

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Yes

by Chris Baker

“Yes, that’s fine. Start the outside on Monday.”

“I may have a little...”

Our painter Denis saw my attention flicker to the postman came up the path. He began again. I am afraid that I didn’t really hear the rest as I was thinking about the evening shirt that was to be delivered: I needed it this evening. It was my own fault, I’d not organised it earlier. I took the bundle of letters from the postman. There was no parcel containing a shirt. Horror of horrors. I really needed it.

“Denis, I wonder if you could excuse me.? I am so very sorry, “I said “I really do need to make a telephone call: I am so sorry”.

At such beseeching he saw that continuing this conversation was a lost cause. He smiled resignedly and said he’d be at the house at eight-thirty sharp. Not only was he thorough but a reliable timekeeper. We were lucky to have someone like him and I regretted not to have been able to give him the attention that he deserved. He had lost out to a stuffed shirt.

As I turned to go to telephone my shirt maker and find out what the hell had become of it and more importantly to arrange collection of another, I glanced quickly at the letters; there wasn’t anything that couldn’t wait although one envelope bore handwriting that I couldn’t place. Had it once been familiar? The question faded away as I mis-dialled for the third time. This was not a good morning.

Strewn on the hall table, the envelopes remained unopened until the following morning when I came down for breakfast: fresh figs, yoghurt and black coffee. The unrecognised hand I left until last.

I opened the letter deliberately, wondering who had such a rounded, flowing hand. I was intrigued and read from beginning to end, rather than turn over the page and look at the signature.

“I do hope that you will be able to come to lunch on the last Thursday of next month. There will be twenty of us. You’ll know everyone. It was difficult to track you down: friends helped. We last saw one another at the Commander’s retirement party – that was forty years ago.”

Then the penny dropped. I knew who it was and would not have missed it for anything.

The letter continued “What fun we had. I have booked the same room – very private – old habits, I suppose. I am sure that we’ll all have so much to talk about. I am looking forward to it.” Do try and come.”

It would undoubtedly be a delightful, discreet lunch, among lots of old friends. I took up my pen and wrote to say that wild horses would not time prevent me.

As I was shown into the room, she was instantly recognisable: still tall, the shoulder length hair still with a breaking wave, perfectly in place but no longer brown but a steel grey. She had always been well dressed: our boss would not have put up with less. She dressed timelessly. She was very well preserved. She must have been eighty-five. Her skin clear but slightly taut now over her cheek bones. Her eyes were clear and she had that same level gaze with what, when she smiled or laughed, one could be forgiven was a slight flirtation. I don’t think anyone was ever sure and no one I’d ever heard of had sought to explore what lay behind it.

Taking a drink from the tray I walked towards her, waiting for her to disengage from an earlier arrival. “Ian” she almost shouted when she saw me, throwing her arms wide apart as if she were going to hug me but put her arms out in front of her to grasp both my hands as she turned her face up to receive a kiss on each cheek. She was just as engaging as ever she had been. I was aware of someone at her left shoulder. Half turning that way she said “You have never met my husband Desmond. Desmond, Ian, Ian Desmond.”

“How do you do,” we said simultaneously and smiling we shook hands

“Money penny!!” I exclaimed.

“Yes, no one knew that I was married all those years ago. At long last everyone can meet him.”

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