

CREATIVE WRITING

Hefted Written by members of the Creative Writing Group Part3

Rob was entranced by the mid-summer beauty of his new surroundings. He looked out each morning over the valley, past the trees and the tarn to the Coniston fells. When the sky cleared and the birds sang he marvelled at the contrast to his life in Leeds. His view from the bus on the way to work, a bleak urban sprawl, hardly a tree or patch of grass to be seen. It was true that he had to work hard, but the hostel was not always busy and at least he could wander off during his afternoon breaks.

Then there was Ceri – how lucky could he be? She insisted they keep the relationship discreet. It was early days, she said. The YHA had a policy that staff should declare if in a relationship with a colleague and Ceri was not in favour of doing that. It would look unprofessional if Steve, her line manager knew. It might even look as if she had enticed Rob into bed to get him to take the job. *Shocking, if anyone could think that*, she joked. So they kept their hands off each other during work time and when there were visitors around.

But soon Rob began to feel trapped. He could not take Ceri out in the evenings. One of them had to be on duty. It was too far to walk everywhere so he could not go far. He intended to call his sister in Leeds about going back to collect a few things, most importantly his bicycle. Ceri was always busy and it was clear that the youth hostel was just her day job. She put most of her energy into her singing and her pottery and as soon as Rob knew what needed doing he was left without assistance.

“I’ve to keep on top of all the admin, my love. The maintenance, ordering stuff. It all takes longer than you might think” she said. But Rob was already starting to feel that he was a lot more serious about their relationship than she was. She often seemed distracted and did not listen when he enthused about his afternoon walks, or about what he was planning to do. He decided that he must have a life off-site. He tracked down his old friend, Mike. He hadn’t had much time to chat to him when they met at the festival, but when he found him on Facebook he saw that they still had interests in common. He wanted to ask him about opportunities to go sailing. They had learned to sail with The Scouts when they were boys. It turned out that Mike was now working at an outdoor education centre at the south end of Coniston Water and sailing was one of many activities he was now teaching. They agreed to meet up for an early evening pint. The village pub was on Mike’s route home from work.

The two men had a lot of catching up to do. They had hardly spent any time together since their college days and Mike now had a wife, Ayesha and two small children, Rose and Ravi. He asked about sailing opportunities and was told that the sailing club and the boating centre (where dinghies could be hired) were up at the north end of the lake.

The bus was infrequent, too far to walk, but then Mike had an idea.

“Hang on Rob, have you got any RYA tickets?”

“Yeah got a level 3 dinghy sailing, did it years ago, but why do you ask?”

“We recently started an after-school sailing session on Mondays and we’re desperate for some volunteer help. You’ll already have CRB clearance ‘cos of your teaching. Here.....” Mike reached for his phone to send Rob the link to a Volunteer Application Form. *“Our sailing principal, Debbie, will be keen to hear from you and she can run you through the induction process.”*

Rob’s weekend at the Hostel was a busy one, so time seemed to fly past and on Monday afternoon he found himself walking to the outdoor centre, three miles away. Plenty of time to get there and

meet Debbie before they started. He knew it would be more of a rush to get back for his evening shift, but Mike had assured him that someone would give him a lift. Rob was asked to take charge of a large dinghy with three less experienced children.

His instructions were to give a short demo then let the children take turns on the helm. *"Just let them get the feel for it"* Debbie, had told him. Another 4 children were sailing single handers and receiving instruction from the safety boat. Rob was loving every minute of being out on the water and the children were very keen to learn. It was a fine summer's evening with a good breeze. He remembered now why he had wanted to go into teaching. They were all having such a good time. But then one of the boys, Leon, after looking very distracted, said *"I think I'm going to....."* Then he lost consciousness and slumped onto the floor of the boat. He was then having an epileptic seizure. Rob reassured the other children, put the boat into the hove-to position and called for the safety boat.

When Rob finally made it back to the hostel he could tell that Ceri was angry before she said anything. Perhaps she had not received his text. When she did turn towards him all her intentions to keep the relationship discreet evaporated. This was going to be a full on domestic and it started with that very well-worn question, dreaded by many who experience some friction on the home front.

"WHERE THE BLOODY HELL HAVE YOU BEEN?"

"I've been sailing with a group of..."

"Ha! Bloody typical. Here I am holding the fort, peeling these friggin' potatoes and wondering where you've got to and who you're with and you come in, calm as you like and say you've been sailing. That really says it all, selfish through and through I call it."

"We had an emergency to deal with, I texted you."

"I've got an effing emergency right now. I'm missing the start of the open mic session and I'm now wondering if I will be able to sing at all, with all this stress you've given me."

It was no good trying to explain what had happened. Ceri was not going to listen. He headed for the kitchen to get on with his tasks while she marched out, slamming the door. Visitors at the large table were embarrassed by the outburst and wondered what was behind it all. Rob wondered too. Ceri had told him that the open mic session at the pub was always very informal and that people just came and went when they felt like it.

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