

**MURIEL  
RURIAL  
2002**

## November 2002

Trevor had been very unreliable of late. So much so, despite being together for nearly twenty years, I thought perhaps it was time we went our separate ways. Maybe I would give him one last chance, after all a car was essential on this particular day..... Almost as if he knew, Trevor started first time and we were off along the A25 towards Daphne's, in the depths of Kemsing.

It was our coffee morning. Our own breakaway, no holds barred, splinter group coffee morning. The sort that usually ended in chaos and breakages and "certainly not befitting ladies of our years" one critic observed.

Anyway when I arrived at Daphne's I knew, from the cars already parked, we were in for a lively debate, especially as my extreme opposite, Madge, was there.

Her car sporting another new sticker. 'Save the Planet', but that was dear old Madge, always trying to save somebody or something.

I felt the mischief tingling through me and I'm sure Daphne fearfully sensed it as she greeted me then led me through to join the others.

The coffee and cakes were fine, and for a while conversation was pleasant and not at all critical but then to change the mood I loudly asked "So, should we invade Iraq or not?" The consensus was 'No', for the same reasons endlessly trotted out by the media and I agreed with their 'No', but not for the same reasons. I raised the point that Saddam could not possibly be a tyrant, a despot, a monster. Why? Because he wears a beret... No such man, through out the annals of history, wore a beret... I continued, "Could you imagine Ghenkis Khan, Attila the Hun or Ivan the Terrible addressing their men and exhorting them to commit heinous crimes, wearing a beret?"

The room fell silent and then, at last, Madge rose to her feet. Save the Planet, Save the Whale, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Decaffeinated, Organic Madge, cried triumphantly, "IDI AMIN!".... Briefly I allowed her a false moment of glory but then, from my carpet bag, I produced a book, the title boldly displayed, 'IDI AMIN, THE EARLY YEARS'.

Ah yes he was wearing a beret but, as his powers grew and the treachery and violence gathered momentum, he dispensed with that particular headgear. And there I showed her clearly in print, p164 the violent dictator declaring, "If ah am to succeed de beret hab got to go".

In temper Madge knocked her coffee over, soaking my macaroon, apologising, suggesting it was an accident. I retaliated by treading on her

toes exposed through open sandals, and before long, true to form, the coffee morning had to be abandoned, leaving Daphne with debris...

All in all a most enjoyable time, I was thinking as I negotiated the country lanes, Trevor's bonnet and the engine literally died.

I coasted to a stop and wondered what to do... Country road, miles from nowhere... I looked in my carpet bag, the contents useless in such an emergency, and threw 'The Early Years' on the back seat, thinking perhaps this punishment for my treatment of Madge. But then a large silver saloon, with tinted almost opaque windows, slowly drove past me then stopped a little way ahead. The driver's door opened and a tall figure emerged, wearing mirrored sunglasses. He began walking slowly towards me. I felt uneasy so I pressed both window locks down, but the closer he came the more menacing he appeared. Extreme panic as he reached into his coat pocket, but then the fear left me and I no longer felt afraid as, from his pocket he withdrew, a beret, and placed it gently on his head.

## December 2002

Let's face it, autumn and winter with their falling leaves, virgin snow and crystal skies, are all very well for artists and poets, but for lesser mortals, freezing, such as I, 'tis the season to be miserable. "It's all in your mind Muriel," they said, "think positive and ignore the cold".... "Right, I will, I'll be an artist," I replied. And so in the morning I set off for the art shop to get 'kitted out'.

Pallet knife, brushes, easel, stool, canvas, everything, the Full Monty, £268... Are you mad Muriel, I asked myself driving home in Trevor the temperamental Fiesta. No I'm not mad, I'm an artist, and, by the way, did you know that artists don't feel the cold?

Next day after breakfast, I drove to the field at the edge of Wrotham, visualising my first masterpiece. The combined beauties of the M20, A20, A227 and the distant M26.

First challenge though, erecting the easel. It came in a box, the picture on the box showing a man with a moustache and goatee beard, wearing a beret and a smock, standing confidently, smugly admiring his work set at the easel. Unfortunately there wasn't a phone where I could contact him for assistance, so it took me thirty five minutes to assemble the ridiculous lopsided contraption. In temper I drew glasses on his face in the picture and an arrow sticking out of his head. I sometimes do that in the newspapers to politicians I don't like.

Anyway the next stage, an outline on the canvas, ready for the chosen paint application technique. I decided I would not attempt the photographic detail of Constable or the subtle suggestion that was Monet. No, mine would be the flamboyant extravagance of abstract. And so I set about squeezing yards of oils on the canvas, stopping occasionally to move it around with the pallet knife. Red ochre, Cobalt blue, Stygian black, it all went on with wild abandon but all the while I was conscious of the temperature dropping and attacking my feet and hands.... At last I had to submit to the cold and look in Trevor for some gloves. The only gloves I found weren't really conducive to painting but those thick motorcycle gauntlets offered luxurious respite from the cold.... I resumed work but wearing the gauntlets meant using both hands to hold the knife or brush. This added difficulty made me unaware of those threatening clouds, the colour of burning tyres, and not aware either of the dog cocking his leg up my easel... The dog's

owner approached me and, standing at my shoulder inclining his head towards the canvas, asked incredulously, "What is it?" .... "It's a masterpiece," I replied. "An abstract masterpiece".... "It's rubbish," he said and laughing aloud began walking away, but as he did so, for his rudeness I flicked the pallet knife laden with Penumbra mauve up the back of his coat. But then as the man and his dog left the field, the heavens opened, drenching me with hail stones, torrential rain and sleet for good measure.

Hastily I gathered my bits, including canvas, but unable to collapse the cases I left it there, a symbol to my folly, and drove home.

After a hot bath and a cup of tea I hung my painting "Storm Clouds and Gauntlets", in the conservatory, and listened to Tibby purring feline approval as she stares at it from her wicker throne.

Perhaps tomorrow I'll try poetry, Tibby.

Yes that's it, indoor poetry.