Bourne toWrite... creative writing workshops

First Day

by Francesca Ryan

"I'd watch my step if I were you. Accidents are terribly punctual around here, Amy."

"Is that a threat or a warning?" She looked at Thomaz. She looked round the cramped office they were going to share. Basement of a nondescript block on the Bailey industrial estate. Strong smell of new carpet tiles. It wasn't the cosiest of workplaces, but then neither were the three years she'd spent as a WPC in the Met.

"I'm just saying, it's an occupational hazard." Thomaz scratched his ear.

"I'll deal with it as and when."

"Don't tell me. Tough woman. You ex-coppers seen it all, is it?" A smile gave a friendly undercut to the sarcasm.

"Let's just say I toughed it out without folding. My colleagues started off gentle. Stripped off my uniform. Bent me over a desk, stamped my backside with 'Property of Her Majesty's Government'. Par for the course, if you were female."

"Expecting more of the same here?"

"Not funny. Well, only a bit. My bra ended up on the aerial of PC Cumberland's panda. That was only the start of it. I got a perforated ear after one joke too far. Nothing said to the boss, of course. Hazing's an occupational hazard. You have to grin and bear it, or your life is hell."

"But you made it past that, didn't you? What made you quit in the end?"

He walked over to the small corner where the sink was and put the kettle on.

"I used to have to wait in the panda car while my oppo nipped into a flat in Hackney. Went for a quick bunk-up with one of his regulars, one of his 'Toms', as they called them. Working girls."

"That surprised you, Amy?"

"He was also taking money off the working girls. Tax, he called it."

"Not the only one who did it, though?"

"No, he wasn't. But he knew I didn't like it. He eventually arranged a 'prank', as he called it, to keep me in line. A prank that got me out of the force. And he told me to keep my mouth shut. Or else. Accidents happen."

Thomaz turned round.

"Tea? And yes, I'm making, Amy. I'll let you off as it's your first day."

"Strong, please."

"You got it. What did you do after you left?"

"Ten months in John Lewis as a store detective. I was bored witless. Eventually got slapped by a wee scrote I clocked. He had two jackets and a Dior aftershave in his sports bag."

"What did you do?"

"I dropped him. Didn't know what hit him."

Thomaz laughed.

"Then what?"

"I got sacked for it. So here I am."

Thomaz grinned.

"Welcome aboard!"

Amy opened up her computer and read through the brief.

"So, what's the story here? Another cheating husband?"

"How about a dodgy Russian with a weakness for young men? And I mean young. They want pictures, dates."

"Who's they?"

"Another dodgy Russian."

"Business partner?" She made quotation marks with her fingers.

"You got it. Says he's a tenant he wants shot of. Fancy flat in Kensington. I don't buy it. But don't ask, don't tell."

"So, what's the problem?"

Thomaz raised his eyebrows at her.

"If we get clocked, it could turn nasty."

"Even in Kensington?"

"Especially Kensington. These people don't fuck around, Amy. I've been at it a long time."

After he came back from a quick fag outside, Thomaz finished making them the promised brew.

"Want to know what happened to the last person who sat where you're sitting?"

"Not good news, I'm guessing, by the look on your face."

“It was an ‘accident’. A private security accident.” He put a mug in front of her.

“Sugar?”

“I’m sweet enough already, thanks.”

“You look like you are. That’s handy. Safer to go as a couple, if you know what I mean. And I look like what I am, unfortunately.”

“Which is?”

“Ex-army. SAS, to be specific. I don’t have a pretty face, as you’ve probably noticed.”

“Couldn’t hack it anymore?” Amy was taking a risk. Thomaz cracked a knuckle.

“Let’s say the top brass didn’t have our backs when it mattered. When it was all finished.”

“So, what’s the spec on this one?” Amy closed the laptop.

“Recce the place tonight, to start with. Safer as a couple, know what I mean?”

“Why this outfit? Bit low-rent for these sorts of jobs, aren’t we?”

“That’s exactly why it’s us. They’ve got taps on the more sophisticated set-ups. Safer to go with an under-the-radar set-up. Though the budget’s pretty good, actually.”

“Danger money?”

“You got it. Like I said, accidents happen.”

Amy took a sip from her mug and grimaced. Budget tea.

“We start tonight. Dress warm, Amy.”

She took another sip from her mug. UHT milk. Disgusting.

“Got any biscuits?