



Goodby Emily, *hello Clare*

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I have a confession to make: my name isn't really Emily. In the grand scheme of things, this isn't an earth-shattering admission. Lots of writers use pen-names, and it's not as though I'm announcing that the Agony Aunt from the *Herald Tribune* is really a 45-year old man called Barry, who wears suspenders at the weekend. But nevertheless, I feel it's time to come clean. My name is Clare, and I'm a police officer.

Well, ex-police officer, actually. Despite a long-held desire to become a journalist, I instead ended up walking the thin blue line and writing nothing more creative than an overtime claim. I had turned my back on the arts in favour of a 'proper job', but the lack of inspiration made me wither inside. I found myself desperate to enhance the statements I took from victims of crime: "Are you sure the suspect was just 'walking'?" I'd say. "Could he perhaps have been 'limping'?" Or "shuffling"? How about "pacing towards you in a menacing way"? My witness would look at me blankly, and I would finish the statement, sighing inwardly at its pedestrian tones.

Stifled by my collar and tie, I started writing, stuffing scraps of paper into my bedside table like a guilty secret. Snatches of story, angry commentary, a flash of personal reflection... I wrote and I wrote and I wrote, and each sentence peeled me just a fraction more away from the day-job. A natural exhibitionist, and now a hopeless word-junkie, I began to crave feedback on my writing. I went online, blogging anonymously about bad parenting, interrupted sex and emotional angst. A magazine editor got in touch: would I like to write for them? And what was my name, anyway?

I panicked. Technically I wasn't breaching any regulations, but I had a



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feeling the Chief would take a dim view on the frivolous journalistic antics of one of her Inspectors... so Emily Carlisle was born. A name plucked from nowhere, with the help of my husband, who found the whole thing rather fun. That first feature turned into more features, which turned into newspaper articles, opinion pieces, and this column. I took a career break and reinvented myself as a freelance journalist.

I became rather fond of Emily. She was far more adventurous than I was; audacious and confident, witty and sharp. The children grew used to my being called Emily on press trips, and even my husband stopped raising his eyebrows as he took another phone message for me. Secretly, I think he liked Emily too. Sleeping with two women perhaps added a certain frisson to his life, without the stress of an affair.

Last month I resigned from the police. A big decision, but life is better this way. I work from home, I see the kids, I run my own life. I like it.

No longer constrained by a police officer's code of conduct I am free to write whatever I want, under whatever name I

like. I can sack Emily. But shaking off a pseudonym is proving far harder than creating one. Like a middle-aged businessman who still carries the nickname acquired at school, Emily follows me around wherever I go. She stalks my inbox and infiltrates my post. She has spread herself so far across the internet that when I try to log on as me, the computer rejects me. Friends I met as Emily find it so impossible to call me Clare that they have settled on variety of hybrids. I simply can't get rid of her.

I have resigned myself to having her around, like the friends with whom you no longer have any common ground, yet join for twice-yearly stilted catch-ups in a restaurant where the menu is more interesting than the conversation. Poor Emily. I feel more than a little guilty, abandoning her when she did so much for me in those early years. There should be a repository for cast-off pen-names: a great warehouse where unwanted monikers jostle for position on the shelves. Writers could apply for pseudonyms; criminals on the run could obtain new identities; MI5 could pick up spook handles. Emily Carlisle could have a far more exciting life than that of a part-mother, part-journalist. She always was more adventurous than me. ■

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