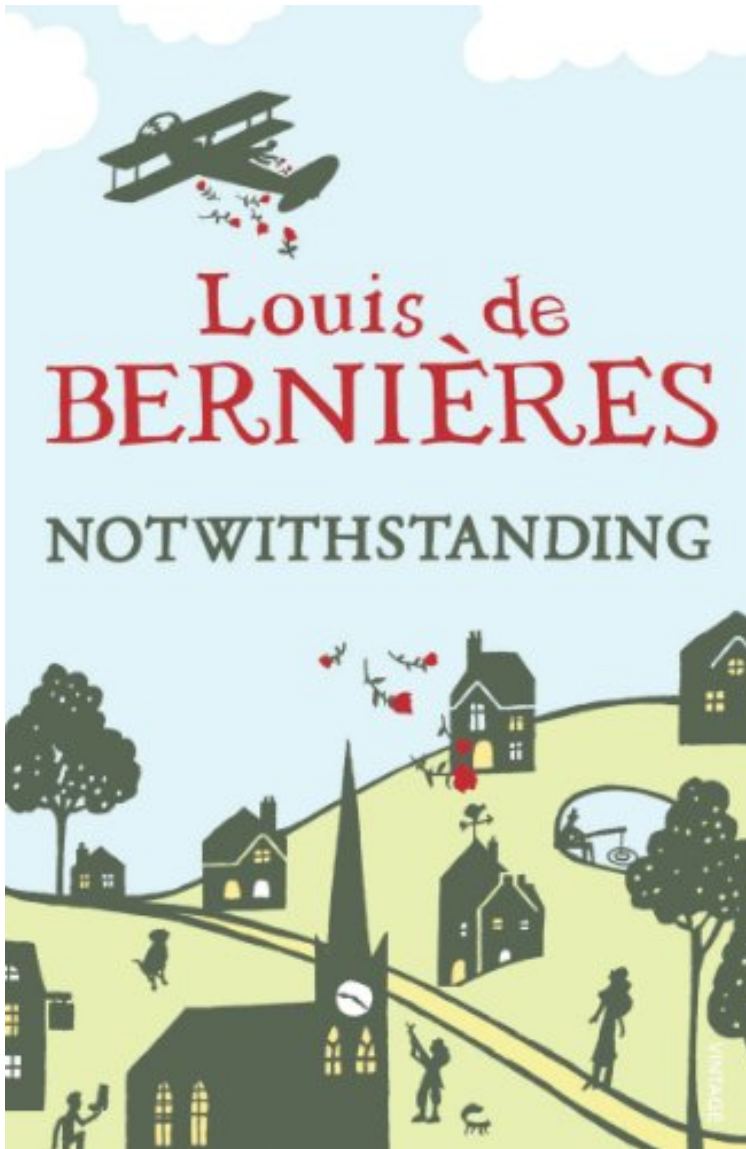


[FREE] File size: 77.Mb

Notwithstanding: Stories from an English Village



Par Louis de Bernières
DOC | *audiobook | ebooks | Download
PDF | ePub

Dtails sur le produit Rang parmi les ventes : #179374 dans eBooksPubli le: 2009-11-24Sorti le: 2009-11-24Format: Ebook Kindle

[FREE] Notwithstanding: Stories from an English Village

Par Louis de Bernières : Notwithstanding: Stories from an English Village before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Notwithstanding: Stories from an English Village:

Download

Read Online

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWelcome to the village of Notwithstanding, where a lady dresses in plus fours and shoots squirrels, a retired general gives up wearing clothes altogether, a spiritualist lives in a cottage with the ghost of her husband, and people think it quite natural to confide in a spider that lives in a potting shed. Based on de Bernires' recollections of the village he grew up in, Notwithstanding is a funny and moving depiction of a charming vanished England.ExtraitARCHIE AND THE BIRDS Im not in. Over, I told my mother, sighing as I held the walkie-talkie in my right hand and with my left continued painstakingly to stick

small seeds to the outside of my living-room window. When will you be back? Over, she asked. Oh, I dont know. Over, I replied. Well, I hope youre back soon, she said, reprovingly. This is the third time Ive walkie-talked and you havent been there. How am I supposed to talk with my own son if hes never there? Over. But, Mother, I was here. I was busy. And now we are talking. Over. Whats keeping you so occupied, anyway? Over. Im sticking seeds to the living-room window, Mother. Over. There was a pause for thought, and then my mother said, Well, at least youre keeping out of mischief. Ill buzz you later. Over. Roger, wilco, over and out, I said. I placed the walkie-talkie on the window ledge, and continued to stick the seeds to the window. It was extremely tedious, and, as I had been at it since breakfast time, I was beginning to find the whole task irksome. I should have been out painting and decorating and bringing in some cash. I even wondered whether this palaver was worth it. Some of the seeds were exceedingly small, and I kept dropping them into the flower bed. I had heard that a lot of the ones in bird food are actually hemp, and I worried that perhaps in the spring these would germinate. If the village bobby happened to pass by, I might get into serious trouble and cause a scandal in the village. So I was spending an undue amount of time on my knees on the damp lawn, looking for the seeds that I had dropped. No doubt many would be found by mice, but then the cat would probably jump on them and I would feel guilty about having lured them to their deaths. That was the least of my worries. In fact, my whole life was turning into a series of irritating little problems, each of which required altogether too much time to deal with. In this instance it ultimately occurred to me that the sensible thing would be to cover the window with glue, and then just fling the seeds at it in the hope that most of them would stick. I tried this plan out, and it worked quite admirably. I stood back and contemplated my good work, whereupon the walkie-talkie crackled again. Mother to Archie-master. Are you back yet? Over, demanded my mother. Only I just heard from the priest that you were late at Mass last Sunday, and caused a stir when you came in. Over. I am back, Mother, obviously, and I would have been on time if I hadnt been late. I had to take Archie out before he did his business on the carpet. Over. Well, thats all right then. Only its a bad thing to get a reputation for lateness. It reflects badly. Over. So it does, I said. But let me point out that you didnt go to Mass at all. You were in bed with a magazine and your head full of curlers. Over. I went back indoors and into the living room. The smears on the glass looked horrible from the inside, and the seeds somehow didnt look right. I realised that I should have arranged them in some kind of artistic pattern. I could have made them into a portrait of a cockerel, or even a nice parsnip, but now it was too late.

The walkie-talkie buzzed again. Mother to Archie-master. So why would you be sticking seeds on the windows? Over. Mother, I said, a little wearily, why cant you just come out of the kitchen and talk to me without using the walkie-talkie? Im only in the living room. Have you lost the use of your legs? Over. Im making a cake and getting lunch. Bangers and mash and baked beans. Itll be ten minutes. Ill give you a buzz. Over and out. I sat in my armchair and waited to see what the response to the seeds would be. I realised that I could not expect results right away, but nonetheless I was extremely curious. While I waited for lunch I reflected upon the chain of events that had led me to adopt this desperate measure. It had begun with the dog, a black retriever. The gypsy who sold it to us took advantage of our ignorance, saying that it was a golden retriever, and that it would turn gold later. All golden retriever puppies were black at first. He was obviously expecting us to fall in love with the dog, so that by the time we found out wed been sold a pup, we wouldnt be wanting a refund. He was right, that was exactly what happened, only we got revenge by giving him a rotten rooster and telling him it was pheasant, well hung. My mother wanted to call the dog Sooty, but the cat had already laid claim to that name, and we didnt fancy the confusion, so we called him Archibald Scott-Moncrieff instead, or Archie for short. Archie was a lollopy friendly dog, and when he was very small he developed a predilection for shoelaces. You couldnt take a step without finding him fastened to your foot. We took to wearing slip-ons, and he just transferred his attentions to the kitchen trolley, biting at the wheels whenever my mother moved it about the house, and yipping at it incessantly when it wasnt being wheeled anywhere. We realised that we had acquired a dog with a terrible flair for obsession, and we decided to take his mind off the trolley. I brought him out in the fields with a walking stick and taught him to retrieve. He was altogether the natural retrieving dog, and soon I was out there with a nine-iron and a golf ball, practising day and night for the pitch-and-putt competition, with Archie flying back and forth between the legs of the cows, my Penfold Commando in his jaws. I tried to train him to put the ball back on the tee, but his nose got in the way of his eyes, and he missed. He had a soft mouth and never put a single mark on the ball, and I had such good practice that soon enough I could hit the ball high and straight, and land it on any cow I chose. I could have given Christie OConnor a match, and I would have won the competition but for a run of bad luck in the putting. The trouble was that Archie wouldnt stop retrieving, and in his spare time he filled the house

with junk. Wed be watching the goggle-box in the evening, as Archie rushed in and out with his tennis ball. Wed leave the front door open and throw the ball out of the living-room window, whereupon Archie would fly into the hallway, out of the front door and into the darkness. Through the window would come wafting the sound of Archie galumphing and crashing and snuffling in the shrubs, and soon enough hed be back with his ball drenched in saliva, dropping it at our feet, looking up at us with liquid brown eyes full of pleading, and then one of us would go soft and throw the ball out again, saying Bloody dog as we did so. When we couldnt take any more, Archie just went out and fetched things that hadnt even been thrown. Thats how my mother found her gardening gloves again, and thats how one evening we were presented with a frog, a log, a baby rabbit and a marrow that needed picking. One day Archie shattered the rake by trying to charge through the front door with the handle horizontal in his mouth. The only thing that Archie didnt retrieve was the cat, because Sooty wouldnt cooperate, and fluffed herself up into a chimney brush if ever he tried. Just as we were Catholics, in fact the only other Catholic family in Notwithstanding (everyone else being Anglican except for the brothers at the garage who didnt drink), retrieving was the nearest that Archie got to having a religion, and since wed always practised toleration, we felt that we had to put up with his chosen way of life. When Archie was about two years old he came in with a blackbird, but we paid no attention. The bird was dead, and we thought that he must have found it somewhere. But then the next day he came in with a song thrush and a starling, and we became suspicious. In our village strange things happen from time to time. To this day we still talk about the time when Mrs Macs sister went round telling us shed heard on the radio that from now on the rain was going to fall upward, and sure enough it did. We sat watching it out of our windows, and it looked to us as if the drops in the puddles were actually little bursts of water heading skyward. We became anxious about the village pond emptying out, but it never did, and eventually Mrs Macs sister confessed that shed heard the radio item on 1 April. Even so, most of us were convinced by lengthy observation that in fact the rain had been falling upward, and we had some good arguments about it, for and against, until Sir Edward explained that it was a perceptual illusion caused by the well-known effects of intellectual confusion upon the eyesight under conditions of simple Galilean relativity, whatever that is. After that, the rain fell downward once more, and normality was restored. Anyway, after Archie had brought in a pigeon, a linnet, a greenfinch, and a woodcock, we began to realise that his retrieving had gone too far, and it wasnt until I took to sitting in the living room after lunch that I discovered the cause of his success in retrieving dead birds that no one had shot. I was reading the Sporting Times one afternoon, when there was a fierce thump on the window. I looked up, startled, to see a robin sliding down it, leaving a thick trail of blood behind on the glass. A few minutes later Archie brought the little bird in, and, as usual, because it would be a shame to see it go to waste, I put it in Sootys bowl. Two more birds committed suicide by crashing into the window that very same evening. My mother and I discussed the possibility that the local birds were suffering from depression. We knew that sometimes in the human population a kind of self-destructive hysteria can sweep through the last time it happened in Notwithstanding was in the eighteenth century when the calendar was adjusted and everyone thought theyd been deprived of several days of life. Somehow this didnt make sense with respect to birds, so we were forced to conclude that it must be a spontaneous collective amnesia about windows. Thats why I stuck birdseed to the glass, to teach them all about windows again, and, though I say it myself, it did work wonderfully. We had dozens of birds of all kinds flapping against the window, picking off the seeds, and the sparrows and tits learned to hover like hummingbirds while they pecked. My mother and I were quite chuffed to have contributed to bird evolution, especially when they also realised by experience to keep out of Sootys reach. She only got two or three before they learned. Nonetheless, it drove us barmy to see Sooty trying to get at the birds, leaping up and down with a mad expression on her face as though she were on an invisible and uncontrollable pogo stick. On top of that, the repeated sound of her claws dragging down the windows was worse than the scritch of a teachers fingernail on the blackboard, so we moved the television into the other room, and Archie went back to fetching everything except birds.

Revue de presse "A timely examination of the charming and, at time, heart-wrenchingly sad aspects of English village life...testament to the rude health of the author's own imagination." (Adam Oriordan Financial Times) "The stories are sketches of lives that settle into the atmosphere of a place and make it unique." (Kate Saunders The Times) "Delightful collection...exquisitely told." (Clare Colvin Daily Mail)