

Everywhere in Chains: Stephen Cardew

It is 1981 and Britain is rapidly declining under the yoke of Thatcher's monetarism. Conditions are so desperate, they're even permeating her iron sociopathy, so she's on the lookout for a distant war to deflect attention. Handily, 7,000 miles away, General Galtieri is thinking the same thing.

Alfred has passed the preceding five years living alone and working a lot in an attempt to fill up the void in his life - a void created by the death of his first wife and abandonment by his second wife, Penny. Many a long evening has passed, in that time, in forlorn contemplation of his own shortcomings in relationships - never mind the wives; he's not even close to his one son. The thoughts simply eddy round till exhaustion claims him once more. Finding Penny's note on the dining room table hadn't, if he was truthful, come as any real surprise and he had subsequently made no attempt to contact her.. nor she him. In consequence, they are still married.

Out of the blue, he meets May. Not entirely out of the blue - May was thrown in his path by his sister - but it felt like a sudden reawakening of him as a man and as a potential husband. Despite this zing, Alfred has always been a careful man and he recognises the need to take things at a pace that won't scare May off. After all, he knows he's no catch.

Now May has expectations. She'd extricated herself from a marriage that didn't bring fulfilment at a time when it wasn't common for wives to do such things. 'He who would be free himself must strike the blow', she quotes to him and so he resolves, after the sort of deliberation which May finds as frustrating as his previous wives had, not to wait the three months till he can sue for divorce on the grounds of five years' separation and contacts his solicitor, Norman, to initiate proceedings.

The proceedings proceed at solicitor pace and, during that time, he contemplates, once more the state of things: the marriage cut short by Eve's death; the marriage cut short by Penny's desertion; the distance his son Simon keeps. No-one seems to want to be close to him.. except May.

And so, once the divorce comes through, Alfred settles for the freedom that only marriage can bring: freedom from himself.