

## The Characters

Bernard Fitzpatrick Maxwell was a walking cliché of a car salesman. Fake tan, white shiny teeth, sharp Italian suits, striped ties, tasseled Italian loafers and assorted chunky gold jewellery. He was born and brought up in north London in the fifties. His father has started the garage and secondhand car business after the war to launder dirty money and his son was tasked with expanding the business and making it legitimate which he had succeeded in doing.

He kept himself fit and visited the gym at least once a week and ran half marathons to raise money for the local Catholic Church and 'for the kiddies.' He had been married to Theresa for the last 35 years but they had not been blessed with children of their own. Theresa was known among her friends as The Saint, for having put up with him for all those years.

On meeting someone new Bernard would scan them with his laser eyes to assess their potential to enhance his business, or if it was a woman of a certain age and shape her potential to satisfy his male ego. Female staff at his three showrooms and secondhand car lots across north London had developed certain strategies to avoid being alone with him and staying clear of his wandering hands.

Bernard liked to eavesdrop, he listened into and noted conversations wherever he was, the gym, the golf club, the Rotary and particularly church meetings. He collected, catalogued, and conserved gossip, tittle-tattle and rumour, he never knew when it might come in handy.

Anita is fifty years old. She has a marriage which she would describe as satisfactory but without a great deal of enthusiasm. She has three children, two girls and the youngest, a boy, Gerald (Gerry) who has just gone to university to study engineering.

Both girls are in what seem to be settled relationships but with no indication that they might marry or have children. The eldest Samantha (Sam) has a degree in politics and economics and a job in local government in Preston, 250 miles away. She is in touch through email and Facetime when she has the time. The second daughter Janice (Jan) has a degree in media studies and now an internship in a company in London that provides editing facilities for independent producers. She has been doing this for over a year and is beginning to get restless.

Her husband, Johnathan, is a middle manager in a company manufacturing wallpaper. There is nothing particularly engaging in the job, but his social life revolves around the works quiz team. They are obviously good since they keep winning. Anita hates quizzes.

Anita knows that the expectation is that she will suffer from the empty nest syndrome. Actually, she doesn't like to admit this too openly, but she has been looking forward to the opportunities the empty nest provides.

She has for some time been a volunteer in the local woodland trust. She joined others in surveying and maintaining a large area of woodland. The trust encourages local crafts, especially those related to sustainable uses of wood. Anita has watched one group with great interest. They are the bodgers. They work with green wood and make a great variety of items from simple walking sticks to pieces of furniture. She has occasionally helped in sourcing and initial preparation of some of the timber. She knows she wants to be a bodger. This has its roots in her childhood when dolls and dolls' houses did not interest her she loved to play in the edges of the woods making dens and imagined toys from twigs and fallen branches.

The bodgers that she knew were all men but over time they had accepted her and her interest and were now ready to provide her with opportunities to learn the craft with the usual warnings that the skills were not easy to learn and required persistence. Daniel, who was a sort of informal leader of the group, who could fashion the most beautiful objects from the raw timber had agreed to teach her. With Gerry out of the way, as she slightly guiltily saw it, now was the time.

## The 10.24 to Munich

*Two strangers, Anita Barlow and Bernard Fitzpatrick Maxwell, find themselves next to each other on an Easyjet flight from Gatwick to Munich.*

**Stewardess** .....make sure your seatbelts are fastened, your seat is in the upright position, your tray table stowed and your window blind up.

**Bernard** *(to himself)* Always the same spiel and no reasons as to why the seat needs to be upright or the window blind open

*(pause)*

**Anita** I'm sorry. I was listening to the stewardess. Were you talking to me?

**Bernard** Apologies. No. All those same instructions – we all know them. I don't see the point of some of them. Seat belts and tray tables – yes; seat angles and window blinds - no!

*(pause. Anita takes out the inflight magazine and begins to flick through)*

Bernard..... I am Bernard. Bernard Fitzpatrick Maxwell.

**Anita** Anita.

*(Anita returns to her magazine)*

**Bernard** (Holding out a business card) This is me. I am going to Munich to visit BNW Welt and to catch up with a few contacts. That's my business – the car industry. I am a purveyor of fine cars;- used car salesman to the uninitiated!

**Stewardess** The captain has switched off the seatbelt sign and the toilets are now in use. We recommend you keep your seatbelts fastened at all times when seated.

**Bernard** What car do you drive? The car you drive says a lot about a person. I'm a BMW man. You can't beat them – speed and style rolled into one!

**Anita** We have a Prius. Trying to do our bit for the environment as one should.

**Bernard** Not sure about the environment; isn't it past helping? You said 'we'; you have a significant other. Is he, or are you, a taxi driver? Every other taxi driver seems to have a Prius with which they cause mayhem by driving at 50 mph on dual carriageways and motorways - saving energy they say. But they are missing out on the excitement of speed.

**Stewardess** Any snacks or drinks?

**A** No thank you. .... Mr. Maxwell, she is asking if you require anything?

*(BFM waves his hand to indicate that he doesn't)*

**Bernard** So, do you drive like taxi drivers or do you like to feel the 'buzz'?

**Anita** I really don't think about it Mr. Maxwell. The car serves its purpose – it starts, it stops, it gets me from A to B safely.

**Bernard** Oh Anita, there is so much more to get from a car, the speed, the thrills and excitement – the power and throb of the engine! It was there from the moment cars were on the road. Look at the excitement Toad of Toad Hall got out of his car!

**Anita** If I remember correctly, Mr. Maxwell, it didn't end well for Toad. I believe there are too many cars, too many people who drive irresponsibly and more people should think about the size and type of car they drive. Now, if you will excuse me!

**( Anita leaves her seat and takes a magazine from her bag in the overhead locker and sits back down and reads the contents page)**

**Bernard** You know something about me; what about you? What does Anita do? What does Anita like?

**Anita** I like practical things, Mr. Maxwell;- things for my family. I like learning new skills and doing something useful;- helping the environment for example!

**BFM** You do things for others and the environment; what about things for yourself? When do you put yourself first?

**A** Excuse me! That's rather an impertinent question and a bit presumptuous on your behalf if I may say so. Do you always take this line with people you have never met before? The 'full on' approach may help you sell cars but I find it a little offensive. Now if you don't mind, I would like to pass the journey enjoying my magazine!

**(Silence reigns for a few minutes)**

**BFM** Sorry. No offence intended. Believe it or not, I am a bit nervous of flying and I always talk more when nervous. I know I can come across as a little bit OTT; I know because people are always telling me - you can't take the car salesman out of the man and all that.

**A** Right. You are wrong about environmental matters though, Mr. Maxwell. We should all do our bit. That's why I am going to the Bayerischer Wald. I hope it will inspire me in my work in my local woodland and give me different ideas.

**BFM** Your husband has not come. Does he not share your views? Not share your enthusiasm?

**A** **(crossly)** Again, it is a far too personal question, Mr. Maxwell! He works hard; dedicated to his job. Now, if you don't mind – my magazine!

**(Anita returns to her magazine, flicking through in search of an any article that grabs her interest.**

**Time passes.**

**She becomes aware of Bernard, restless, gazing out of the window, fiddling with the seat pocket, looking at his watch and frequently casting a glance towards her.)**

**Bernard** You know I didn't mean to cause you any offence, Anita. Being a purveyor of fine cars for so long has just made me the way I am. I live and breathe my job, it has formed my character. I am a sociable person, not meaning to offend people.

**Anita** Do you always go into such personal areas of people's lives when you are selling them cars, Mr. Maxwell? Does it help you clinch the deal? Do you see me as a potential client? Do you see every person you talk to as a potential client?

**Bernard** It's a formed habit I guess. Despite what people think, it's a dog eat dog world in the car business. You have to gain every advantage that you can. Making people think they are the most important and valued client you have ever had is vital. The personal touch I think they call it.

**Anita** Well, Mr. Maxwell, maybe you should review your borderline between personal and too personal!

**Bernard** It has served me well so far, Anita. Too late to change now. I have to keep running with the pack.

**(Pauses)**

I usually get my clients to call me Bernard. That creates a closer bond. We have been talking for a while now but you still address me as Mr. Maxwell. Why is that? Do you not like talking to new people?

**Anita** Mr. Maxwell; we have sat next to each other by chance. After the 'plane lands we will go our separate ways. I have your card but I will never use it to buy a car from you. You will move on to your next sale, your next 'victim' and we will both keep ambling down our chosen paths.

**Bernard** My turn to feel offended, Anita. I don't have 'victims'. I am helping people as much as you are trying to help save the environment. I didn't choose to sit next to you and I have just been trying to engage you in conversation to help the journey pass for both of us. I told you – it helps my nerves as I am not a fan of flying.

**Anita** **(firmly)** It seems you are using me to help yourself then, Mr. Maxwell. I would have been quite happy left in peace with my magazine!

**Stewardess** The captain has switched on the 'fasten seat belts sign' as we are beginning our descent into Munich. Please make sure your seatbelts are fastened, your seat is in the upright position, your tray table stowed and your window blind up.

**(Anita returns her magazine to her bag in the overhead locker and sits back down and fastens her seat belt)**

**Anita** And, to answer your question, we are two people with different characters meeting in the moment. I do not feel the need to address you as Bernard. I think that would be far too informal given our contrasting characteristics and the fact that in a few minutes you will be off to your business and I will be off to mine.

**Bernard** I thought the phrase was 'opposites attract'! I may not agree with you on the environment but I admire the fact that you have a strong belief. Where are you staying in Munich? We are both alone and have time to kill. Maybe we could meet up for a coffee and you could try to persuade me to become more environmentally friendly?

**Anita** **( smiling )** You have not lost your sense of humour I see, Mr. Maxwell!

**Bernard** I didn't realise I was saying something funny?

**Anita** Well I don't know about you, Mr. Maxwell, but I am married with a family. I have never met up with strange men for a coffee or anything else and I was not planning to start now.

*(Pauses. An uncomfortable silence for a few seconds that seem like minutes to both)*

I am sorry. That was rather rude of me. It was a very kind invitation but I have to refuse.

**Bernard** Fine. I will have other options for company. I was just trying to be friendly.

**Anita** Well good luck with your trip.

*(There is no more conversation as the 'plane lands and taxis to its stand.)*

**Bernard** Well, if you ever think of changing your Prius, give me a ring and I can do you a nice deal on something more exciting, more 'in character'.

*(short pause)*

*(with a 'knowing' smile)* Or even if you change your mind about the coffee!

*(short pause)*

When are you returning? Maybe we will be on the same flight back. Mine is on Saturday – 13;15.

**Anita** You can rest assured I will not need your services, Mr. Maxwell.

*(Anita glances at her flight details. Saturday 13;15)*

**Anita** I am staying until Sunday.

*(Everyone disembarks and Anita dives into the nearest WC)*