

# Bourne toWrite...

creative writing  
workshops

## The Library Book

by Garf Collins

Mark leaned against the Embankment wall looking idly at the Thames rushing downstream. As a dealer in rare books, he had been searching through the displays below Waterloo Bridge. He hadn't had much luck so far but thought he would have one last try.

He found nothing which would benefit his business but he noticed a book which seemed out of place amongst a rack of paperbacks. It had a leatherette cover and the gold embossed title on the spine was 'The Tribes of Borneo.' Intrigued, he opened it and found that it had been a library book. The cardboard receptacle for the control tag and columns of stamped dates were there just as he remembered from his childhood. He noticed that the last date had been in March 1985. A further red stamp across the date page declared 'Withdrawn from circulation: Tunbridge Wells Library'

Mark flicked through the pages of text interspersed by smudgy photos of primitive tribes. A handwritten note on a yellowing sheet of paper fell out. It said 'Deborah. See you at the flat 2 pm Sat. If that's OK - remove THIS note. Paul.' He purchased the book and took it to a nearby café where he looked again at the note and wondered how it came to be there. Gradually, he constructed a plausible story and with it a feeling for Deborah and Paul. Tunbridge Wells was a small town and in the eighties, house phones could be answered by anyone. The pair must have been lovers who had devised a clever method of communication. They had chosen an obscure book in a rarely visited part of the library and used it to post their messages. They must have thought it very secure as they used their real names. Or, were they names made up for the purpose? Obviously, they had to foster identities as book lovers to excuse frequent visits to the library.

After all this speculation, Mark found that he was getting quite fond of Deborah and Paul. He imagined them in a passionate relationship enhanced by the thrill of secrecy. But sometime in 1984 maybe, Paul had posted his note and it hadn't been removed. Perhaps this

was the second time that had happened because he had written 'If that's OK - remove THIS note.' He would have been desperate for news of Deborah because she clearly hadn't taken the previous note from the book. Perhaps, she had a husband who had guessed about their affair. She had confessed and promised to end it. Maybe she had suffered a terrible accident. Or, could they have quarreled at their last meeting with Deborah demanding a deeper commitment which Paul was unable to give?

The more he thought about it the more Mark wanted to know the end of this romantic adventure. He so wanted there to be an answer to the mystery that he resolved immediately to write a story about it.

Once installed in a quiet corner of a nearby cafe, Mark ordered a coffee and set up his laptop. He knew little about Tunbridge Wells so he started by Googling some information about it. He decided Deborah had been an unmarried young woman in love with an older man. Soon Mark was lost in his writing. After four hours and countless cups of coffee, he read over his completed story...

'Paul hurried into the library. Thoughts of Deborah dominated his mind. He was still under the spell of the passionate weekend they had managed to arrange in an oast house well away from Tunbridge Wells. Desperate to see her again he went immediately to the anthropology section where he took out an obscure book and hurriedly leafed through its pages. Her father had forbidden their relationship so they had devised a clever messaging system. He had left a note - 'Debbie, see you at the flat 2 pm Saturday. If that's OK remove this note. Paul turned to the agreed page and found no note. He had to suppress a shout of joy in the quiet of the library.

The freedom to abandon themselves to each other on the previous weekend had been a welcome change from their usual meetings in her friend's flat. These were somewhat inhibiting but it was all they had, since, anywhere else in Tunbridge Wells, they were liable to meet people who knew her family. Her father - Sir Archibald Moresby - was a well-known businessman in the City and a local magistrate.

When they met on the appointed date, Deborah told Paul she wouldn't be able to meet the following weekend even if he could. Her father had said, "Make sure you are free next weekend. No traipsing off to that friend of yours you are always going to see. We've been invited to stay the weekend with the Falkonburys. They're a respected county family. Good Catholics and young Lawrence is a fine lad. You're eighteen now and it's about time you had a nice boyfriend."

"Don't worry about him Paul," Deborah said, "I can't stand Lawrence. He's a stuck up prig."

The lovers continued their affair without detection for many weeks after that. Sometimes they varied their regime by meeting in Dunorion Park. Deborah loved walking by the lake there. Then, one sunny day in March, Deborah arrived at the flat and joyfully announced that she was pregnant.

"That's fantastic, love," said Paul, "we ought to get married but what will your father say to that?" he added as his expression of delight turned to anxiety.

"Well, he won't like the fact that you are divorced and that I was forbidden to see you, but surely when he knows he will have a grandchild that will change?"

Paul worried about Deborah and her family's reaction to the news for days afterwards. He left one of their notes in the book hoping that she could meet after her art class on the following Wednesday. The note was not removed.

That whole week Deborah had been in furious arguments with her father who, on hearing the news had stated, "I'm very disappointed in you Deborah for disobeying my explicit

instructions. That man Paul is never going to be my son-in-law, I can tell you. He's divorced to start with and he's only a teacher. You can do much better than that."

"But Daddy, surely you would like a grandchild. I expect you'll change your mind when you see him. I'm sure it's a boy."

"There's no way you are going to keep that baby. Abortion is out of the question. It's against everything we believe in but you will go down to cousin Bronwyn in Aberystwyth. There you'll have his brat and then the Catholic Adoption Agency will take care of it. No arguments about this. I knew we shouldn't have let you join that Theatre Club."

Whenever Deborah ventured out to the library her mother went with her. She had no means of communicating with Paul. He left another note, - 'Deborah. See you at the flat 2 pm Sat. If that's OK - remove THIS note.' But it was not removed. He was distraught but couldn't think what to do. Realising that the note could apply for any Saturday, Paul kept going back to the library hoping for some response. After three weeks he resolved to visit the Moresby's house and brave the wrath of Deborah's father. But as he was leaving the library he caught sight of the headline on the local paper left casually on a table.

'GIRL IN LAKE IDENTIFIED'

With a feeling of dread, Paul picked up the paper and read;

*'The body of the young girl found drowned in the lake in Dunorian Park on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> March has been identified as Deborah Moresby (18), daughter of Sir Archibald Moresby the prominent businessman and local magistrate. The police are not looking for anyone else in connection with her death. In a post mortem, she was found to be 3 months pregnant. Moresby said he had no idea she was expecting a child and said that they would have welcomed the baby into their family rather than lose a lovely daughter.'*

In a daze, Paul left the library and, as if in a trance, walked through the town.'

Although Mark was pleased with the story, he left the cafe feeling a little guilty at having explained the note to himself with such drastic consequences for the lovers. "But it's better than if it had remained an unsolved mystery in my mind," he reasoned, "I can forget about it now."

Back in his bookshop in Totnes, Mark put the 'Tribes of Borneo' on his shelves but couldn't imagine ever selling it.

He often had browsers in his shop. He didn't bother them but looked at them surreptitiously. He liked to guess their lifestyle and occupation. He often found out in a later conversation whether he was right. So one day he was mildly intrigued by a well set up man in his mid-sixties who was rather flamboyantly dressed. His interest sharpened when the man took out the 'Tribes of Borneo' and, after flipping through the pages, asked to purchase it.

"Do you have a particular interest in that book?" Mark asked, "I picked it up in London and there was a mysterious note in it. I guessed it was a method of communicating between two lovers. For some unknown reason, I decided he was a teacher in his mid-twenties and her a teenager of 18. In my imagined version of events, it all ended tragically."

"Well, you may be interested to know you were entirely wrong. It was I who left the note you found. Susie and I had played opposite each other in 'She Stoops to Conquer' and this started our affair. As we were both married at the time we arranged meetings as you have guessed. After she didn't respond the second time, I was a bit cut up but I soon found out she had fallen in love with her new leading man in 'Separate Tables.' It happened all the time."