

Bourne
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workshops

Come Again Another Day

by Gill Hilton

Crystal Rain. If anyone had taunted her with ‘Rain, Rain, go away...’ or, ‘What a drip!’ that would only have pointed a finger of stupidity at the name-caller. The heaviest torrent of mockery would have been water off her designer backpack. And anyway, no one wanted Crystal Rain to go away. Even before her schoolgirl body flattened and filled out in all the right places. Even before the rest of her talents exploded into everyone’s gawping faces. She was just good. At everything.

As I spot her now, ten years to the day since we left school, it is raining. It seems like there’s always rain around the corner, ready to offload itself. It comes in splinters or splatters or sheets. Today, it is rain that fills the whole world, the air that I breathe.

I call gently to her, “hi.”

Clearly she thinks she doesn’t know me.

“It’s Crystal, isn’t it,” I say.

“Yes,” she says, with a shiny look of friendliness.

“We were in the same class?” Here my intonation rises. As if giving her the chance to remember. Not seeming to push her.

“Oh, of course,” she declares, obviously with no memory of me at all. I’m not going to offer her my name. If she asks I could tell her, or give her a false name. It doesn’t matter.

“I love your work. I read everything,” I say brightly.

“Thank you,” she says, like she prizes my praise.

Next I say, “your recent piece on domestic violence was so powerful.”

“Thank you,” her tone is intense, “it was a very challenging piece to write, but worth it I hope.”

I keep things moving. I don’t want her asking about me.

“You’ve really made a name for yourself,” I venture, “how does it feel to be followed by so many people?”

“Oh, it’s amazing,” she says, “I’m really grateful for all the support,” a short pause here, “though it’s not all good stuff that I get”. I’m patient. Her face changes. “You’ve no idea what some of these trolls will say. It can be unbearable sometimes.”

I say what anybody would, “I’m sorry to hear that.”

She shrugs her shoulders as if in surrender to something bigger than us both. I’ve heard enough. I steer the conversation to a polite close.

“I’ll let you go. Keep up the good work,” I say.

“I will,” she says.

Will she really? She looks somehow worn down. In need of sleep. Under a cloud.

The rain seems to part for her as she moves immaculately through it. Back to her Maida Vale mansion block apartment, her faultless husband and her two sparkling children.

I spoke the truth when I said I read everything she writes. She won’t, of course, know that I too write. Or that she will have read my writing. And she will read it again. Maybe later today, once I’ve sent her the next message from #smashcrystal.

So I will return home now, through the oblivious rain.