

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

If Only

by Stuart Carruthers

The Mediterranean morning sun warmed the back of Jeffery's tanned neck.

Bowing his head slightly and tipping the peak of his summer hat, he bid the ladies from the rowing club a good morning.

"Single to New Brighton please."

Scanning the numerous empty seats on the ground floor, he took his seat at the back and removed his mask to sneeze into his elbow.

"Bless you."

"Thanks."

Yesterday's rain had stayed overnight and the empty seafront streets looked miserable yet beautiful in a strange way.

Sensing the woman in the opposite seat was watching, he carefully replaced his mask over his overgrown beard and smiled with his eyes.

"Sailing today Jeffery?"

"Down to the islands, Captain Peters and his wife are joining me, can you prepare the yacht please I'll be back at ten."

Newton Street was deserted.

The building facades of glass and stone deserted of their occupants. The security guard barely raised his head to acknowledge his arrival.

The silence of the open plan office was deafening. Seven weeks into the lockdown and this wasn't what he expected from his early career in banking.

"Jeffrey."

"Captain Peters."

"It's a good day to head out to the islands."

"Indeed, Mrs Peters not joining us?"

"Sorry no, but I have a business deal to discuss that I think you'll find more interesting."

"Shall we board, she wasn't much to look at, but she was something to think about."

"Thank you, she was cheap, but the guys in the boat yard done a fantastic job, shall we sail?"

Lunchtime consisted of standing in a queue outside Tesco's and once inside, scrambling over whatever was left on the shelves.

"We should have taken the offer of furlough."

"Why?"

"Because everyone is at home, doing nothing and getting paid for it."

"Yes but redundancies are coming and they are predicting a bleak future, so I'd rather come into work and anyway Jack is in hospital with Covid, how funny is that?"

Beneath the burning sun, the wine flowed and lazy conversations about upcoming polo events passed the time while lunch was served. Captain Peter's placed his suitcase on the table. Jeffrey smiled, leaned back in his comfortable chair and laughed out loud. His dream had come true.

"You're on mute Joanne."

"Welcome to the Millionaires club Jeffrey, you've worked hard for this."

"Sorry Joanne I can't hear you for your dog barking in the background."

“Captain Peters, would you like to take the wheel for the final leg of our journey?”

“Sorry I have another Teams call after this meeting, I just don’t seem to have time these days for anything.”