

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Billy

by Victoria Watson

I'll have a vodka and tonic thanks love. No, I don't want ice. What a day! I tell you; you wouldn't believe it. All those tourists looking the wrong way on the escalators.

Thanks, yeah, I'll have another.

You been here long? I don't recognise your face and I'm good with faces. I don't remember names, but always a face. If I'd seen your face before, I'd remember I was drinking with Billy.

Billy and me we go way back. We go so far back I don't really know where Billy ends and I begin. We're old friends Billy and me. Drinking pals like. Blood brothers. We don't talk any more though.

If I had seen your face before I know I would have been with Billy because he's always liked a redhead you know. Always got an eye for them if you know what I mean.

I'll have the same love, vodka and tonic, no ice.

Billy dyed his hair for years you know. Dyed in the wool you might say. Not got much left now, just like me, but I remember what it was like when we were kids. His hair was so red when he got angry the top of his head used to glow through the roots. We used to wind him up well and proper just to get to see his head glowing like a firework. Poor old Billy, what a temper!

I'll have one too, thanks. No ice.

I don't drink much now. I can take it or leave it. Sometimes I go days, weeks, I don't even touch the stuff. Its Billy who can drink though; he can really knock 'em back.

Thanks love, no leave the tonic.

Yeah Billy's the one with the problem alright. I think he drinks to forget all the things he's seen, poor bastard. Railways did that to him. He worked down there for years. Things he saw, nobody should see; all those junkies with needles, all the toms and pervs; he should have got out years ago. I tried telling him, but he wouldn't listen.

Then those bombings happened, do you remember? The 7:7 ones, well he never got over that. All those bits of bodies and twisted metal. Week after week he had to clear the place, identify the dead and help make a temporary mortuary. He told me he was fine, drinking ten pints a night mind, but you know, just fine.

Then one day this man about his sort of age gave him a card and some flowers to put down there. He'd lost his only child, a little boy. The card said something about being with the angels and that's when Billy knew. Something him, just broke.

No that's alright love, you serve him, then get me another one will you.

We've been coming to this pub all our lives, Billy and me. They didn't used to play this racket back then, they played proper stuff, you know a singer with a band. Billy was in a band once. He could really play the piano. When you heard him it was like everything stopped. The whole pub used to go so quiet you could hear a pin drop. He would get lost in the music and you couldn't take your eyes off him; I don't believe in God or nothing like that, but when Billy used to play it was like angels or something. Like you were watching beauty but inside out.

No, I don't remember your face. Yeah, another thanks. You married? You don't look married. You get a sort of look when you're married, can see it a mile off. Billy never did settle down, always looking to see who might be around the next corner. Always a different girl, most of them no good. Not me though, always been devoted to my Carol. She keeps me straight she does, always used to call me her lucky charm. Full of sense she is, used to tell Billy after all his troubles that memory is the thing you forget with, I don't think he listened mind. She's not the same now though, poor cow. Not after the stroke. Billy and I we both tried our luck with Carol, he didn't stand a chance though. She saw right through him, used to say, "Billy you're going to get yourself into trouble one of these days." She was right too. I think everything changed between us when I married Carol.

Yeah, just one more, no ice that's right. It's not like I've not got a home to go to, I'm not like Billy, all on his Jack Jones. He hasn't got a soul now see, they're all gone.

Right, better be off, see you around love. What's that you say? What's my name?

It's Billy, love. Night.

