

Bourne toWrite...

creative writing
workshops

Words

by Georgina Burrows

She had always wanted words, she loved them; grew up on them. Periwinkle, sausages, bodacious, leaflet, quixotic – they all rolled off her tongue when she practised them quietly, alone in her bed, late at night. Sometimes, when out and about, sitting in cafes, she would hear people ask each other, ‘what’s the word for when you’re really angry, like *absolutely raging*,’ and she would think ‘incandescent’ to herself, rolling her eyes as she did so.

It came of growing up with Violet and Peregrine, university professors, who toiled daily at the coalface of know-it-all Oxford students, who seemed to think that using ‘lexicon’ and ‘absolutism’ and ‘milieu’ made them somehow more original than the pontification of earnest scholars that came before them. Violet and Peregrine (who, much in the way of Ant ‘n’ Dec or Lea ‘n’ Perrins were always referred to in that order only) would take a much-needed break from marking their student’s papers by methodically working their way through the crossword in every daily broadsheet. Cryptics, or ‘cryps’ were reserved for after lunchtime, with their third instant coffee of the day, to ‘give our brains a chance to warm up’, but after dinner, over the final coffee, and perhaps the remnants of a bottle of decent Shiraz, they wound down with the quick crossword, and quick it most certainly was – their current record for completion was just under five minutes.

She settled down every evening and listened to the soothing back-and-forth of clues; after 28 years of marriage, Violet and Peregrine had practically developed their own code.

‘Four down, thought it might have been...’

‘Yes me too but too many letters so it’s most likely...’

‘Idiosyncrasy, of course.’

‘Of course.’

Some days they berated the crossword setter – Mondays were often very weak. ‘Absolute damn fool of a setter this week, surely humanitarian should have been...’

‘Well of course it should but what else do you expect of Monday, probably thinks irony is where the Ironians live.’

After six years of full immersion in a word soup every evening, with ‘authoritarianism’ and ‘post-industrialisation’, ‘bibliophile’ and ‘Bichon Frise’ flying back and forth across the kitchen table, her vocabulary was second to none. The difference between a verb and a noun? Nonsense, she was an expert on linguistic patterning! Now she was focusing solely on pronunciation, as so far, everything that came out of her mouth sounded rather too much like ‘woof’...