

Musings about the poet, writing, life... (3)

It was in London I became a wife and a mother. It happened all very quickly. Oh, yes, I forgot to mention Holland. Hm. So, back to a kind of beginning of that defining middle part of my life.

For a few years I lived in Holland and became fluent in the language. In the case of Dutch, it meant putting German into a box for a while because the tween don't mix. At least that's how it worked (or didn't) for me. Dutch and German are so closely related, that you better tuck away one in order to enter the other, or you'll forever speak pidgin.

Anyway, it was in Holland (or The Netherlands, rather), in the summer, that I met this young guy who had come from London to spend the weekend in the house of a friend. I found him a little overbearing but had to admit that he was rather funny. Had this Greek name. When I asked him what he did, he told me, 'I sleep 15 hours a day.' I thought that was funny. I later learned that's exactly what he did. At the time.

Instead of the weekend he stayed for three weeks. Then called me every day. One of those days he suggested we'd get married. When I asked him why, his romantic line was, 'Because my dad won't pay the phone bills anymore.' I was in London in October, my container arrived at the beginning of November, in the same month when we found our first flat, we married in December and in January—as in the best families—I was pregnant with my son.

I had my daughter about two-and-a-bit years later. The family was complete, and London was becoming so much more than just another place. It became the language my children would speak, an alien world I had to conquer (so much has changed in England since then, or so I thought). Like in any small village, it took me five years to remotely 'belong'. It all changed for the better when my English improved, when I understood the jokes and found them funny, when my kids went to school, when we had 'friends of the family' (instead of me just inheriting his old friends who were nice to me but found me odd and rather un-English. Well, yes.)

So much about circumstance. The writing became a major problem. With my languages I now sat between three chairs: German, Dutch, and English. My mother tongue took a further beating and walked on crutches. My Dutch became obsolete. My French had already taken many knocks, and my English was still in a state of emerging. I used to be an avid letter writer, but letters to my friends became a chore rather than a pleasure as I, like a planet moving with the Big Bang, was slowly but surely further and further removed from what were once my secure home grounds.

A letter took three to five days to what was then simply 'The Continent'. Before someone wrote back, at least a week would pass. Then that letter would take another three to five days to get to me. There were no cell phones. Calling 'overseas' was expensive. So friendships—unless they had been intense, honest, and strong—slowly thinned until they disappeared behind the horizon.

After about 15 years of speaking and writing English, talking daily with my husband, my children's teachers, friends, neighbours, the local shopkeepers and about anything and anybody else, I found the confidence to attempt writing again. For 15 years I had been language-less. After 15 years I felt as Alexander must have felt when he had the out-of-the-box idea to just cut the Gordian knot with his sword. Something suddenly gave. I still needed a few more years though before I took up with my first love again: poetry.

And just when I felt safe, my marriage went pearshaped, and it felt like a good idea to put some distance between us for a while. I left for Madrid.