

Caroline is eating lunch. It is the third day of the three-day conference.

There is noise of the back of a spoon being banged on a table. People stop eating and talking and turn in the direction of the noise.

Jim stands and speaks. "The afternoon session will begin in fifteen minutes. Thank you."

'Not exactly the style of Edith's mini-xylophone.' thinks Caroline.

The afternoon session is planned to be of a forty minute lecture and then another hour of Quick Talks.

David approaches.

"Caroline, would you be able to present another Quick Talk if the opportunity arises?"

"Yes."

David pauses and smiles.

"Did you stay up late last night and prepare something just in case?"

"No." replies Caroline.

"Oh ... ah." says David.

"I did get up early this morning, got ready and then sat down for forty-five minutes and prepared something before I came down for breakfast. As you say - just in case."

David smiles broadly.

The lecture has just finished.

Jim goes to the front of the room.

"Right, thank you we can break for fifteen minutes and then we can have the Quick Talks session. There are four scheduled Quick Talks."

The Quick Talks session.

Caroline notices that Jim seems to ask a lot of questions and wonders if he is trying to make sure that each talk and any discussion takes fifteen minutes so that there can be no floor speakers.

The fourth talk ends. It is three minutes to four.

Jim goes to the front of the room.

“Well, thank you everybody for attending the conference. The conference is now closed.”

David calls out “Jim, Caroline is ready to give a Quick Talk.”

“No, no.” says Caroline, not loudly, but noticeably.

“But you said that you had prepared a talk!” retorts David.

“Yes, but only if there were the opportunity to present it, and there is not, as the conference is closed.”

“Oh, come on Jim, open the conference up again so that Caroline can present her talk.” says David.

“No,” says Caroline “the conference is closed, it would not be right to open it again after it has been closed.”

Jim observes this exchange and wonders quite what to make of it.

“Oh come on, Caroline, I’m trying to get you an opportunity.” says David.

“No,” says Caroline “it would not be right.”

David turns to face Jim again, speaking as he turns.

“Oh come on Jim, ask her” as he realizes that Jim has gone.

“Well Caroline, will you give your talk here and now not as part of the conference?” asks David.

“No,” says Caroline “the conference was an official booking - anything else would need to be booked properly, not just done unofficially.”

David shakes his head in disbelief and shrugs and walks away feeling somewhat miffed.

Various other conference participants had paused as they were departing, waiting to see what would happen. Now they drift away.

Although some people are leaving the hotel to travel home from the conference, many are not, preferring to wait until the next morning before travelling. Some people are staying on a few days for a few days holiday. Indeed some excursions have been arranged.

The next morning. An excursion, a guided tour, walking, to view some wall poems that are displayed painted onto the outside of some of the buildings around the city, though with a minibus accompanying for those people who would rather not walk very far. Caroline and David are amongst those who walk. The elderly retired journalist gentleman travels in the minibus along with four other people, though alighting to view and discuss the poems.

After observing various poems, in various languages and in various scripts, they arrive at a small square where there are several Acer trees planted.

There is a poem displayed on a wall of a house, in a landscape format panel. At the left side of the panel is a painting of a foxglove in flower, at the right side a painting of a rosebay willowherb in flower, and along the lower edge paintings of dandelions in flower.

In a garden together

One planted

Watched carefully as it grew

Some blown in by the wind

Yet left to flourish

All are beautiful

Colours in the summer sunshine

Brightening the day

The tour continues and several other wall poems are observed.

The ending of the tour is at a café for lunch. There are poems painted on the walls inside the café, each with an illustration.

People are looking at the illustrations and chatting about them.

David approaches Caroline, somewhat cautiously.

“Caroline, I’m sorry I got a bit carried away yesterday afternoon ... I have just noticed that there is a sign saying ‘Function Room available’ ... if I were to manage to arrange, fully officially, the use of the function room for you to give your talk, would you do it, for everyone who wants to listen, even if it is only me ... please?”

There is a pause.

“Very well,” says Caroline “ ... it will be a pleasure.” and smiles.

“Though after lunch and after we have had a break.” she adds.

David smiles, turns and walks towards the owner of the café.

“Madame ...” calls out David.

Caroline smiles that he could have waited until he got closer and then spoken quietly when he got there.