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## It's Perfectly Formed

by Martin Bourne

It's perfectly formed. That was my first opinion of it as the lady to my left began to provide me with her uninvited medical history. I was, it has to be said, taken aback by her immediate candour. After exchanging names, she started with her age, 91, a favourite topic for old people. In the next breath she informed me that she had a plastic nose. She told me that due to a growth, her surgeon had said.

“You've got a really deep seated cancerous growth, and if we don't cut your nose off you will die”

“So I said, in that case, you'd better chop it off”

She was stroking her false nose, which I now could not stop looking at, and with a feeling of impending dread I expected that at any minute she would unclip the prosthetic and reveal to me her noseless face. Fortunately, she did not. At hearing the word hello, I was introduced to the lady on my right, who similarly considered it important to tell me she was 89.

We were in the Authority Room at Ascot, and organisers are such sticklers, that the seating arrangements have to be male and female in strict order with no family connection between each adjacent diner. What luck I thought, seated between two ladies of advanced years. However, it quickly became clear that the lady on my left was far more interesting and her four syllable double-barrelled name was of significant historical importance. I was quickly becoming a name snob.

The speech was to mark the retirement of a steward who had served at both Ascot and Plumpton. The retiring steward received his gift, and proceeded to provide three amusing anecdotes, which failed to produce any laughs.

The lady on my right started to repeat herself and I managed to divert her attention to my son who was seated to her right. This enabled me to resume my conversation, or rather to listen to, the lady with the double-barrelled name.

“That’s my son Jack,” she said, motioning to the man sitting on the opposite side of the table, “he used to be a point to point jockey like me. You know,” she said, igniting a memory in her eyes, “I rode in a point to point in 1949, and there was a drop fence where the ground sloped away steeply on the landing side. It was so terrifying, it was like jumping out of a bedroom window. Anyhow, I jumped it and the two girls who were upside me both fell. I won that race by 20 lengths. Another time, I was riding a horse and he bucked me straight into a fence post knocking out my front teeth. I received them in the post two days later in a little bag.”

“Are you related to the family who have lived in Sherborne castle since just after Walter Rayleigh?” I asked.

“Cousins,” she said dismissively.