

Bourne
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creative writing
workshops

Harold

by Vera Gajic

“Hello, how are you my name is Grace,” Grace grimaced at the mirror, that did not sound right, “hi I’m Grace, how are you?” Grace bared her teeth at the mirror hoping it looked like a big smile, she wasn’t convinced, she looked like her mother had asked to check her teeth. Suddenly smiling seemed like the hardest thing maybe best not to smile, she thought.

Ok try again, “hello.”

‘maybe stop at hello’ she thought, ‘a yes much better, he’ll know my name anyway’.

But what next she thought? How could her mother do this to her? She didn’t want to meet a boy she didn’t know, not that she knew many boys but still how could she do this to her, she felt like screaming.

Grace looked at herself in the mirror again and didn’t recognise herself. Mother had given her a new dress to wear and had put up her hair in the new fashion. Grace’s usual outfit comprised her brother’s breeches and shirts. Since he’d gone to war she’d only used the clothes in his cupboard. Dad would never have allowed it but as he’d been away so long he wasn’t here to stop her. Mother didn’t even mention it but then mother was always so busy with one thing and another she probably hadn’t even noticed. Which is why it was a surprise when Mother mentioned yesterday at breakfast that she had invited Mrs Scrimshaw and her nephew for tea.

“She particularly wants you to meet her nephew darling, she is sure you will get on like a house on fire.”

Grace couldn’t think why Mrs Scrimshaw would think that, she hardly knew her so how could she tell if they would get on.

Mother continued, “she’s very influential darling, sits on the town council, I’ve no idea what the boy is like but I hear he is very handsome so it can’t be all bad. I am sure you’ll be able to entertain him for a few hours.”

“Grace darling, won’t you come down, our guests are here,” Mum called up the stairs. Grace tried to glide down the stairs as she’d practised, not completely successfully. There they were in the hallway, the young man was indeed handsome. The butterflies in Grace’s stomach started to flutter around her heart and up her throat, she clasped her neck, then quickly put her hand out to shake his.

“Hello, I’m Grace.”

“Yes I know, a lovely name, my name is Harold,” and he took her hand and kissed it. Grace was sure her face was bright red, she could feel the sweat pricking her hairline. She was speechless.

“Come into the parlour,” said mother leading the way through into the room set up with the tea things, “I’ll go and get the tea.”

“No I’ll go,” said Grace finding her tongue.

“No need Grace why don’t you show Harold around the garden,” said Mum looking at Grace with the smallest of corner smiles. Grace realised that Mother was finding this amusing and had no idea the pain she was going through. She briefly felt exasperated at how little her mother knew her but she didn’t have time to consider it now, she had to focus on what to do next, she did not want to be left alone with Harold, she would die.

“That would be lovely, I love gardens, one of my favourite pastimes, is it this way?” said Harold standing by the French windows which obviously led to the garden. Grace felt doomed and short of fainting felt she had no control over the situation. She walked slowly over to the French doors, trying to smile unsuccessfully at Mrs Scrimshaw sitting on the armchair watching the young people. The butterflies were getting caught up with her pounding heart and she felt she may indeed faint, even though she had never fainted in her life. Once outside she felt a bit better, the fresh air and scent of flower calmed her sufficiently to turn and look at Harold. He was smiling at her, “are you alright you look a bit peeky?” an amused lilt to his voice, as if talking to his younger sister, he reminded Grace of her brother.

“Can I take your hand?” said Harold.

“Why ever would you do that?” said Grace.

“It would please my aunt no end, see she’s watching, she has been tasked with finding me a bride, which of course is the last thing I want but you have to show willing don’t you?”

“I suppose so,” said Grace, relieved and disappointed at the same time.

“Don’t you want to get married?” asked Grace.

“Good God no, what a dreadful thought, do you?”

“Well I just assumed I would, I haven’t really thought about it much,” lied Grace

“I suggest you think about it or they’ll marry you off before you’ve had time to cut the roses,” said Harold pointing at the buds just forming on the rosebush, “father has got this notion that I need to settle down, been too wild.”

“And have you? asked Grace beginning to rather like Harold, she couldn’t imagine what being wild meant but she wanted to find out.

“Well it all depends on your definition of wild but maybe a little, don’t want a dull life do you?” said Harold.

“No I don’t suppose you do, maybe we could pretend we want to get married, would that help?” thought Grace, she realised she wanted to keep seeing Harold.

“I think you’ve been reading too many romantic novels Grace, I know the plot of Bridgerton too.”