

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

Inga

by Juliet Robinson

London. Her first summer away from home. Her first in a city. Not just any city, London. She never, not even fifty years later, got over the excitement of London. Of that summer. Was there ever a June as glorious as that one?

She had a flat in Belgravia. A job in advertising with the Observer. She was a woman, it was the seventies, and she was making strides. Not sure how she had managed half of this. But she was here.

The rent had been cheap. The flat secured through a friend of her mother's. But her pay had been minimal. Standards had been high. It was expensive to be a woman. Especially one in the business of advertising. Clothes, make-up, hair and socialising. The bars had been a far cry from the country pubs where she had come of age drinking cider. Sometimes she missed those musty places, where the field workers came in smelling of the sun, sweat and grass; hands caked brown from their toil in the fields. Sometimes.

Here everything was fast, exciting and new. People had a way of talking. Confidence. She felt part of something huge here in London, even if she spent most of her days brewing coffee, running errands, answering the phone, collecting lunches and making dinner reservations.

She had been young and beautiful. Flushed with the potential of a life just begun.

At a party she met Amado. He had been invited by one of the executives who had a passion for the occult.

Amado. He was dangerous. The sense of it had lingered around him. He had been finely dressed, smoking a pipe, like her father. A long face, roman nose, heavy eyebrows that framed stark staring eyes. Eyes that she had felt on her.

Her skin had crept and crawled when he came to speak to her. He wasn't keen to hear about her, he just wanted to talk about himself, he was writing a book, he was a magician and he quickly dropped the name of his father into their conversation. Crowley. She knew that name.

As politely as possible she had detached herself from his conversation. But he had haunted her steps for the rest of the night and indeed for the remainder of that warm and vibrant June.

Parties, so many parties that month and he was always there. She kept him at arm's length. Easy enough to do. But one night he followed her home. After that, he had been everywhere. The park where she and her friends sunbathed on the weekends, the grocers, the newspaper stand at Knightsbridge tube station. Always her shadow. Yet he never approached. Just lingered. Watched. Then one day he was gone.

On the night of June 21st, the summer solstice, her doorbell rang. Though she was in a rush to ready herself for a dinner with clients she answered it. Amado. He was crowded up to the door and loomed over her. She stepped back, her mouth dropped open, ready to scream, to alert passers-by. Silence. They stared at each other.

He was sweating, it dripped down his forehead and into his brows. He wasn't dressed for June. Trench coat and boots, but she sensed this wasn't why he perspired. He was nervous.

'I have a gift for you.' He glanced over his shoulder, then reached into the duffle bag he carried.

A gleam of white, a flash of teeth, in his hands rested a skull. He thrust it at her and she took it. Shocked, she held it staring down at empty eye sockets. He turned and hurried away.

Clutching the skull, she shut the door.

June had continued hot and glorious, filled with parties. Amado had gone. A cloud had lifted.

Eventually she took the skull home to her parents and her father buried it in the asparagus bed.