

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Esther

by Elda Abramson

Esther breathed a huge sigh of relief as she settled herself in the deck chair by the pool feeling the Umbrian sun warming her bones.

After the long journey, she richly deserved this down time after herding five of her friends here from Long Island. One of them managing to leave her rucksack on the train into New York and the stress of retrieving it before the gates closed for the flight. Jeez!

Happy now to leave them to their tutor and the painting session, she was finally off duty.

Esther was falling to sleep when the piercing rings from the phone in reception broke the silence.

The receptionist came out to the terrace and called, "Signora Weyl? Telefono per te."

Esther jerked to attention, who could possibly be phoning her here?

Sliding into her sandals, she hurried to reception and cautiously took the phone.

"Hello?"

"Esther, come home now."

“Wha...? Peter? What’s the matter?”

“Come home now.”

“You’ve already said that...but why?”

“If you don’t get on the next plane I will kill myself. I’m going to the airport now to pick you up.”

Stunned, lost for words, before she could find any, Peter had hung up. Never, had her husband of 54 years spoken with such urgency or made such a demand and threat. It was completely out of character.

Esther tried phoning back, but there was no answer. She knew it was no use anyway. The ring would just terrify him further. He never before had answered the phone. It was one of the enduring scars from his traumatic past, when he was the only one of his family to escape the German camps, this terror of a ringing phone.

Esther understood this from the beginning and managed by leaving notes for him when she went out but it had been a burden to say the least. And now he was actually phoning her, in another country. Unbelievable.

A very pale Esther approached the group, “I have to go home, Peter needs me. He says he will kill himself if I don’t come home on the next flight. “

Her friends were more than shocked. They knew this devoted husband had always been pleased to be working on his book about the origins of agriculture while Esther went on her cultural adventures.

Myra, stood up, and looking calmly and evenly at Esther said, “you must go and I will go to the airport with you.” She took the little black-and-white neckerchief from around her neck and tied it around Esther’s saying this is for good luck, my friend.

The taxi arrived half an hour later, Esther and Myra set off on a three hour journey to Rome. Myra knew no Italian and Sabatino the driver no English; it would be a long return journey to Assisi for both of them.

Desperate, Esther took the next flight to Kennedy and then a long taxi ride to the small airport near their home.

She knew Peter would be waiting for her there since his phone call all those hours ago, and that he would have been watching passengers walk down the steps plane after plane, then stoically waiting for the next plane when his wife didn’t appear.

She enters the airport and sees him watching another planeload of passengers disembark.

She sees desperation, and then recognition, as she faces him. He throws his arms around her and says, "It will be all okay now."

She lets him drive The short way home, he knows it well, and what does it matter anyway.

Arriving home, she sees the kitchen and it is in disarray, food has been eaten. She gets him to lie down and he falls instantly into a deep sleep.

She walks past his study and flashes of white catch her eye. She steps in and sees dozens upon dozens of sheets of paper crumbled into balls. They are everywhere on the floor, in the bin, on the desk...

And this is the moment she realises that this crisis may be over but from now on the days of their lives will never be the same.