

THE ANGLER

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Editorial

It's this year's fourth and final issue of the Angler already. For some people, this time of the year means stress: there's essays to be written, reading to catch up on, and decisions to be made. Of course, there's also the summer for doing this, but procrastination can also be quite stressful.

For others it means relaxation. For these blessed few, the thought of the long summer ahead is the most important thing, and the mere thought of it is enough to get them through the arse-end of the semester.

For me it means wiping away a tear or two, and not just because my hay fever is playing me up something rotten. No, this is my last issue as a member of the Angler team. Still, at least I'm going out with a bang: in this issue, we have Elena show us more of Russian life, Anna gives us a precursor to her life in Hull, Peter shows us why the life of a writer isn't quite as romantic as you may think, and Jodie treats us to some naughty neologisms and a wonderful short story.

Fishy wishes,

Leah

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The Language of the Noughties

One thousand years ago, the Anglo-Saxons were most likely looking back on the first decade of the new millennium and thinking 'Gadzooks, will those blasted Vikings never leave us alone!' Today, however, a melting pot of different ethnic groups looks back on a very different kind of invasion, the onslaught of the Internet.

Much like the Vikings, the advancement of the Internet was all encompassing. Within just a few years of its existence, it was already available as a tool to anyone who could get their hands on a 56k modem and a phone line. Today, it is as essential to our daily lives as oxygen; so essential, in fact, that we now have the Internet on our mobile phones. But what have been the consequences of this invasion for language?

Well, for starters, we now have a name for the first decade of a new century, namely, the noughties; a decade dominated not only by technological innovation, but also by an explosion of newly coined expressions to describe what's going on as we wend our way through various social networks on a daily basis, and gorge ourselves on ready-made information dished out to us in easy to read portions, which are available in multi-media options. In short, language got its bling on!

Here are just a few of the terms that were spawned in the noughties:

googlegänger *also* **googleganger** = noun [countable]

→ a person who has the same name as you and is discovered by doing a search on your name using the Google™ Internet search engine

wilfing = noun [uncountable]

→ the activity of browsing the Internet without any particular purpose

eco-bling *also* **ecobling** = noun [uncountable]

→ ecological gadgets and technology which do not save or produce very much energy relative to their cost

These terms may not yet have made it to official dictionary status, but that does not mean that dictionaries are being left to eat the dust of the techno revolution. The well known and trusted dictionaries are now online and some of them have even added pages where one can find many of the new terms that are coined on a daily basis in newspaper articles and blogs around the world. Added to this are countless sites that dedicate themselves to updating the wealth of English vocabulary, such as Word Spy and Macmillan's Buzzword page.

In conclusion, the noughties have done naught but shows us that noughts and ones are just another way for us to express ourselves. As Dizraeli says in the fantastic YouTube video *21st Century Flux*:

"The professor said, "Pif! What language is this? Degenerate slang isn't Standard English! We at the top must establish limits."

I said "Prof! Language is the people that live it." Get loose, give it some vision and foresight and juice; we can fling the dictionary door wide.

I live in a city where it seems like every single idiom is intermingling stream-like, Like streams, that know no barriers.

No matter what dams and channels are established – they are irrelevant.

What matters is the message that is put across, and the passion that's invested in it.

Nothing's lost it merely mutates, and lets the people speaking it tweak it in new ways."

By

Sources:

Dizraeli – 21st Century Flux – <http://www.youtube.com/user/macmillanELT#p/a/u/1/8Weg44O9c58>

<http://www.wordspy.com/>

<http://www.macmillandictionary.com/buzzword/entries/noughties.html>

Characteristic Features of Russian Schools and Their Curriculums

In the last issue of the Angler I wrote about my experience of studying at the medical university in Russian and about differences in organisation and curriculums between Russian and Dutch universities. The high school education in Russia has curious characteristics that distinguish it from the Dutch as well. Some of those differences are small and insignificant; others can be unexpected and striking.

Russian children start school when they are six or seven years old. To be accepted they have to be already able to count and to read, which they learn at lessons in kindergartens or at special one-year-long courses. There is no division between primary and secondary school, like in Western Europe. Usually, children study eleven years before entering university, but they can stop after seven or eight years and accept a job that does not require higher education.

From the first year children study six days a week (with the exception of Sunday) and five hours a day. Classes either last from 8.00 till 13.00 or from 13.00 till 18.00, changing every year. Senior classes study only in the morning shifts because they have more lessons, approximately from 8.00 till 15.00. Lessons last 45 minutes and they are separated by five or ten minute breaks and one twenty minutes break. The latter is for lunch in the school cafeteria. There are three week-long holidays during the academic year at the beginning of November, at New Year and at the end of March. Summer holidays last three months for small children and a bit less for older ones.

Another distinguishing feature of Russian schools is a lesser element of amusement during studies. Pupils of first years do not play at school. Their lessons are held in the same manner as those for last year's pupils and consist of explanations of a topic by a teacher, doing exercises from textbooks and answering questions by which a teacher controls how well students understood and remembered the material. When the pupil answers questions, he has to stand up and come out to the blackboard. From first days at school children get homework, which they prepare after school and on Sundays. Homework takes the rest of the afternoon and the evening and often demands help of parents. Before Sundays homework is usually more voluminous and takes more time. I remember that I rested on Saturday evenings and prepared lessons on Sundays and I never heard that somebody did this differently. For children, whose parents cannot help them with their homework, special classes are organised after the main classes in the afternoons and early evenings. Those children prepare their homework there under the supervision of teachers.

School subjects are fixed for every year and there is no possibility of choosing some subjects and avoiding others. Dur-

ing the first three years of school children have seven subjects: Russian language, literature, arithmetic, nature study, drawing, music and physical training. All the subjects, except from drawing, music and physical training are taught by the same teacher. From the fourth year every subject is taught by different teachers on a higher level. Arithmetic is divided into algebra and geometry in the sixth year. Nature study turns into botany in the fourth and fifth year, zoology in the sixth and seventh, anatomy in the eighth and biology with courses of genetics, ecology, anthropology and paleontology in the last two years. New subjects are added: from the fourth year pupils at the age of nine to ten begin to study a foreign language, general history and history of the native region. From the fifth year geography appears, chemistry and physics are added on the seventh year and from the ninth year pupils study computer science, astronomy and introduction to philosophy.

History lessons begin with the ancient period of Egypt, China and countries on the territory of modern Europe. Medieval and modern history focuses on Europe, Russia and a bit less on China. This subject is completed by the history of Russia in the last year of school. From history and geography schoolchildren get a certain image of far countries and nations. This image is always positive. Creating respect towards other nations has always been an important part of education in Russia. Success of Western European countries in economics, social development and collaboration was never a secret for pupils. I still remember how our teacher of history told us about life in USA and Western countries, about their social and economic structure. Now living in the Netherlands and closely observing this life by myself, I conclude that all her words were true.

Literature traditionally gets great attention at Russian schools. It has more lessons a week than other subjects, its program includes lots of tests every year, essays and exams and its mark is always on the first place in our school diplomas as the most important school subject, together with the mark of Russian language. Lessons are supplemented by regular visits to drama and poetical evenings in the theatres. Literary exams are compulsory at the end of school and for entering any university.

The literature program deals with Russian literature from first manuscripts and chronicles to contemporary prose and poetry. Foreign literature rightly takes its place alongside Russian works. Thus, children of first four years at school acquaint themselves with fairytales of Hans Christian Andersen.

More serious works are studied in the fifth year, when pupils are ten years old. The program of the fifth year consist



of 102 hours of classwork and many hours of homework, focusing on adventure stories and already including plenty of famous foreign (translated) texts. Every child in Russia reads *In Search of Castaway* by Jules Verne, *The Three Musketeers* by Alexander Dumas, *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Gold Bug* and *Murders in the Rue Morgue* by Edgar Poe, *Love of Life* by Jack London, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, *The Lost World* and *The Crooked Man* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Sound of Thunder* by Ray Bradbury, *Chink and Other Stories* by Ernest Thompson-Seton, *The Bafutbeagles* by Gerald Durrel and stories by Karel Capek.

The teacher talks about the author, children read the book at home and discuss it in the class. Some of these books, for instance *The Three Musketeers*, are read in abridged and adapted versions. In the sixth year literary lessons take 102 hours of classwork too and cover more genres than on the previous classes. All students read for their lessons *The Blue Bird* by Maurice Maeterlinck, *Horla* by Guy de Maupassant, *La Venus d'Ille* by Prosper Merimee, *The History of Little Mook* and *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* by E. T. A. Hoffmann, *The Last Leaf* by O. Henry, *Three Men in a Boat* by Jerome K. Jerome, *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe (abridged and adapted version without any references to religious discussions), *Martin Eden* by Jack London, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain, *The Song of Hiawatha* by Henry Longfellow, and *The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Andersen.

In addition, young readers make acquaintance with extracts from myths of different cultures such as myths about Heracles, *Odysseus* by Homer (usually the fragment *Odysseus and Cyclops*), the Scandinavian *Journey of Thor to Utgard*, and Finnish and Karelian folklore *Kalevala*.

A bit shorter but not less interesting program (68 hours) awaits pupils in the seventh year. They read chapters from *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole* by Susan Townsend, *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank, *The Gift of the Magi* by O. Henry, the first two books of *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift, *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery, poetry of William Shakespeare and Rudyard Kipling.

The story of Anne Frank always gets a sympathetic response from Russian readers. Her book was first translated and published in 1960 with a few abridgements and later in 1994. It was repeatedly staged, last time in the Russian Academic Youth Theatre (producer A. Borodin) in 2006.

Students of the eighth year have 68 hours of literary lessons and together with texts of Russian authors discuss *The Bourgeois Gentleman* by Moliere, *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare, chapters from *Hello Sadness* by Fransuaza Sagan and *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes, *The Last Inch* by James Aldridge, *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernst Hemingway and *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens.

In the ninth year pupils have 102 hours of literature and study mainly Russian texts.

In the last two years literary lessons take 136 hours a year. Students read *Dom Juan* by Moliere, *Romeo and Juliet* and sonnets by William Shakespeare, *The Flower of Evil* by Charles Baudelaire, *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel G. Marquez, *Gobseck* by Honore de Balzac, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and verses by George Byron, "The Glove" by Frederick Schiller, *The Plague* by Albert Camus and some works of Jean-Paul Sartre. Some of the texts are analysed in detail in classes, others are advised to read at home and are discussed briefly. Pupils are often asked to learn verses by heart and recite them before the class. Another popular kind of task is writing essays, where literary genres or different aspects of the texts are discussed.

The programs for all the school subjects are approved by the Ministry of Education and correlate with entrance examinations at universities. But a teacher can introduce some authors or texts in addition to the program for brief discussions. For instance, we read much more from *La Comedie Humaine* by Honore de Balzac than it was demanded by the program.

Only one foreign language is obligatory for Russian schoolchildren (although there are special schools for older children, who want to specialise in languages, offering two languages). Usually they can choose between English, French, German and much more seldom Italian and Spanish. The training pays much attention to translations of texts. An acquaintance with a foreign language is complicated by the fact that all TV channels use synchronous translation and as a result people do not hear English speech and cannot train their pronunciation, even channels such as Animal Planet or National Geographic. Most foreign writers are published in high quality translations and people prefer to read them in Russian. However, the interest to foreign languages, especially to English, grows incontestably. Serious language courses are widespread and accessible to everybody. Departments of foreign literature in original language become bigger and bigger in Russian bookshops and to find William Wordsworth, John Keats or George Byron becomes more and more easy.

The school education in Russia appears to be quite different from the Dutch and the Western European in general, concerning the schedule, the manner of teaching and programs of subjects. So it was in the past, and still is now. The present system of education is exactly the same as in the school years of my parents.

by Elena Morozova

One Ferry Trip Away from Home: Kingston-upon-Hull.

You will have noticed from the heading of this piece of writing that I am going away to Hull, probably by ferry. That's right – I'm going to study in England for a year. I was completely psyched when I heard I would go to Hull, actually running around in my student's room, yodelling enthusiastically, and then calling both parents plus my brother and texting all of my friends.

But why Hull? I can hear you ask. What is there, beside a ferry? Why such excessive happiness?

Some people I told the happy news to had not even heard of the place. It's connotations of Kingston Upon Hull are 'fishing', Hull FC (rugby), Hull City (soccer) and some kind of river, the Humber, north of which starts Northumbria.

For me, however, Hull now has a kind of magic ring to it. Next year I'll be one of the 1100 students who have partaken in the Harting Program since 1945. It is, according to the information I received, by far the oldest internationalisation program in Europe. The program was started shortly after the Second World War by Professor P.N.U. Harting of the University of Amsterdam. He arranged, through his contacts in England, to place a number of Dutch studies in England yearly and have their fees waived. Nowadays the Dutch students have to teach Dutch to compensate for these costs.

Yes, we have to teach Dutch! I'll be sure to pack some of my old grammar books – I'd be absolutely mortified if my mind suddenly draws a blank when they ask me why some silly word does not behave according to our rules.

As a native speaker I am probably not aware of half of these rules – thank god for KOFSCHIP! I will pack all colours of spelling 'Boekjes' (Red, green, white) just to be sure. And something for my throat – I foresee endless practising of the /x/ and /y/ sounds. Gggggghhhhh!

However, now is not the time for such musings: A heap of still-to-be-written essays, countless pages of reading, vowel labels to cram, and exams to sit through are still ahead of me, and every other English student. Meanwhile I have not yet heard a single thing from Hull University – who needs housing, who needs a dorm? I'll just find some kind of fishing shed instead, completely in sync with the fishiness of the old fishing town, whose name I still find difficult to pronounce. Maybe I have to make a more pretentious face while I say it?

Four other people from the second year were also elected for the Harting program: Jan, Laura, Minke and Charlotte – Congrats!

Next year I'll be writing from Hull. I will be living in Yorkshire - the land of the Brontë sisters and Andrew Marvell:

Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Shouldst rubies find: I by the tide
Of Humber would complain.

(To His Coy Mistress)

Hopefully I will have no reason to write laments – I'll try to stick to columns.

By Anna Visser.

DIRECT DUTCH is een instituut dat gespecialiseerd is in het geven van cursussen Nederlands (volgens de directe conversatiemethode) aan buitenlanders die voor korte of langere tijd in Nederland wonen en werken.

Wij hebben regelmatig plaats voor enthousiaste part-time

LERARE(SSE)N Nederlands als vreemde taal

De kandidaten dienen te voldoen aan de volgende eisen:

- Nederlands als moedertaal en een goede "fluency" in het Engels
- interesse in taal en cultuur
- woonachtig in regio Den Haag
- bereidheid deel te nemen aan een trainingscursus om te leren werken met het Direct Dutch cursusmateriaal
- bereidheid in het begin wat tijd te investeren in de voorbereiding van de lessen
- 4 dagdelen per week inzetbaar waarvan minimaal 2 avonden (ma & wo of di & do)
- minimaal 1 jaar beschikbaar

Interesse? Bel ons voor een sollicitatieformulier of stuur een e-mail met enkele tijdstippen waarop je beschikbaar bent voor een oriënterend gesprek (30-60 minuten) met onze coördinator (Petra Hisgen) naar petra@directdutch.com

How to Write Creatively

Last night the worst happened, again.

I arrive early at a meeting of my writer's critique group, eager to hear what the other members have made of my latest story. The story, about a woman who gives birth to a lamb, has received some really positive comments from my co-students on Robert Lankamp's Creative Writing Master course and I'm expectant of an equally good reaction here. "They are going to enjoy this one," I had said to myself as I emailed it to them the previous week.

But the group are ambivalent. For every person who enjoys the humour, there are two who are left cold and confused by the notion of a woman giving birth to a lamb. One man demands to know what genre the story is. Apparently he was under the impression it was a serious story in the beginning, and felt cheated when it was finally revealed the wife had been impregnated by a ram rather than an angel of God.

"What is it?" he says. "Sci-fi? Fantasy?" I don't have an answer for him.

Another lady, more sympathetic, describes the story as a trivial waste of my writing talent. Three beers later in the bar across the street from our meeting place, the first man tells me I actually have no talent. "So put that in your pipe and smoke it, Pierre!" he might as well have added.

There's no doubt about it: I feel discouraged. On nights like these I question the value of showing my stories to other people. Surely it's better to send them off into the unknown where an anonymous editor will reject them, rather than having them criticised by people who know me and see me revealing my (obviously disappointing) self in fiction? The endless internal debate goes on another round:

- It comes down to talent. You either have it or you don't.
- Wait a second - that lady said you had talent.
- But that guy said you didn't. And men have more authority than women on account of their having deeper voices.
- There must be more to it than that.
- Nope. Men are the cleverest.
- Shit.

Even as I'm having this conversation with myself, I know it's not true. Not that men are cleverer than women (you can't argue with a deep voice), but about talent being the defining factor in writing well and finding reader's who *really* like your stuff. 'I've read the first page of *The Da Vinci code*,' I think to myself. 'Writing talent obviously has nothing to do with

finding willing readers. If it did, Dan Brown would be working in McDonald's.'

Improving at something like writing, which usually has to be done for its own sake for a long period before it reaps any kind of financial or moral reward, takes a lot of sweat, persistence and perspective. The guidance of an experienced writer like Robert Lankamp is valuable for finding out what you're doing wrong quickly, but even more precious is having a group of people who are willing to read your stories regularly and to spend time critiquing them.

The more opinions you get on a piece of writing, the more evident it becomes how idiosyncratic people's tastes in fiction can be. You begin to have an idea of who your story will appeal to as you write, and learn to disregard the opinions of the people who would not like a particular story no matter how thoroughly you revised it, for the simple fact that it just isn't their thing. The negative reaction of the man in my writer's critique group yesterday evening was a line in the sand. I now know that while he appreciates quirky diversions about the storylines of obscure television movies starring Kenny Rogers, he's uncomfortable with fiction that embraces the absurd. And I can accept that, though it still burns a little to hear him criticise something I've worked hard on.

The important thing is to keep writing through the disappointments, to keep tapping the keys and filling the pages, and the deadlines of a creative writing course are an invaluable cure for writer's block. If you know people are waiting to read a story by you, you have to take the risk and get something, anything, down on paper. If they don't like it, listen to their reasons why and try to get better. As Samuel Beckett said: "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. *Fail again. Fail better.*"

Let the worse happen. Then let it happen again.



PARROT PASSION

“So where did you two meet?”

She grins at him. God, how many times have they been asked this question in the past week, she thinks. He smiles at her as if he can hear her thoughts. He’s thinking the same thing as her, of course, and she smiles back, acknowledging this.

Her mind flashes back to two weeks ago. The grey, concrete landscape of the train station platform forms in her mind as she remembers that morning. It still amazes her that it was such a short time ago. It feels like a lifetime has passed since then.

“Actually, it’s quite a good story,” she replies breezily, fixing the mask. She takes his hand in hers and squeezes it tightly, finding the confidence to be the first to speak.

“It all started a couple of weeks ago. There I was, just waiting for the train, just like any other morning of the week, and all of a sudden this burst of colour flashed past my eyes!”

She neglects to add the detail about how she was so lonely and desperate that she was actually contemplating stepping off the platform in front of a moving train at the time.

“I was so surprised that I almost walked off the platform,” she says, laughing brightly, “So, when I’d recovered my balance, I turned around and saw this gorgeous green and blue parrot sitting on top of the shelter, bold as brass he was, just sitting there and looking me up and down as if he was a fashion critic and didn’t approve of the lack of colour in my outfit. Don’t you just love how animals can make you feel so silly sometimes?” she asks, giggling.

The man across from her just smirks knowingly.

“Then just as suddenly, he flew off,” she continues, “and that was that, I got on the train and went to work.”

That little encounter had saved her life in a way, she thinks as she picks up her water and takes a small sip. She sets it down again and continues, “The next day, the same thing happens, I’m standing at the platform and a few minutes before my train is due to arrive, this parrot, the same one, flies straight past me at eye level and lands on the shelter behind me,” she pauses, takes another sip

and simultaneously pushes a loose ash blond curl behind her ear before continuing.

“Now, I’ve never been one to believe in coincidences. I become curious even if there is just a hint of a pattern, so the fact that this same parrot landed on the same shelter two days in a row is plainly a sign of something, or so I think. And besides that, I’m a sucker for animals, all of them, no matter how big or small, so I decided to follow it,” she says proudly.

The interviewer gives a puzzled smile.

“OK, not quite sure what this has to do with you two meeting up, but go on then, where did the parrot lead you?” he asks, his tone making it plain that he thinks his leg is being pulled in the most obvious way and he’s just waiting for the punch-line to a bad pub joke.

She smiles, shyly, and dips her head a little as a blush spreads up her cheeks. Her hand moves to her neck to pull nervously on a string of pearls she’s had since she was a girl. Then she feels him squeeze her hand again, the reassurance and push she needs to continue with her story.

“Just bear with me,” she says earnestly, her hand moving back to her lap “It gets better,” another pause and another sip.

“So, I follow the bird, which conveniently doesn’t fly too fast or too far for me to lose it, which I, of course, see as another clear sign that I am meant to follow it wherever it may lead,” she explains, “and it leads me to this quiet little street, just a block from the station, where I see the parrot fly up to a balcony, and there’s Matthew, standing there, his hand held out, waiting for the parrot to fly up and land on his arm, you know, like those men who train hawks and falcons do. He even has one of those fancy gloves they use. In any event, the parrot flew right up to him as if it were the most normal thing in the world and started eating out of his hand. It was amazing!” she says, her voice a little breathless, and turns her gaze to the man sitting next to her, her feelings for him abundantly clear.

“It was love at first sight,” she says simply.

“So what did you do? Did you talk to him?” asks the man sitting across from her.

“Oh certainly not!” she exclaims, turning her attention back to the questioner,



“No, I was too dumbstruck by my feelings to even contemplate talking to him,” she answers, “In fact, I was quite sure that he hadn’t seen me so I just left and went to work, that first morning. I wasn’t considering a relationship at all, let alone with a man I didn’t know. I mean, yes, I saw him feed the parrot and immediately assumed he must be a good sort if he spends his time looking after a pet, but for all I knew he could have been some violent psychopath with a thing for birds!” she says, laughing.

“No, it wasn’t me who made the first move,” she went on to say, “It was Matthew, dear soul, who did that.”

Her face takes on a dreamy look and it softens the lines making her look almost like a young girl again. She’s not a tall woman and her short legs hang off of the edge of the chair, swinging back and forth.

Coming back to earth from wherever her mind had gone, she continues the story,

“I followed the parrot to his house every day after that, always stopping before I thought he would see me, but as it turns out he saw me every time. He’d seen me on the first day, even. He told me that he eventually got bored with waiting for me to say something so one day, when I followed the parrot, I get to my normal hiding place and there he is, standing next to the big oak that I thought had been concealing me every day. At first I didn’t know what to say. I was so nervous. I thought he was going to be angry with me for stalking him like some crazy person from one of those television shows,” she explains, her hand moving up to her mouth to hide a grin, “but he wasn’t,” she finishes, sighing, as she absentmindedly smooths down the hem of her white gown with her hands.

“He was the perfect gentleman,” she says matter-of-factly, “He asked me my name and invited me in for a cup of tea and I just said ‘yes’, just like that, no hesitation at all. That’s quite unusual for me,” she says by way of explanation, her hands making a single wild gesture in the air as she talks, almost knocking over her water.

“I’ve always been very shy, perhaps that’s why I never really had a successful relationship before,” she trails off for a moment, lost in her own thoughts.

“But that all changed when I met Matthew,” she says, beaming.

She is radiant when she smiles, thinks the man sitting across from her.

“Such a special man,” she says. To her questioner, it seems that her mind wanders off again.

For a couple of moments she sits absolutely still.

Her features, already difficult to read, go completely blank.

Then just as abruptly, her face swivels back.

“Do you know why he has the parrot? Jack is his name, by the way, the parrot’s name, that is. Do you know?” she asks.

“No, I don’t,” the interviewer replies.

“Because he’s allergic to everything else,” she explains, giggling, “Can you imagine that? Allergic to everything except birds! Just a whiff of cat or the smallest bee-sting and he swells up like a blowfish! And don’t even get me started on what he can and can’t eat”

“That must make life a little difficult, doesn’t it?”

“Oh, not really,” she replies, “Well, not anymore at least,” she says.

“What do you mean by that Sarah?” the man sitting across from her asks intently, “Is there something you want to tell me?”

“What do you mean? I’ve just been telling you something, haven’t I? Honestly, you young men of today never listen do you?” she says accusingly.

“Oh, I’ve been listening, Sarah, but I have to tell you, I don’t believe you,” he says.

He watches her face and sees the familiar look of recognition that suspects always get when they realise that the game is up. Her eyes seem to see him now for the first time. She takes in dark blue suit, the well-thumbed notebook and the standard issue blue pen in his hands.

“What do you mean you don’t believe me?” she says, an icy tone in her voice.

“Where is Matthew now, Sarah?” he asks.

“Why, he’s sitting here,” she says, patting the empty cushion next to her.

“No, Sarah, he’s dead,” he retorts, “And I think you know how that happened, don’t you?”

“Don’t be ridiculous! Matthew is right here. We’ve just come in here for a nice drink before our afternoon walk. Who are you to say such things! How dare you say this! Who do you think you are?” she screams.

“Was Matthew allergic to peanuts?” he asks.

That stops her hysterics for a moment. Her eyes look down at the floor, moving back and forth rapidly as she tries to remember.

“Well, yes, I told you that already, he’s allergic to so many things, poor dear.”

“So tell me, Sarah, why did our forensics team find traces of peanut oil in the wounds on Matthews arms?”

“What!”

“And why did they find traces of the same oil on your handbag?”

“What gives you the right to look through a lady’s handbag!”

He ignores her question and drives on, “And why did we find traces of the same oil on the claws of the parrot? Not only that, but we also found Matthews skin cells under the parrot’s claws as well. How do you explain that Sarah?”

“Well, there you go, it must have been accident, mustn’t it?” she says, “Jack must have got hold of some peanuts from someone else’s balcony and then flown home to get some food from Matthew and Matthew obviously forgot to put his glove on. If Jack scratched him with the peanuts on his claws then...” suddenly realising what she is saying, she stops and stares at the space beside her.

“Then the peanuts would get into his bloodstream, he go into anaphylactic shock, and he’d die,” the detective finishes her sentence.

“I told him he should be careful with that bird, I told him it was a terrible idea to let it fly wild like that. I told him! But he didn’t listen. He must have lost his glove. It was just an accident, it was!”

“Well, that’s the thing, Sarah. We searched his apartment and didn’t find his glove anywhere there. But we did find it somewhere else.”

Her entire body seems to fold in on itself and she is transformed from a lady of middle age to a small, fright-

ened girl.

“You know where we found it, don’t you Sarah?” the detective asks softly.

She nods, “I just wanted him to love me. All he had to do was love me and everything would have been perfect,” she says in a small voice as she rocks back and forth in the chair.

He leaves her there, mumbling to herself. He has what he needs. Picking up the tape recorder from the steel table that separates them he signals to the doctor waiting outside. The door unlocks and he walks out into the corridor.

“So, did she confess?” the doctor asks.

“More or less, Doc, more or less. She knows what she’s done,” he says, his voice tired, “I’ll send the tape off to the prosecutor. That together with the testimony from forensics should be enough to put her away.”

“Sad though, isn’t it?” the doctor says as he looks through the one way window in the door at the crumpled figure still rocking in her chair, “What love can make a person do!”

“You’re not wrong, Doc, you’re not wrong.”

By Jodie Mann



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The Agenda

Announcements

Albion's Weekly Drinks

Every Thursday it is time to relax with a pint and chat with the other Albion members.

Date: every Thursday

Time: 4 pm onwards

Place: King's Sports Bar (Noordeinde 28)