

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Edinburgh

by Sue Hitchcock

Nicky and Phoebe started their journey from the old Covent Garden market, just north of the Strand, from where lorries ferried fruit and vegetables northwards early in the morning. Their first lift took them as far as Stevenage, where a mad, speed-freak from the missile factory picked them up, only releasing them somewhere in the east Midlands. Midday doldrums took them by means of a few short lifts into Yorkshire, where they sampled the ale. Then finally a lorry took them a good distance towards Edinburgh, dropping them on the dark, unlit road in the Grampians. They had to leap out into the headlights of oncoming lorries to catch the attention of a driver, till their last lift dropped them near Nicky's home.

They walked the last bit, along a drive, through tall gateposts, to a large Georgian house. The door was open and Nicky ruffled the ears of a large dog sleeping in the hall. Nicky led Phoebe up to his bedroom and they fell into bed exhausted by almost twenty-four hours of travel.

When they awoke in the late morning, the sun was shining in through the uncurtained windows. They dressed quickly and Nicky took Phoebe on a quick tour. At the end of the gallery was a bathroom with ancient fittings. Many doors—maybe six or more—were either side of the stone staircase, which curved down to the hall.

The dog barked loudly till Nicky made a fuss of him again and Phoebe looked into a large music room one side of the front door and a lounge on the other. The furniture, like the rugs were threadbare and no curtains hung at the windows.

Nicky led Phoebe to a strange, small kitchen, where he introduced her to his mother, whom he addressed as Mary. Mary was a bony woman with straight, greying hair and wind-reddened cheeks, but her eyes were bright and cheerful. She excused herself to do some gardening while Nicky shovelled some coffee beans into a grinder fixed to the window frame and started grinding. Breakfast of home made bread, butter and jam along with the most aromatic coffee she had ever tasted, Phoebe thought she was in heaven.

Mary did not play hostess, but welcomed visitors of all sorts, especially during the festival, writers, artists, musicians, journalists from the *New Statesman*. Phoebe was allocated the old kitchen in the basement, large with an old gas cooker and boxes of homegrown shallots on the window sill. She could cook for Nicky's friends.

When summer was over and departure for the new term was due, though Phoebe thought she was in love with Nicky, it was saying goodbye to Mary that made her cry.