

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Duality

by Ali Giles

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom. It was the age of foolishness,” he whispered. And stopped. Closed the book and placed it back on the rafter, along with his scarf that he had lain down, carefully folded.

Up there in the attic, with the smell of fresh sawn wood and tar and nobody else in the house; the builders gone for the day, and the light fading and blurring the edges of her and nobody knew they were there. She wore a demure white dress, but grubby and frayed at the hem, and her bonnet lay beside her with its two wilting flowers tucked in the ribbon. She smelled of the sun still.

This girl sent to live with an Aunt and her dog in West Ham, just across the way; her father working fourteen hour days on the docks in Southampton, a drinker, she told him, and foul tempered on it, with not enough money to keep or feed her. Mother dead.

He wondered at the life these people led; he thought that such wretched poverty would induce a man to hold on dear to the things he purported to love.

Bright and guileless eyes, brown and shiny as horse chestnuts and a petulant mouth; the front teeth a little large, but good condition, and lightly touching on her tongue now, protruding almost coquettishly.

And it was queer; for she had reminded him so of Rosie, yet what else could this feeling have been, if not love? A sweet trembling inside, so fine as to be a vibration of the senses. He had read of it, and seen himself in the words.

He had shown her the best in him, but then he had shown her the bad; his spring of hope then, for a time; but also his winter of despair.

And he had held her by the throat and watched the life leave her, marvelling at the pure simplicity of it: how these dualities should suddenly come together.