

01 March 2013 12:21am

She was hunched over her immaculately tidy desk peering intently at the computer monitor, gold-rimmed reading glasses perched on the end of her nose, the spectacle chains as motionless as her head. She was wearing a woollen pleated skirt and a plain twin set cardigan offset by a modest string of pearls and a cameo brooch. Her long silvered hair was pulled back severely into a tight bun, held in place by a tortoiseshell comb with nary a stray wisp of hair to be seen. Sensible shoes and support stockings completed the picture. Suddenly her lips pursed, fine wrinkles forming at the corners of her mouth 'Oh really, this just will *not* do' she tut-tutted, her brow furrowed, as she stabbed at the keyboard, deleting another comment.

Just then Eric came breezing through the doorway whistling [Shiny Happy People](#), a take-away coffee in one hand and a cream bun in the other. He stopped mid stride as he saw the unfamiliar figure sitting at his mate's desk. 'Er, who are you? Where's ...'

'He's moved on - seeking alternative employment' she interrupted sternly.

'Since when? He was here yesterday...'

'Since he was shown the door by management. Now, who are *you*?' she asked, irritated by the interruption.

'Well I'm Eric and I work here. That's my spot over there' he spluttered somewhat taken aback, pointing to the desk in the corner that was covered in magazines, comics, empty take-away containers and assorted residues of food.

'Disgusting' she sniffed haughtily.

'So who the bloody hell are *you* and what are you doing here anyway?' Eric asked, slightly miffed

‘Miss Crabbe to you - and I’m the new Community Standards Enforcement Officer. So, young man, *you* will be working for *me* from now on and, let me make this perfectly clear, I run a tight ship. There are going to be some major changes - strict adherence to Community Standards for a start. Now sit down and get to work - you’re already 3 minutes late.... and do something about that revolting desk - it’s a biological hazard’

Eric was stunned. Suddenly, his cosy, stress-free job looked like going well down the gurgler. He crossed to his desk, swept some of the mess aside, placed his coffee and bun down and fired up his computer to log onto the Crossword Comment site, wondering what he’d done wrong to deserve this living nightmare.

‘Oh and another thing - mind your Ps and Qs - I most certainly will not tolerate bad language’

Eric sighed loudly then started softly [whistling this tune.....](#)

05 March 2013 1:00am

The following short(ish) story is based on a *word* that appeared in yesterday's Crossword and contains no offensive material that I am aware of.

The old Aston Martin crunched over the gravel and eased to a halt beside the imposing stone steps that led to the grand entrance of the two-hatted restaurant. The valet opened the passenger door allowing the elegantly dressed woman to alight. The driver, handsome in his dinner suit, let himself out and tossed the keys to the valet and discretely palmed him a fiver. ‘Thank you Sir’ he acknowledge, touching the brim of his hat.

It was a lovely evening - the sun’s last rays a suggestion on the western horizon as they climbed the five steps to the imposing door which opened before them.

The young maitre d'hotel quickly came from behind the lectern in the foyer.
'Good evening Madame, good evening Sir, welcome to Luigi's' he said
gesturing them towards the lectern.
'Does Sir have a reservation?' he enquired.

'Er... yes' the gentleman nodded, and was about to offer his name when the
maitre d' asked
'Your name Sir?', scanning the reservations list on the lectern before him.

'Alf Rescoe' the gentleman replied.

The maitre d' looked up and as politely as possible said 'I'm sorry Sir, I meant
what is your name?'

'Alf Rescoe' he replied slightly louder.

'I don't think Sir understands - I just need your name so I can check the
reservation'

'My.. name.. is.. *Alf.. Rescoe*' he said with obvious emphasis, '*Mr Alfred
Rescoe* - and this is my wife *Mrs Rescoe*'

The maitre d' paused, then looked intently as he ran his finger down the page
before him, raising his eyebrows sharply as he came across the name *Mr and
Mrs Rescoe 7:30pm* clearly written on the list. He retrieved a pencil and
savagely scribbled out the name before looking up, a forced smile on his
face.

'Will Sir be dining inside or outside tonight?' he asked pleasantly

The gentlemen looked to his wife for guidance who mouthed a word to him
'Well, it is a lovely evening..' he remarked as he turned back to the maitre d'
'I think we might dine alfres...'
'... on second thoughts, we might just dine inside' he sighed

16 March 2013 1:04am

He rubbed the window pane with his sleeve and peered in, just as he had done each day for the past week or so. *If only my mind was as easily cleared as this glass*, he thought. Moving to the stoop, he paused before the door, hesitating took a deep breath, exhaled loudly then crossed the threshold muttering *OK mate, let's do this*.

The usual crowd was there, deep in conversation about visits to Museums and tapas bars, or pencilling answers to the crossword. The gentle clack of snooker balls didn't rouse *Unicorn* slumbering peacefully under a table. He looked up at the scoreboard as he crossed the room to the bar – *Lamb* was up 59 frames to nil. Some things just didn't change, but he did notice a small dragon (*Puff*) in the corner roasting marshmallows with delicate blasts of fire from its nostrils – that was new.

'Well, well, if it isn't *Subbie*. Long time, no see – you having your usual?' the *Welsh Granny* inquired as she started to expertly pull a pint of Black Sheep.

'What have you been up to lad?' she asked

'Oh you know – this and that. Thought I'd have a bit of a break to sort things out and let a few niggles settle down. Tell you what though, staying away was harder than giving up smoking!' *Subbie* explained.

'It's good to back amongst friends but I can't help thinking I'm a bit like that bloke from the Bible story – what's his name? You know.... The Prod something.....?' he said thinking hard.

'I know...' he exclaimed triumphantly and rather too loudly, '.. it's the *Prodigious Son*!'

No one had ever seen *Lamb* miscue a simple pot on the black ball before, nor heard any lamb baa with laughter for that matter. Loud guffaws of merriment rippled through the room causing *Unicorn* to wake with a start and impale her horn on the underside of the table, and the now giggling *Puff*, to incinerate a whole batch of marshmallows leaving a sizeable scorch mark on the wall.

‘Er, I think you mean the **Prodigal** Son’ *Welsh Granny* gently corrected

‘Really?’ *Subbie* replied with a smile on his face and a twinkle in his eye. ‘The things you learn in this place eh?’

He beckoned *Welsh Granny* closer and whispered in her ear ‘I really don’t mind if they laugh with me or at me, but you have to admit, laughter is medicine for the soul, shirley?’

‘Can’t disagree with that *Subbie*’ *Welsh Granny* answered, nodding wisely as she went back to finish pulling his pint.

She placed the full glass on the bar then beckoned *Subbie* in close, looked around to make sure no one else was listening in, and whispered in his ear...

‘How the bloody hell did you know me name was *Shirley*?’