

a Prince of the Realm

for michaelswritings.co.uk

The ground hurt his face. The sand burns his skin. The water irritates his eyes. His body feels heavy, too heavy. He tries to raise himself on his hands. But he cannot. He is lying face down on the cold soggy beach. His naked body is bedraggled with a tattered and torn shirt and ragged shorts. He has nothing on his feet. He looks shipwrecked. He is. He is tired and limp.

“Mister, you’ll have to get up, or you’ll drown. The tide is coming in.”

Three 10 year old boys were standing by the body laying face down in the muddy sand. The man moved, wriggled, pushed with his hands but could not lift himself.

After looking at each other, shrugging their shoulders, the boys rushed into the water, and all helped to lift the young man and pull him, drag him, out of the shallows onto the high drier sand.

It took some time. The man was heavy with the water and mud. He himself was in his early twenties, strong but obviously exhausted. The young boys dropped him a few times but did not give up. They persisted in their rescue and, laughing and yelping as they achieved success, they clapped each other on their backs.

“Please don’t send me
back across the water

you can lock me
up in prison
you can throw me
off a cliff

but please don’t send me
back across the water”

such are the pleas of the young man as the boys escort drag him inland
to the beach villa of one of the boys’ mother

“we won’t,” they declare

through the cold the damp the wind the salt the sea-air they
struggle on until they reach home

This is a small but charming white wood hut called “The Retreat” clearly painted on a sign attached to the wall of the building.

“Don’t bring that fish in here

I’ve told you before

It’s smelly and it’s wet”

“It isn’t a fish, ma. It’s a man”

There follows scraping of tables and chairs around the floor of the kitchen as they lay the young man onto the table top.

“So it is,” shrieks ma.

They set about cleaning and washing the young man who continues in his pleadings:

“don’t send me overland

please don’t send me

back there across the water

overland please let me stay here”

“Thanks Ellie for taking me with him to the Reverend Freddie. I couldn’t face it on my own.”

Ma , Martha, is shuddering in her friend Ellie’s old blue car as they hurtle towards the vicarage of St Mary’s Merton.

The young man who looks about twenty, but is probably more like forty, is cleaned up, spruced up and wearing some of Martha’s husband’s clothes, and looking quite smart. He remains silent.

“That’s all right. Do not worry about it. Glad to help. Lucky the vicar’s wife has run off with the curate. It means Freddie has more room and opportunity to see to our stranger.”

Martha says nothing.

The car makes the only sounds.

As soon as the Reverend Freddie Lawrenns set eyes on the young man from across the sea he knew the young man would be Freddie's salvation. The young man presented such a shining vibration to the vicar that the young man seemed almost to glow. And this despite the fact that the young man stood forlorn, slightly stooped, his head low, wearing slightly ill fitting clothes that were dowdy and drab; yet still he shone with a tranquillity and warmth Freddie picked up on as being quite wonderful. Since Freddie's wife had left him he had become lonely and the vicarage was too large. Here was someone sent by God perhaps to fill this place in his life. A young man to nurture and to enjoy and simply to help. He certainly seemed in need of help. Despite his compassionate aura, the man seemed in great need of assistance. Why had he come to this shore? Who was he? He still had not yet declared a name nor place of origin.

It should be noted that the young man looked young, to be in his mid twenties, but on closer later inspection, his neck showed he could be older, as old as in his mid forties, and on some occasions he looked to appear to be even in his fifties or sixties. This uncertainty about him fascinated Freddie all the more as he came to know the young man over the days to come.

Returning to their first encounter Freddie warmed to the young man so instantly that he would soon invite the man to stay with him if he wished whilst he settled. Freddie turned to Ellie and Martha:

"Thank you ladies for bringing him round to see me," he said.

“We really didn’t know what else to do. He just appeared and my son brought him to us and we cleaned him up. But he doesn’t say anything,” says Martha.

“Except don’t send him back across the sea,” puts in Ellie.

“Do you want to stay?”

“No thank you vicar. We have to go. We’ll call you later to see how you manage.”

The ladies bustle left.

The vicar waved the young man into the lounge and brought some tea.

“Don’t send me back overland will you? Please?” were the words he first spoke to the vicar.

“Nobody will send you anywhere you do not wish to go.”

“I don’t want to be sent back across the sea. I don’t wish to go back overland. I came those ways. Don’t wish to go back those ways. I left my home. I left my country to come to yours. I had to go through the mountains. Then across overland and finally I crossed the sea in a boat that wrecked and washed me ashore here . I wanted to come to your country. To England.”

“But why? Why did you want to come here?”

“I have learned it is a good free country, kind and helpful. Interested in the world and the future. I had to run away from my country and come here. Please let me stay.”

“Of course you may stay.”

Freddie said this and hoped it could be true, but he was concerned about who the man was and what was going on in his mind. Certainly the authorities would have to be told but that could wait a little while. Freddie wanted to know the young man before proceeding any further.

So we come to the naming and the origin of the young man.

The Reverend Lawrenns cannot hold his patience for very much longer. After the man has been refreshed with tea, the vicar offers him sojourn in the vicarage for a while to settle himself. The young man smiles in great gratitude. Freddie takes him to the spare room which is large and overlooks the fore garden, and the hill that leads down to the village of Merton, a pretty rural retreat with 11th century Norman origins. The four poster bed shocks the young man, as do the armchairs and table and cupboards, and a room adjoining with washing facilities, bath and toilet.

“I could live here in this room,” the wandering waif thinks to himself. He smiles, laughs and turns to face the enquiring expression of “will it do?” on his host’s face to say out loud the same thing as he thinks.

“You are most welcome to be here. But you can come out of your room and join me in the dining room and downstairs for other pleasures,” declares the delighted vicar.

“Thank you. I am so grateful. You are so kind. Why? Why are you so good to me? I’m not used to it, to people helping me like this.”

“I’m sorry you say that,” commiserated the vicar, “but I shall see to it that everyone is kind and helpful to you. After all, we are all here to be nice to each other, not nasty. We’re put here to live and assist everyone. You have no need to worry nor fear. You are here now in Merton, in Worthshire, in England.”

“What a splendid country you are. I always knew you would be. I have dreamed of coming here for so long. And now I am I am so happy. I see you will not send me back across the sea.”

“Across the sea? No.”

“You will not send me overland?”

“No-one will make you go overland.”

“Nor through the mountains. Those terrible mountains. The terrible horrible mountains. I had to pass through them to escape to be here, you know.”

“I don’t know till you tell me.”

“Later, let me just be happy now here with you,” the young man states.

And the Reverend ushers the man out of the bedroom and downstairs and shows him the library.

“I’ll leave you here to browse and read, and I’ll see about lunch, and afterwards, you can tell me who you are,” he declares.

“That will be difficult to do. Almost impossible. But for you, I will try.”

“I come from a kingdom
not known to the world
it has been hidden from the world
for many centuries enclosed
in the folds of mountains
where the east of Europe
joins with mountains
from the west of Asia “

in this way the young man describes to the Reverend Freddie Lawrenns where he the young man comes from.

“Does it have a name your kingdom?” the vicar asks.

“It does,” replies the stranger. “It is known as the Kingdom of Slavonia after the people who live there. They are the slavs of the world. They are the original peoples of man’s civilising. They are the people’s people and their kingdom is Slavonia.”

Why have you left there?”

“That is my story and I will tell it to you another day. It is too difficult and complicated to tell you just now, if you don’t mind.”

“No, I understand. But now you have told me where you have come from, can you tell me your name?”

“I will make up a name for myself for you, whilst I am here. My real name would reveal too much of my story. For now I shall call myself Christopher.”

“You should have a second name.”

“Then Christopher Christopher it will be, unless I can use your name?”

“Lawrenns? Well I suppose you could, but that might be a problem; stick to Christopher Christopher for now.”

They smile at each other, and appear pleased at their solution of names and story.

