



THOUGHTCRAFT

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Diplomatic dinners

One of the most entertaining books I have read, many years ago, was by Lawrence Durrell, called 'Esprit de Corps'. It was all about the more hilarious characters and incidents that are a part of diplomatic life. It is totally fictional, but very funny. In reality, life in the diplomatic service is far more earnest than that, ruled by protocol, rituals and rank.

Although there are and were very eccentric folk in the corps – and we met many in our time, each one meriting his own story – by and large, diplomats were like everyone else.

Protocol reigned supreme, but there were always exceptions to everything. If you were a reasonably personable junior diplomat, you frequently got invited to dinner parties by the great and the good, a.k.a. the ambassadors.

Even so, we knew our lowly place in the

hierarchy. We were always seated somewhere at the end of the table near the service door, or in the middle of the table with other equally unimportant people. Our job was to make ourselves agreeable to the guests on our right and left, to entertain and hopefully be entertained too.

Very often, the best places were in fact in the middle of the table or at the end. That was where the most interesting people sat, although they had no rank or title. At one very long and tedious dinner, I saw my husband engrossed in conversation with a dull-looking man on his right. He told me later that this guest, who was the British Embassy doctor, was an expert on the Napoleonic Wars, particularly, on the Battle of Borodino.

On another occasion, I was seated near the end of someone's table, next to a young Australian diplomat. I looked at the people at the head of the table and said, "They

must be having such interesting conversations up there. I wish I could be there." As it happened, the Australian was an expert on Japanese literature and kept me fascinated with the breadth of his knowledge on a variety of subjects, his wit, and his humour. He was very good looking too. When we rose from the table he smiled and asked, "Do you still wish you had been at the top of the table?"

As the years passed, and we moved to the head of the table, figuratively speaking, other young people replaced us at the end. However, it seems to me even today, that those were the better years of our lives. To me, in retrospect, every memory from earlier times seems bathed in a special light, as if everything really was more beautiful, and every experience more pleasurable. Cocktail parties were still occasions to meet wonderful charming people. Dinner discussions were honest, direct, and sincere.

Everyone in the diplomatic corps was professional, highly educated, and well-travelled. We knew the facts, but we looked at the world with clear and uncritical eyes, and found pleasure in every new experience, and in every new city, even when the realities were very different in some cases. We had the whole world to see, much to look forward to, and many things to see and do. We had a real belief that we could make the world a better place in our own small way. We had not yet become blasé. Knowing history, we still did not believe that only power determined the fate of countries. Still, I felt privileged that the government actually paid us to go to new countries and see new things. I look back on those years and all the memories with pleasure, nostalgia, and gratitude. We tend to retain the best memories of the past; the ones that make us look back and smile.

MUSINGS

Whatever happened to reading for pleasure?

I grew up reading a lot of books. Reading is an old habit and a way for me to get away – sometimes from problems, sometimes from reality and sometimes even from myself, and become immersed in a completely different world. However, I find that this is not the case for most people around me today.

Most children born in the '90s spent a lot of their time with their noses buried in a Goosebumps, or the Famous Five and later on, Harry Potter. In other cases there were the "Tin Goyenda" series, or even Sheba's engrossing translations of English classics. Today, however, children do not care for a good read. They don't seem to be as curious as we were back then.

We are moving forward and embracing more of technology and the technological, of course. But I did not think this lack of curiosity was part of the bargain. Most of the children today are into consoles and

movies and every time I think about it, I realise how different my childhood was.

I wish children still found happiness in an Archie and Jughead Double Digest or Tintin. Actually, I wish children these days at least recognise Archie and Tintin.

It is not only limited to children, though. Being able to find some time today for pleasure reading seems to have become a luxury most people cannot afford. So often we hear that the 24-hour day is just too short, and of course, never enough to practice a hobby we once loved so deeply.

For argument's sake, let's say looking up authors, going from one store to another and hauling books can be a little time consuming and somewhat tiring. But then came something wonderful: e-readers like Amazon's Kindle.

You would think that the invention of the likes of Kindle and access to e-books would

appeal to those readers who have lost touch with this beautiful habit, but, like many, PDFs just do not cut it for me – I need to be able to hold the book and carry it around.

It is a big part of the whole experience for me, even though it is something to thank the digital age for, as it makes it very easy to access material on the go. Yet, it seems to be just not convenient enough, and that, is a shame.

There is, however, a growing craze for young adult novels. This relatively new genre consists of stories which seem to have similar plots to one another: A young couple, a love like no other, and a major complication – which involves either of them dying or being part of the undead. These are books that have already been turned into or on their way to becoming plots for major motion pictures. Of course, I

have nothing personal against these stories or authors, I just do not appreciate the effort to tag these as classics for the future.

Generally, people seem to think catching the movie version is all the same as reading the book. But it is not. Someone who has never enjoyed reading will never ever know what a magnificent effect reading can have on their life, even if is not for every day, but just something done sometimes, in moments of pleasurable leisure.

Books teach us so much. We know about people we will never meet, we learn about places we will never go to, and most importantly, we find out something new about ourselves. Now this is not something you can expect with every read, but when you do feel a connection to a book, you know it will be forever, close to your heart for life.

By Maaesha Nuzhat Nazmul



Ice COOL Prickly Heat Powder এর ইস্ট্যান্ট কুলিং পাওয়ার
অসহ্য গরমেও ঘাম ও দুর্গন্ধের হাত থেকে রক্ষা
করে - আপনাকে রাখে ফ্রেশ এন্ড কুল।

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