

Miss Worger: Steve Fuger

Miss Worger is formidable, standing in a corner of the vegetable garden peering over the wall into the neighbour's property, her painted lips pursed in a dog's-bottom sphincter of disapproval. Her brass washer-bright eyes all-seeing through glassless wire frames perched on her cork mottled nose.

Her worn leather gardening gloves have seen better days yet firmly grip a sturdy bamboo pole, brandishing it in the breeze, startling the neighbour whenever he senses her presence.

She is squarely built, with pole rigid shoulders from which hang worn and faded clothes, that would benefit from seasonal changes, the limbs within as firmly shaped as two-litre plastic water bottles. Her green gumboots are perished and leak but are still fit for purpose, keeping her anchored against the brisk easterlies that lift her slug-nibbled skirt, exposing legs astonishingly clad in bright red and black striped tights.

Her square pasty-complexioned head is as hairless as the five-litre plastic container it suggests. I gifted her a wig, my 1970s nylon might-be-good-for-fancy-dress wig. Also an old holed straw hat. Come Springtime, the tits harvested the straw further, then through the hole, plucked the wig bare.

We stand eye to eye, Miss Worger and I, which would be about right. I pat her on the shoulder whenever we pass. She makes me smile, even if garden defence is not her strong point.

Miss Worger was formidable. And she was squarely built; height-wise about the same as I am now. She may have been stern but she was not frightening and she was not bald, not a single permed grey hair dared ever stray out of place. She wore tailored tweed skirts, a neat blouse over her ample bosom, sensible polished shoes, and a grey cardigan, with pockets, in which she kept a freshly laundered lace-edged handkerchief.

Miss Worger knew the name of every girl in the school.

“Stephanie! No running in the corridors.”

And she took a dim view of our game of Islands, jumping from bed to bed without touching the floor, when my bed-leg smashed through the wormy floorboards above her study. But if perched on the edge of an armchair opposite her in that study, homesick and snivelling, she would proffer that lace hanky together with a few gentle words.