mean who the devil were they all? She seemed to have a thing about uniforms, didn't she?

ELSIE'S DIARY: Lieutenant Paul Irwin called to take me to show, *Doctor's Dilemma*. Dinner at Casa Pepe, and walked all the way home. At 1.15 Murray phoned and came by. Talked, and then bed. 1mm.

COUSIN: She did have a whale of a time. I wonder why your mother got married at all?

ELSIE'S DIARY: Saturday June 4th, 1942. We all went out for dinner on Slough Road. Got rid of John with great difficulty. He came back and disconnected the doorbell! But Tiny returned with key, as arranged, and without incident. 2 mm's. Grand.

ELSIE'S DIARY: Monday July 13th. 5.30 met Captain Lewis Brookes at the Cumberland.

(Music stops)

ELSIE'S DIARY: Talked in bar, and later in the lounge. Very serious.

(Music starts, stops again)

ELSIE'S DIARY: Then home by taxi. Left at the door. Kissed me on cheek!

(Music starts, then stops)

ELSIE'S DIARY: (giggles) He is very sweet, and seems to like me.

(Music starts, then stops)

ELSIE'S DIARY: I hope so.

(Music crescendo)

SOUND: *Traffic.*

WARBRIDE (Helen): He was a bombardier I think, when I met him. Oh! Beautiful curly hair, a bit foxy. Beautiful curly hair. And tall, a nice looking man, yeah.

WARBRIDE (Jean): He was very quiet. he's still very quiet. And he had a moustache. And it didn't suit him at all. Somebody said to me "Well, what do you think about him?" I said "Well, I suppose he wouldn't be too bad without that dead mouse under his nose."

WARBRIDE (Barbara): He came from behind me and asked me to dance. And he had Newfoundland flashes up on his shoulder. The rest of the station were all Canada flashes on the shoulder. But this man had *Newfoundland* on. He said "Well, I come from a country. Newfoundland."

SOUND: *Door buzzer. Door opens*

BROOKES: Hello. I'm researching the life of a woman who used to live here.

MAN: Are you?

BROOKES: Yes, about fifty years ago. And I hoped you might be able to help me.

MAN: Yeah, come on in. Number 27, eh?

'Songs my Mother Taught Me' --.....page 13

BROOKES: Number 27.

MAN: Well we're just renting here at the moment.

BROOKES: Well, I think she was, too. But I'm not really sure.

MAN: Yeah? Who's that?

BROOKES: Her name was Phyllis Elmer.

ELSIE'S DIARY: Monday, August 24th. Went to pictures with Lew. Met many Newfoundlanders for drinks after. On to the Cumberland for dinner dance.

MAN: Well, there is a lift, but we can just go up the stairs...

ELSIE'S DIARY: Home by 11.30 and danced to the radio. Then bed by 2 a.m. He stayed. Very happy.
(Apartment door opens)

MAN: Chris is investigating the life of...

BROOKES: Hello. A woman who lived here about 50 some-odd years ago.

WOMAN: Oh, right.

ELSIE'S DIARY: August 28th, 1942. Lewis came to take me by train to swimming pool.

BROOKES: It would help me to know if there is a balcony, such that somebody could be somewhere down below and throw stones up to the balcony to get let in.

MAN: What? Ha ha. Sure, come in. This is intriguing.

BROOKES: ...There is!...

ELSIE'S DIARY: Dinner at home. Tiny came by, then John and Chuck dropped in and had coffee with us.

MAN: Yeah, 'cause the squirrels run across here.

BROOKES: Oh, so someone could...

ELSIE'S DIARY: John and Chuck soon left. Then Tiny and Lew left around half eleven.

BROOKES: So this opens...
(Sound of balcony door opening)

ELSIE'S DIARY: Lewis returned and I dropped key from window. 1 mm. Lovely.
(Sound of balcony door closing again)

BROOKES: Well actually this is quite lovely... So if you, you could actually come and go through here if you wanted to be surreptitious, couldn't you?

WOMAN: It would be possible I guess. If you look from the outside...

ELSIE'S DIARY: Sunday, August 30th, 1942. Bed by half ten. Lewis came by balcony.

'Songs my Mother Taught Me' --.....page 14

BROOKES: Oh that would make a perfect way to get up, wouldn't it?

MAN: What did she go on to do that interests you? Was it later in her life?

BROOKES: Yeah. She married a Newfoundlander. A soldier. *(sound fades)*

ELSIE'S DIARY: Monday, July 13th. 5.30 met Captain Lewis at the Cumberland.

SOUND: *(Radio Program: faint accordion music)*

ELSIE'S DIARY: Proposed marriage in taxi to Cafe Royale. Talked for a long while, and he confirmed his love for me. Did not leave until the early hours. Very disturbed but happy night.

SOUND: *(WOMAN RADIO ANNOUNCER): ...Newfoundland Sailor. Part Two in this radio series by Dr. Thomas Wood, introducing Commonwealth troops stationed here aiding with the war effort. And here is Dr. Thomas Wood.*

WOOD: On my right is Captain Lewis Brookes of the Newfoundland liaison staff. On my left is Corporal Tony Onrath, now of the Canadian army. What would you say, Captain, if I asked you what is the song above all others that would bring Newfoundland right into this very room?

CAPTAIN BROOKES: Well, Doc, I guess its 'The Ryan's and the Pittmans.' What do you think, Tony?

CORPORAL ONRATH: Is that the one, 'We'll rant and we'll Roar', Captain?

CAPTAIN: Sure, that's it.

CORPORAL: Oh boy, let her go, Captain, she's a dandy. We'll sure rant and roar all together.

CHOIR: (sings) We'll rant and we'll roar like true Newfoundlanders

We'll rant and we'll roar on deck and below... (fades)

WARBRIDE (Jean): I remember telling some of the WAF's that a Newfoundlander was going to meet me. "Newfoundlander! What's he like?" I said, well, what do you think he's like? Ordinary. "But how does he speak?" I said, well, like we speak. He speaks English. Well they couldn't believe that. So I told him where we would meet, outside the front of Thames House which was MAP then, and the entire unit walked out the front door and out the back so that they could see Alistair and see what a Newfoundlander looked like!

(Radio Singing up a moment : "Whenever I gets in a boat's standing room...")

COUSIN #2: You know how English people mix, like we mix Australians and New Zealanders. Perhaps we don't so much now, but we used to. And you mix Americans and Canadians... oops, sorry. Newfoundlanders. And not forgetting that English people had only ever seen pictures of America on Hollywood screens and things. And you hear the accent, which we wouldn't have been able to differentiate, we would think of you as American. In your mind, it's all associated with riches, isn't it? And good living.

WARBRIDE (Dierdre): When Bob told me "Well I live in Newfoundland, do you know where Newfoundland is?" I expected it to be like the cowboy movies with fences outside of pubs that had swinging doors that you tied horses up to. That was as much as I knew.

RADIO PROGRAM: *...What kind of song did you sing?*

CAPTAIN: Well, the Squid Jigging Grounds was one. All about the squid.

CORPORAL: That's swell. Shoot.

CHOIR: (sings) Oh, this is the place where the fishermen gather....

ELSIE'S DIARY: Four o'clock met Herbert Masterson at the Grosvenor for tea dance. Met Lewis on the way. He was upset! Herbert proposed at the bus stop. Arranged to see ring tomorrow.

'Songs my Mother Taught Me' --.....page 15

COUSIN #2: We all got the impression she must have turned down hundreds, you know, Barbara Cartland, that kind of thing? She must have turned down hundreds of suitors. Hah! Well, perhaps she did. I mean obviously the men found her very attractive. But maybe she couldn't get them quite as far as the altar if they realized that her background wasn't the same as theirs. 'Cause the families would've objected.. I mean suppose she'd met up with the Earl of Strathmore or something or other. That would be fine him taking her back to the castle, wouldn't it? The baronial hall. But if he wanted to go back to her place, it would be the laundry at Caxton Road. (laughs)

BROOKES: So you mean by, then, marrying out of the country...

COUSIN #2: They wouldn't know, would they?

COUSIN #1: She could fool the friends she had over there, couldn't she? She was a stranger to them, they would really think that she was a Lady of Newfoundland. But we'd all know over here that she was no First Lady, so she wouldn't be able to keep it up, would she?

SOUND: *CHOIR: "oh, this is the place where the fishermen gather,
With oilskins and boots and..."*

ELSIE'S DIARY: Sunday, November 8th. Engagement with Herbert broken off. Terrible quarrel, said dreadful things. Feel relieved that it is all over, and I am free. Stayed home alone all day. Then phoned Lewis.

MUSIC: *Organ plays The Wedding March.*

ELSIE'S SISTER: That's what I can remember of my sister.

BROOKES: Ever see the wedding invitation?

ELSIE'S SISTER: Oh, I say. I don't know if we got one of these. If we did, my sister's got it.

BROOKES: Read it.

ELSIE'S SISTER: Um....

BROOKES: The pleasure of your...

ELSIE'S SISTER: The pleasure...

ELSIE'S VOICE: The pleasure of your company is requested at the marriage of Phyllis, daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. P.A. Elmer, and Captain Lewis R. Brookes...

(Music stops)

ELSIE'S SISTER: No! He wasn't, you see! That was what hurt him so. I remember now. Because he wasn't "the late." He was alive. You see? What she would do? That's very sad. I remember this now. And how hurt he was about it. "Why did she," he said, "why did she say I was..." You know. But what could he say about it? And that's why we didn't go to the reception, I know now. I remember now. Because he didn't want... I mean how could she introduce him as her father...? And yet my Dad was a good old Dad...

BROOKES: ...Why would she... do that?

ELSIE'S SISTER: Because she didn't want them to know her family.

'Songs my Mother Taught Me' --.....page 16

TELEPHONE CALL: (BEEP) This whole situation is sick. So take some responsibility. Say it to yourself a few times: "I am making another human being miserable." I don't know if my saying this is going to make any difference at all. You're in denial, anyway. And I've had it! You need to see a therapist! (BEEP)

(pause)

COUNSELOR: ...So, I guess the moral of the story is you got recruited, in that family, into the marriage. Instead of being able to be a kid in that family. You might think about that for a moment. Why wouldn't you leave?

BROOKES: Well, where would I go? I didn't have any other family. I mean, my mother always said that her family was dead. Which wasn't true, I learned in later life. But as a child I didn't know. My father's family, um, she was estranged from them. Something had happened when I was a little kid, when she'd first stepped off the boat here. I don't really know what it was. So I couldn't go to Aunt So-and-So, or Uncle So-and-So. Where would I go? If I did run away?

COUNSELOR: Interesting. So leaving was not a... Ending relationships was not an option you had much experience with.

SOUND: *Small brass band plays the Wedding March.*

PATERNAL AUNT: It was either Harvey and Company's wharf, or very near there. I guess I was about 10, yes. And I remember jumping up and down with excitement, and seeing the ship come in...

WARBRIDE (Barbara): And we could hear the band playing "Here comes the Bride." And that was funny, because some of us had been married for years, ha ha. I was married a year and a half, and there were people there with babies. And it was "Here comes the Brides"...

PATERNAL AUNT: And your mother wore a hat. I remember her coming off the ship in high heels and a hat. And I thought this was probably the most glamorous thing I'd ever seen.

WARBRIDE (Barbara): She looked down on the wharf, and everybody'd gone, and been greeted. And there was just this one man standing there. And she looked and she said "Oh, my god, is this...? I'm going home..." kind of thing, I mean, you know. Because he looked so different in civilian clothing.

PATERNAL AUNT: Fancy coming off a ship in high heels and a hat! It wasn't like the girl down the street!

WARBRIDE (Jean): We couldn't have been the sort of people they expected their sons and brothers to marry, and bring home. Because we had been made so different with the war, that we weren't... what shall I say... charming daughters-in-law?

(Brass band finishes)

PATERNAL AUNT: We always had the feeling that your mother was very disappointed in the type of family that she came out to. That we didn't quite live up to what she perhaps had either hoped was landed gentry, or had been led to believe was landed gentry. Although I don't know. But we always felt... there was that sense of not quite being what she was either used to, or expected us to be.

WARBRIDE (Joyce): They didn't really understand, I don't think, what we expected.

BROOKES: Is it because they hadn't been through the war?

'Songs my Mother Taught Me' --.....page 17

WARBRIDE (Joyce): I think that was a lot of it. No, they didn't fear for their life every night. But it... no. All the dreams that we had, that we were going to make a new life, that it was going to be splendid, they all went. No. Newfoundland wasn't for me. It wasn't that dream. I think the first fortnight I knew it couldn't be.

SOUND: *Distant waves, foghorn.*

ELSIE'S DIARY: Monday, April 1st, 1946. Very cold and snow. Stayed in all day.
 Tuesday, April 2nd. Stayed in all day. Very cold and slushy. Snow everywhere.
 Wednesday, April 3rd. Stayed in all day.
 Thursday, April 4th. Stayed in all day.
 Friday, April 5th. Rain, hail, ice, snow and slush everywhere. Stayed in all day.
 Wednesday May 2nd, 1946. They accuse me of not trying to like people here. Gosh but I feel a long way from home now! How I hate it here. But who cares how I feel? Having to live under such awful conditions, and the weather so terribly bleak, what can they expect?

WARBRIDE (Dierdre): This homesickness, I think, was also a part of grieving, And I think it was kind of a post-traumatic experience we were having that nobody knew about or nobody realised. I don't think it was quite as bad as we thought, and how we blamed Newfoundland and how we blamed people for it. I think we were going through what they now call a post-traumatic syndrome of the war, and leaving home, and that kind of thing. I really do. But it wasn't recognised then, was it? Nothing like that was recognised

SOUND: *Foghorn*

WARBRIDE (Joyce): And you know, there were always family arguments. And nobody really understood how you felt. They didn't understand why I wanted to go home. They didn't understand why I wasn't happy. I was very sad.

SOUND: *Foghorn*

BROOKES: I felt if they'd separated, I guess...

COUNSELOR: They what?

BROOKES: If they'd separated, they couldn't have been any worse off. But they stayed together for me.

COUNSELOR: Is that what they told you?

BROOKES: Well, that's what my mother told me.

COUNSELOR: Your Mom said that? "If it wasn't for you I'd be gone...?"

BROOKES: Oh yeah. My mother used to say that if it wasn't for me she'd be gone back to England.

COUNSELOR: So the eight-year-old says "I'd never do this, I'd never continually threaten to leave a relationship."

BROOKES: I guess.

COUNSELOR: Clever shit. So you promised yourself that you'd never keep this threat of abandonment going, and so you never do... leave a relationship. Interesting little twist there.

ELSIE'S DIARY: I'm desperately unhappy. No future. No present.

COUNSELOR: If you leave a relationship you're injuring somebody else.

'Songs my Mother Taught Me' --.....page 18

ELSIE'S DIARY: I am keen for divorce.

COUNSELOR: So do you think... how would you have gotten by if she had left? If she had stopped all the talk and left?

ELSIE'S DIARY: To ship back with me: sewing machine, gramophone with records, coffee table, radio...
(fades)

BROOKES: ... I don't know. I imagine I would be more like some of my friends, who are able to... I mean, I know lots of people who are divorced. Who don't exactly torture themselves about it. It seems to be something that they can handle, and live through. *(takes a breath)* I think I'd be more like that.

COUNSELOR: I got to quit for tonight. Have you been listening to your tapes in between sessions...?

SOUND: *"buzz bomb" slowly passes overhead*

TELEPHONE VOICE: ...You asked for my commitment. You expected me to be committed to you through all of this crap, and you're annoyed with me now because I can't do that?
I can't go on any longer like this.
It's over. It's over.
...Goodbye.
(BEEP)

SOUND: *"buzz bomb" sound stops*

----- *end* -----