

Bourne
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creative writing
workshops

Brian and Olive

by Martin Bourne

“Argh Wally how could you man, farting and belching in the cage. You shouldn’t be boozing the night before an early shift, it’s us that suffer,” said Brisey Bishop.

“Aye and your wife,” shouted Tussock. The miners laughed.

“It’s that useless windy-man bouncing us up and down. It’s turning me guts over,” said Walter.

“Don’t blame the wincher-man,” they all chorused.

“Meet me in the social tonight Bishop and we’ll have a sup, or does little Olive have you under the thumb at home?”

Brian winced. “Maybe I will have a couple tonight.”

All the men jeered.

Later at home in the kitchen.

“What do you mean your going out? You never go out.”

“Well I am tonight.”

“Don’t expect me to wait up for you.”

Later Brian came swinging up the ginnel singing and swearing.

“Brian, Brian, shhh. All the neighbours are looking. Look at your ganzy, it’s all ripped and dirty.”

“Shut up woman.”

“Be quiet man, the bairns are sleeping.”

“I said shut up, yer like a bloody buzzsaw in my head.”

“A buzzsaw am I, well you’re a disgrace. Look at the state of yer.”

“I’ll show you woman. Tatter at my ears would you. Come here.”

“Ow yer hurting me. Let go of my hair. Why you doing dragging me into the garden.”

“There. See if a night in the shed stops your mithering.”

“Brian, Brian. Open the door. Let me out. Brian. Brian.”

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“Olive. I’m sorry lass. I shouldn’t have left you there all night Come in out of the cold. I’ve made tea.”

“I’ve no time for tea. I’ve bairns to get ready for school and house to sort out. Have you forgotten your Bob is coming up from London next week with his new wife Jean? And them only just married.”

“Aye. Well I’m off to pit.”

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“Well then our Bob. How you keeping?”

“I’m fair Ollers. Nowt much changed around here.”

“No, nowt much, but can you go and have a word with your brother about his behaviour. He’s just coming up the ginnel now.”

“OK, I’ll go and meet him.”

“Now then, who do we have here. Jennie is it?”

“No. Jean.”

“Jeanie?”

“No. Jean.”

“Well, happen you know your own name. So, there you are only a few weeks married and a baby on the way. I suppose you think your set now.”

“What do you mean? we’re married.”

“That you may be and you think you’ve got him. You’ll never have him. His heart belongs in Yorkshire where he was born. But, I’m forgetting my manners, you’ve had a long train journey. I’ll show you the bathroom so you can freshen up.”

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“Hello. Is that you Jean?”

“Bob, Olive’s on the phone.”

“Hello Ollers. Crikey it must be 40 years.”

“Aye. Well. You know that’s because you fell out with my Brian over the miners strike and you being a Tory supporter. Anyway, I’ve bad news, our Brian died last night.”

“What. How?”

“Heart attack. All those years down the pit, and then working for the union.”

Olive finished the call and looked about. The children long gone and now Brian. She started putting ornaments into a box, preparing herself for the inevitable. She stared into the mantelpiece mirror. Talking to herself, “the house is silent now and she feels like a stranger here.”