

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Catch 22

by Malcolm Walker

It was love at first sight, but he had less than 20/20 vision. Perhaps it was the colour of Chloe's hair, strawberry blonde she called it. More like anaemic marmalade John thought. Or was it the shape of her nose, broken he later discovered during the course of her early career as a professional wrestler. Maybe it was her sinuous figure, not to be seen in profile when her anorexic image bore a striking resemblance to a hat stand.

No, it must have been her personality heightened by her hysteria and an obsessive compulsion to laugh like a Northern Line tube entering the tunnel at Hampstead. Be that as it may he loved her with a passion akin to that of a man bereft of intellect. It was instinctive and animalistic, and no less worthy for all that.

So it was that they married in the grounds of the institution where they had met all those years ago. It was closed last year when the inmates could no longer prove they were insane. In order to prove their insanity they had to apply for a sane certificate but they could not do so unless they were insane. Once the application was made they were deemed sane and discharge followed automatically.

Life had been tough for them both but they inevitably drifted into politics as so many have done in similar circumstances. They became guardians of political tracts many having been written by mentally challenged iconoclasts. These tracts were only made available to those who could prove themselves capable of understanding complex semantic issues. In the event nobody had ever read any of the publications.

It was probably a misdirected or at any rate an incorrectly addressed invitation that arrived one January morning which led to them attending a writers convention at the Gladstone Library. On arrival they were able to have the use of the library facilities including access to all 250,000 books provided they could establish their credentials as writers. To accomplish this however they needed to submit their work to the panel of assessors. As they had not written anything approved by the panel they could not be admitted to the library.

Undaunted they took themselves off that summer to Russia, It was their intention to teach computer programming to inmates in the Gulag. They went with the blessing of their GP who took a post as an advisor to a group of physicians specialising in the 23rd outbreak of a disease called Catch.

In keeping with the laws of Soviet Russia at the time they arrived they had to convert their currency into roubles. As one would expect the rate of exchange was not attractive but at least the initial charge for conversion was manageable. They duly completed the forms for conversion and as directed went to Room 22 to pay the fee.

“That'll be 22 roubles please,” said the cashier.

“But I don't have any roubles.”

“Fill in this form and go to Room 41. This will give you dispensation but the fee for that is ten roubles.”

“Doh, we've been caught again. Have you read Catch 22 in the institution for the sane?”