

Bourne toWrite...

creative writing
workshops

First Meeting

by Marion Umney

The excitement and anxiety have been building all day. I've done my lateral flow test and from the messages on the Whatsapp group, everyone else has done them too. Photos of a single red line keep popping up with "All clear", "Me too", "Ready to go" and other equally positive messages. I find myself checking constantly, is that all of us; who hasn't responded; is it too soon; is this really going to happen?

As I drive the ten miles to the house I feel as if I'm in an alien world. I haven't been outside of the town for months and the scenery seems strange, but familiar at the same time. The last time I came this way it was winter. The trees were bare of leaves, skeletal fingers grazing the skyline, while the fields sat under the damp sky, bleak and sad; grey stalks, long dead, mingling with brown muddy earth. Today, those same fields are clothed in a veil of green, or yellow with rape, nearly ripe for harvesting. Trees, heavy with leaves of varying shades create an undulating horizon, warm and hopeful under the bright July sky.

As I pull into the drive it is as if the car knows where to go, while I still feel dislocated in time and space. It is all the same, yet it feels different. The same gate slightly broken at the bottom; the blue door with the owl knocker, with tubs of geraniums either side of the porch. She always did love geraniums. In the near distance I hear voices, so familiar yet so strange – did they sound like this on facetime? I don't remember.

Then there she is. I have to remind myself to breathe -- almost to remind my heart to beat as she comes towards the car. She moves with a grace I don't remember as being hers. She carries her son, and my heart catches as I watch him nuzzle into her as she whispers in his uncomprehending ear. Motherhood suits her. Were she and I like that? Somewhere in my memory is a smell, a touch, a cry to which I know I too responded with that unconditional love and ecstasy, yet it seems so long ago.

As I get out of the car I can see the others through the metal side-gate, around the barbecue. My family. They mingle carefully “Are we hugging?” Some responding with elbow touching, others, and I might have guessed who, throw their arms wide as they gather each other close. Some have spotted me, but they hold back. Their turn will come but for now, they know I need this moment.

I don't have to ask her if we are hugging or not. I'm enfolded by her arms, the baby sandwiched between us, as she buries her face in my hair. She seems taller, or have I shrunk? We laugh, “I guess we're hugging?” “Too right we are”. The child wriggles uncomfortably between us, so she steps back and he is in my arms, staring at me solemnly with those blue grey eyes as my own fill with tears.

“Hello little man – I'm your granny.”