

MODELS By Jeremy Taylor

Until 1989, not many people in the West knew that women behind the Iron Curtain were, in fact, dazzlingly beautiful. Brought up on a diet of Bulgarian shot putters and the wives of various Communist leaders this is not particularly surprising. However, when the walls and curtains came tumbling down in the revolutions of that year, things were to change rapidly and in some ways, unexpectedly.

One particular, and as yet undocumented, series of events took place in early 1990. I have recently been given access to all the relevant documents and reluctant permission to tell the full story. Read on.

In January 1990, an _____¹ ex model called Herma Sedlackova visited the British Embassy in Thunova Street, Prague. She explained to the Czech Embassy worker that she was interested in making contact with British models and modelling _____² and was given a copy of an out of date London telephone directory to get suitable names and addresses. Herma wrote down three addresses and went quickly back to her flat in Michle to compose the letters.

Ten days later, Duncan Jones received a letter with an _____³ stamp in the corner. 'Ceskoslovensko', said the stamp. Duncan slit the letter open and took out Herma's letter.

Dear Sir or Madam,

¹ the word 'enterprise' is a noun. What is the adjectival form?

² agencies or unions?

³ a word meaning 'from a foreign country' though, probably a far away country, with a very positive meaning.

Let me introduce myself, my name is Herma Sedlackova. I am interesting in modelling. I like to visit England with my models. It is possible? You can help me with accommodation for myself and my models, I am think about ten? I am think one week in start March.

Yours sincerely,

Herma Sedlackova.

‘Gosh,’ thought Duncan, so there were modellers behind the Iron Curtain as well! But what _____⁴ of models? Duncan knew that Czechoslovakia was a _____⁵-locked country so it was unlikely that there would be many boats. Perhaps some of the Czechoslovak modellers would be interested in First World War battle scenes. He had nearly finished his display of the Battle of the Somme.

That evening at a meeting of the Forest Hill Modellers’ Club, Duncan read out Herma’s letter. “So, _____⁶ personally, I’m quite excited about Herma Sedlackova’s letter. I think we should help him all we can.”

“It isn’t ‘him’, it’s ‘her’,” said Ron Burton. “Slavik women’s names end with ‘ova’. Herma is a woman.”

‘Gosh’ thought Duncan for the second time that day. ‘A woman modeller! Perhaps...’ After the meeting, Duncan dashed home and wrote a reply to Herma on his Amstrad Computer. That night Duncan couldn’t sleep particularly well. Images of Herma Sedlackova kept floating into his

_____⁷.

⁴ brand, kind or make?

⁵ a country that has no coast is _____-locked.

⁶ saying or speaking?

Herma had not been _____⁸ about getting any replies from England. So it was with great excitement that six days later she ran upstairs to her flat clutching Duncan Jones' Basildon Bond envelope.

Dear Herma,

Thank you very much for your letter! Your English is very good - much better than my Czechoslovak! We will be very happy to accommodate you and your models. You are very welcome to stay in my big _____⁹ or I can arrange hotel accommodation for you. I look forward to seeing your models, and you as well of course! Perhaps we will be able to do some modelling together! What sort of modelling do you like?

Yours,

Duncan Jones.

'Duncan,' thought Herma. 'What an exotic name!' But was it a man or a woman? Herma called the British Embassy and had a big smile on her face as she put the phone down. Duncan was a man, the head of a modelling club, - not an agency, but a club. 'You can stay in my big flat', read Herma again. So Duncan Jones had a flat big enough for eleven models! She couldn't wait to meet him. He would be tall, dark, very handsome, a gentleman - like all Englishmen! And he probably had quite a lot of money. He certainly had more money than Herma had managed to save from her job at the _____¹⁰. Modelling was not a full time profession in Communist Czechoslovakia.

⁷ consciousness or mind?

⁸ the opposite of pessimistic

⁹ in American English it is an apartment. What is it in British English?

¹⁰ a shop where you can buy bread and cakes

But what about the models? She had five friends who were models that had agreed to go with her but she had mentioned 10 to Duncan. Would he be angry if she only brought five? Nervously, Herma put pen to paper.

“Quiet everybody,” called Duncan. “I got another letter from Herma today!”

The other eleven men in the Forest Hill Modellers’ Club stopped discussing Napoleonic weaponry and how to use dried moss as hedgerows in a battlefield scene, and listened to Duncan.

“Dear Duncan,

Thank you very much for your letter! My English is very bad - I know it! You can really accommodate us? We are really very very happy. I am really happy you want to be model with me! I send you my picture! I hope you like it! We arrive on three March, ten o’clock, Victoria Coach Stn., but I only bring five models. I hope is okay. I like modern style modelling.

Yours,

Herma.

“So _____¹¹ have a look at the photo!” cried Ian Fisher.

With trembling hands, Duncan held up the picture of Herma Sedlackova.

¹¹ ‘could we’, ‘can we’ or ‘let’s’?

She was gorgeous, there was no doubt about that. Herma was wearing a navy blue off the shoulder evening dress, showing a sizeable portion of her ample breasts. Her long _____¹² hair cascaded onto her shoulders and her face could have launched a million ships, even in land-locked Czechoslovakia: deep blue eyes, high cheekbones, perfect smile.

An eerie silence fell on the Forest Hill Modellers' Club as the men sat and gaped at the dazzling beauty that had been hiding behind the Iron Curtain for so long. It was broken by Ron Burton. "Why did she say 'we' and 'us'?"

That very point had been on Duncan's mind all day. He was certain he knew the answer. Herma wasn't a modeller at all. Virtually no women were modellers, and definitely not ones who could have been on the front cover of Cosmopolitan. It was her husband. He was the modeller and he had simply asked Herma to write the letters. To be _____¹³, her English was not very good and hence the misunderstanding. Still, with Herma's photo stuck to the top of his computer, Duncan Jones tapped out his reply.

For four days, Herma had been waiting for The Letter to arrive. As soon as she saw her postlady's red trolley outside her block of flats, she ran downstairs and this time she was in luck. Duncan's quality envelope with the British stamp in the corner was sitting in her postbox. She ran upstairs, tearing open the letter on the way. No photograph! But surely... Oh well, Herma had a very vivid imagination and there were only four days left until she would meet exotic Duncan _____¹⁴!

¹² what kind of nut could also describe the colour of Herma's hair?

¹³ a man's name, that also means 'to be honest' – often used when telling someone something they don't want to hear

Dear Herma!

Thank you for your letter! I am very happy that you are coming and I will be waiting for you at Victoria Coach Station at ten o'clock. I will bring my car so that we can put your models in the back - carefully of course! My friends and I have a little surprise for you!

See you on the third!

Yours

Duncan.

Herma smiled again. Duncan knew that she was bringing five models with her and they could all go in the back of his car. It must be a Mercedes or a Cadillac! A surprise! What would it be? Like Duncan, a thousand kilometres away, Herma had great problems sleeping the few days before her trip to England.

The journey between Prague and London takes twenty three hours by bus. You leave at ten o'clock from Prague, spend all day going through Germany and then at about half past three the following morning, just as you are nodding off to sleep, you have to leave the coach and wander around the boat. After you arrive in Dover and the grilling from Immigration Officers, you get back on the coach for the ride up to London.

So on the last _____¹⁵ of the journey, the English people dozed and most Czechoslovak people looked out of the windows excitedly at their first sight of England and people driving on the wrong side of the road.

¹⁴ 'in the person', 'in the body' or 'in the flesh'?

¹⁵ this part of the body means 'part of a journey'

However, five very beautiful Czechoslovak models and Herma were busy with their make up - not an easy task as they bounced their way up the A2.

Herma was a little nervous. The photo she had sent to Duncan was six years old. Since then she had developed a _____¹⁶ or two. Of course, they were now safely hidden by her foundation but what about later? It had been agreed that Herma had first choice and that choice was almost certainly going to be Duncan. He sounded so kind and was probably quite rich as well. Would there be other male models? Englishmen were Gentlemen and knew how to look after a woman!

Duncan arrived at Victoria Coach Station at quarter to ten. He parked his Volkswagen Golf around the corner and waited, with great anticipation, for the arrival of Herma Sedlackova.

At five to ten, a large white bus with 'Kingscourt Express' on the side, pulled up. When Duncan saw the 'CS' sticker on the back his heart jumped. So this was it...

Duncan watched as bleary-eyed travellers got off the bus. Then suddenly, there, looking even more beautiful than in her photo, was Herma.

Herma looked around for her tall, dark, handsome Duncan. All she could see was a _____¹⁷ boy with dirty hair in a cheap anorak waving stupidly. "Herma?"

No!

"Herma Sedlakova?"

Herma wondered if there could be another Herma Sedlakova on the bus, but no. Still, he was only the boss. Surely the models must be tasty. "Yes, is

¹⁶ the lines on your face and body as you grow older. The word starts with a silent w!

me,” said Herma, shaking Duncan’s hand and leaning forward to reluctantly accept a kiss that never came.

“So where are your models? Are they in the boot?”

“The what?”

“The boot, the back of the bus.”

“No, no, they is here.”

Duncan looked for a painted Harrier jump jet or an Aircraft carrier but all he could see were five incredibly beautiful girls. He had presumed that they were au pairs waiting for their families but something about the number five gave him a jolt. Suddenly Duncan realised the whole, horrifying truth.

Modelling and modelling! They were the five models! They were the five models that were going to be put -very carefully! onto the back seat of his Volkswagen Golf! They were the five models that were going to stay for a week in his _____¹⁸ flat!

“Let me introduce myself, my name is Šarka,” said Šarka, shaking Duncan’s feeble damp hand.

After four more ritual introductions, Duncan led the six women to his car. Duncan closed his eyes as he remembered the surprise that was waiting for Herma and her models.

“I’m afraid my other car is at the garage at the moment,” lied Duncan. “It may be a bit of a squeeze.”

¹⁷ many teenagers have spots on their face. What is the adjectival form of ‘spot’?

¹⁸ Duncan’s flat has two bedrooms. What is the adjectival way of saying this?

None of the Czechoslovaks understood the word 'squeeze'. Herma had written her letters and read Duncan's with the _____¹⁹ of a dictionary and a book that would help her learn perfect English in three months. So when Duncan unlocked the boot of his Golf, there were nervous glances passed between the women. Fortunately, Herma understood 'other', 'car' and 'garage' and explained the situation to the others who then found out for themselves the meaning of 'squeeze'. Three of them sat in the back with Šarka on Radka's _____²⁰. Dana and Martina sat with their suitcases and make-up kits in their arms. Herma and Erika sat in the front.

Duncan saw a policeman strolling in his direction so started his car quickly and sped off around the corner, wincing as he saw the policeman note his registration number.

The traffic was not too heavy out to Forest Hill and it was at quarter to eleven that Duncan pulled up outside his flat.

Inside, final preparations were being made. The remaining eleven members of the Forest Hill Modellers' Club had spent all morning getting things ready for their visitor - the first international visitor the club had ever had.

As soon as they saw Duncan's car pull up outside, they let down the banner from the two upstairs windows.

Herma got out of the car and jumped as the banner fell. Vitame Vas Herma! proclaimed the words on the two large tablecloths sewn together. Herma smiled for the first time since her arrival at Victoria. But then she looked a little closer. Drawn all around the welcoming message were

¹⁹ coming from French, this word is very similar in meaning to 'help'.

²⁰ Šarka is sitting on Radka's horizontal thighs. The same place you might put your ___top computer.

aeroplanes, military aeroplanes, and at the bottom there were rockets and tanks. What was going on?

Duncan led six bewildered Czechoslovaks up to his flat. As they reached the door, it was opened quickly and the models got their first glimpse of the modellers.

“Herma!” said Ian Fisher. “Veetamer Vase! I see you’ve brought some friends with you.”

“Yes... yes... my friends...” said Herma, barely able to speak. The models shuffled into the room, surrounded by the eager modellers who, as yet, had not realised that Herma’s models were, in fact, flesh and blood. In front of them there was a large battlefield scene in the middle of which were two large cakes, side by side, in the shape of tanks. From the top of one flew the Union Jack, from the other, the Czechoslovak flag.

Facing the cake tanks were a couple of smaller tanks and armoured vehicles with hammer and sickle flags. The whole scene was littered with bodies, mostly of Russian soldiers, with each uniform correct and beautifully painted, right down to the colour of the buttons.

It was Šarka who spoke first. Her brain, like 15 other brains in the room was trying to make sense of the situation. What was she and her friends doing in London in a flat with a bunch of scruffy men surrounded by Russian, Czech and British plastic tanks and soldiers? She even noticed a few plastic aeroplanes hanging from the ceiling. Then suddenly two synapses in her brain collided. “Modely!” she cried, pointing at the toy soldiers and tanks.

Seconds later, two synapses in Ian Fisher’s brain collided, “Models!” he said, pointing at the six Czechoslovaks.

Six heads nodded as one.

It took both Duncan Jones and Herma Sedlackova quite a while to recover from the experience but things turned out well in the end. The modellers took the models around the sights of London. They took them to Oxford, Cambridge and Stratford Upon Avon. And, when they left a week later, there were many hugs, kisses, a tear or two and a promise of a visit to Prague for every member of the Forest Hill Modellers' Club.

2454 words

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