



'The ordeal' - A short story by Len Willcocks

THE man was standing crushed against a mass of bodies, his arms pinned helplessly to his side.

He could not move arms, legs or indeed any part of his anatomy. He was being crushed by the pressure, terrible pressure against his ribs. Surely they would break under the heavy weight on them.

His head ached. He felt weak and dizzy, but he could not fall, held up as he was by the bodies around him.

Now the pressure increased as part of the human mass tried to escape. Around him people muttered and swore softly to themselves. Some joked grimly. Some even smiled and laughed.

He winced as someone stamped on his feet. The heat was unbearable. He felt he could take no more of this.

He looked out from the prison he was in; outside was blackness, terrible darkness.

There was a roaring in his ears. Once again that terrible pressure. Surely, he would be crushed.

Where was he? In some terrible medieval torture chamber... had he died and was entering some dark satanic underworld, perhaps on the way to hell himself, he who had lived a good life without committing any great harm or wrong?

Surely he did not deserve this?

A little later this same man was observed leaving East Finchley underground station, his daily ordeal over.

Editor's Note:

This short story was inspired by 24 years' commuting on the infamous Northern Line between East Finchley and the Bank!

Our short story writer, Len Willcocks of Park Hall Road, used to travel to the City every day. Len is now retired and tells us that he does not miss travelling one bit. I guess this story sums up the East Finchley commuter's lot all too descriptively!

Please submit your short stories to the Editor.



Photo by Julietta Wagman

Miakol - the female bodyguard by Cathy Young

'EVERYONE needs to defend themselves sometime in their lives. You never know what may happen and people do things for weird reasons. You must be alert.' Timely advice from 18-year old Michelle, a black belt in Bujutsu karate.

Under the name of Miakol, she operates a bodyguard service for women and children from a flat above the 'Bargain Centre' shop in East Finchley High Road.

She arrived to join her father here a year ago from Limerick, Ireland, and was asked by a friend to help her avoid trouble with a violent boyfriend.

From this grew the idea that she could provide a service for people who were, or felt themselves to be, vulnerable in an increasingly violent society.

'I don't take work from single men.

They seem to have strange ideas about a woman who is prepared to defend herself. Ideas to do with whips and black leather,

I'm definitely not interested in all that.

My concern is for women who are afraid to go out alone at night, up to the West End say, or children who need to be accompanied somewhere or an elderly couple frightened to open the door at night.

I have helped with violent partners or just when a woman or young girl has to stay in the house alone at night.

I don't use brute force. Often you can talk your way out of difficult situations, although sometimes you're given no choice in the end.'

Michelle is a strong, self-confident woman with no illusions about her abilities.

'I'm just like everyone else. Everybody can defend themselves, given the right tactics; and of course you must practise.'

She learned her particular brand of karate, Bujutsu, in Ireland where she participated in various tournaments. It is a form of karate less well known in England.

'I used to go to the Hippodrome a lot and when I first went and people found out I was a black belt, I got a lot of attention and lots of 'calls outside' but I didn't like that scene. I don't feel the need to prove myself.'

Michelle sees self-defence as a form of self-discipline, a taking of control over a situation. She has this advice for women alone.

'Always be on your guard, avoid dark places and short cuts. Above all, when you're walking on your own, especially at night, carry something.'

I'm not suggesting a knife or anything like that. You could find yourself arrested. But pepper thrown in the face of a would-be attacker can throw him off his guard long enough for you to regain control of the situation.

If you're alone in the house, never open the door without checking who is there first. At night, get friends to give you a ring before they come round.'

As Miakol (pronounced Michael) she charges a sliding scale according to needs and ability to pay. For some elderly couples she does not charge at all.

NATURE NOTES

Vanishing residents

By Graham Hobbs

The summer is nearly over, and as the nights grow longer and the days cooler, many of East Finchley's more familiar residents will disappear.

The question is, where do all those insects go?

Insects have complicated life cycles, and different species spend the winter in different ways. Some as we shall see, even leave altogether! A few familiar examples illustrate various strategies.

As autumn approaches, the aphids that produced live female young all summer now give birth to winged males and females which mate and lay eggs on a particular type of tree. There the eggs survive the winter. Winged individuals emerge in the spring to re-infest our gardens.

BUTTERFLY STRATEGIES

The caterpillar of the Cabbage White butterfly can go on feeding as late as December in a mild year. More usually they pass the winter as pupae, like their cousins, the Small Whites.

Small Tortoiseshell butterflies hibernate as adults, in secluded crevices, as do Peacocks. Peacocks are heavy sleepers, not emerging until March or April, but Small Tortoiseshells are often seen on sunny days as early as January. Both species are on the wing now.

Earwigs also survive as adults, emerging to lay eggs in the spring. Although regarded as a pest, they are they are unusual in showing maternal care for their

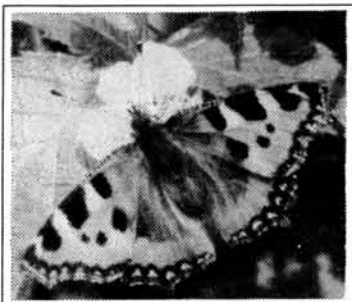


Photo by Graham Hobbs

eggs and young. Ladybirds, as suggested in the nursery rhyme, are not attentive parents, but they are very gregarious when it comes to hibernation, with dozens and even hundreds being found together.

The more committedly social insects - bees, wasps and ants - also spend the winter as adults. In the case of bumble-bees and wasps, a single individual - a fertilized queen - survives the

winter in a hole in the ground.

Wasps are very evident in September. The hard work of rearing a colony behind them, they freely indulge their 'sweet tooth' making a terrible nuisance of themselves, as any picnicker knows.

Perhaps we should allow them this, as they devour vast numbers of pests during the summer, and will soon die off as the weather cools.

Honey bees, like ants, form longer-lived colonies where tens of thousands of workers survive with the queen. She may live as long as fifteen years. They don't hibernate as such, but stay quietly at home, living off the summer's surplus honey.

EMIGRATING INSECTS

The most enviable strategy is to leave for somewhere warmer.

The Red Admiral butterfly is amongst those taking a winter break. Although individuals occasionally hibernate, the population is made up mostly of immigrants from the Continent who breed here, their offspring returning in the autumn.

By providing undisturbed winter refuges in our gardens and elsewhere, we can, with a little thought, all play our part in making sure that East Finchley's vanishing residents don't go for good.

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