

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

The Signal Box

by Richard Lewis

Harold had a fragile quality about him. You'd never imagine he'd earned a black belt in judo and ran the local judo club, in the valley town of Ystrad Munach. He was also an author and when asked for guidance in the craft, rather than saying, read a lot or live your life first, he'd reply, "my advice to all young writers is quite simple, find a job that pays you to write".

As an only child of older parents, doted on by his mother and discouraged from making friends out of school, Harold had difficulty connecting with people but developed a rich phantasy life. It was 1970 and Harold was in his late forties, parents long dead, he lived a solitary life with his cat Pushkin, in the spartan, terraced house where he was born.

He was a portly man with a shiny bald scalp and a ring of frizzy grey hair around the side of his head, making him look like Friar Tuck. Appearance meant nothing to him, he'd worn the same clothes for more than a decade.

His great love of the railway drew him to the life of a signaller. Every day his Remington Quiet-Riter accompanied him to work in the signal box, where, in between passing trains, he would write. Harold had had a number of books published on judo, karate and physical fitness and was now venturing into romantic fiction. Something he knew nothing about, having never been in a relationship. Though after sourcing a number of Mills and Boon novels from the library, he soon worked out the formula.

Harold could do the job of signaller standing on his head. Even when pulling levers, part of his mind would be immersed in writing, like a steam engine, pistons propelling the story down the track. His mind focussed, as if running on rails, the gentle clatter of the Remington, floating through the air like the clickety-clack rhythm of rolling carriages, steel on steel.

One frosty December morning he came down to find Pushkin lying under the table, stiff as a board. He wept for the first time in years. The loss made him realise how lonely and isolated he'd become and that his latest romance novel "Longing", was really about him.

He decided it was now or never. Rather than finding himself another cat, he would take the train into Cardiff, buy himself new clothes and register his name with the Match Makers marriage bureau.

