

Mrs Moneypenny

Things have changed around here: tread carefully, Mr M...



Mr M to go for two days of intensive golf coaching at the David Leadbetter Golf Academy. The DLGA is based in the US but it has one UK branch, which happens to be eight miles from Middlesbrough and 207 miles from where we live. Why? And why is there only one in the UK? They have six in France! I called up and asked when they had availability. In the whole of Mr M's three weeks off, they had only two days available – the two days of the house move.

After calming down and thinking about it, I decided that it was still for the best. How helpful are husbands during a house move anyway? They only interfere and stop you throwing away all their junk. So the

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night before the move Mr M set off for the north-east and spent two days on the golf course.

I, on the other hand, spent two days putting stuff into boxes, filling three skips, opening boxes at the other end, finding

light bulbs, coffee and tea towels when no one could remember where they were packed, agonising over furniture that did not fit into its intended destination, making sure that CC#2's bedroom was repainted from Barbie-doll pink to magnolia before he came home from boarding school and threw a fit, making sure that the dog did not escape... and so on.

In the new house Mr M has his own annexe with his hundreds (literally) of books on sport, a plasma-screen TV and a glass cabinet awaiting future golf trophies. Plus his wine collection, wine-storage cabinet and all his wine books. All of this was unpacked and sorted out so that he could arrive back and find it in situ. I even arranged for someone to come and connect the satellite TV box, and made our bed up with fresh linen. So when he returned, the house was well on the way, and his sports annexe, his bedroom and the kitchen were all ready to receive him. I had even made a delicious dinner.

What was the first thing he said? "Have you moved over the Setanta subscription?" That's another TV sports service, for the poor innocents among you. Maybe I should reconsider what I said about not planning on divorce.

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CHANGE IS STRESSFUL. Starting a new job, moving house and divorce are often cited as three of the most common causes of stress. Mr M and I are not contemplating divorce, but he has just changed job in the same week that we completed the purchase of our new house and moved in.

Yes, the Moneypenny family has purchased a property – in the worst housing market for a long while. For the past eight years we have been renting, while we put our capital to other uses. Renting made sense for several reasons, but the whole Moneypenny family had become rather bored of never being able to improve or modify the home because to do so would simply add value to someone else's property. So we have bought our own, and we think we have benefited from the dire state of the housing market, not least because we have no plans to sell it for many, many years – at least until Cost Centre #3 (now aged nine) has left university, if then.

We have not been able to move our cricket net, but given that a gate leads directly from our back garden on to the village cricket pitch, complete with its own nets, it hardly seemed necessary to have our own as well. However, we do plan to construct a golf net instead.

Mr M took three weeks off between jobs. We used the time to prepare for our move and to go away together for 24 hours. This might seem a little perfunctory for a holiday, especially an overseas one, but we went to Bruges. Keen-eyed readers will note that Bruges begins with a "b", as do the adjectives "beautiful" and "boring", both of which can be appropriately used in this context. Twenty-four hours is long enough for a visit to Bruges, I can assure you.

Before the start of his new job, as an early birthday present, I said that I would arrange for

*That was then...
this is now*

Mostar



[1941]

From "Black Lamb and Grey Falcon", by Rebecca West

"We went on past an aerodrome with its hangars, past the barracks and the tobacco factory that stand in the outskirts of any Hertzegovinian town, and were in Mostar, 'Stari most', old bridge... It is one of the most beautiful bridges in the world. A slender arch lies between two round towers, its parapet bent in a shallow angle in the centre. To look at it is good; to stand on it is good. Over the grey-green river swoop hundreds of swallows, and on the banks mosques and white houses stand among glades of trees and bushes.

[2008]

From johnandsheena.co.uk/blog

"We walked to the market where cherries were cheap and plentiful and had a coffee in a seat that had the classic Mostar view of the Old Bridge... Occasionally, a young man would dive or jump off the parapet, for money which was collected from the waves of tour groups that were crossing. From here, the impact of tourism wasn't really visible. The bridge looked beautiful arching majestically far above the rushing green of the Neretva River.

But as we walked on towards the bridge, it was impossible to miss. Every shop was dedicated to selling only souvenirs. And every shop had the same souvenirs. Chillingly, these included fragments of shrapnel and the odd helmet or two... It seemed sacrilegious to tout these items in streets that just over a decade before had seen such bitter fighting.