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A Man of No Account

by Garf Collins

'Futura collapses,' shrieked the headlines. Next day - *'Proctor retains substantial fortune despite losing his company.'* This after an intense period when it seemed Arthur Proctor's troubles were in the news every day.

After a brief lull the headlines began again;

'Creditors and Shareholders of collapsed Futura sue Proctor for personal redress.'

'Bitter divorce for Proctor. Wife demands £50M.'

Regular reports about these bitter fights followed at intervals until;

'Proctor declared bankrupt. Law suits, alimony settlement and huge legal costs wipe out his fortune.'

A traumatised Arthur, desperate to escape from being the Proctor of popular renown, bought a remote barn with the last of his money and fitted it out as a simple cottage. A village a few miles distant provided for his basic needs and a bus took him to a small town where he picked up his pension - now his only means of support. For heating he foraged for wood from the surrounding hills. His clothing was chosen from charity shops to blend with his rural surroundings.

A year later as he sat in the sun outside his barn, he realised that at last he was happy. He had succeeded in becoming totally uninteresting. Nobody wanted to interview him.

No newspapers were publishing articles about him and photos of him mobbed by journalists and protestors. The occasional walker passing by would nod and say hullo but any curiosity they showed was only out of interest in a simple life.

“This is all I need,” he thought, “the striving to build a company and to dominate its market, the networking to achieve wider influence, social climbing and above all marrying a shallow fortune-seeking wife seem just a mirage now. What a way to live? I was just bolstering my own ego.”

He shuddered at the thought of the extreme pressure of creating his empire and the even greater stress of its collapse that had taken such a toll on his health.

A month later two ramblers took the path, which passed Arthur’s barn. As they came over the brow of a hill the women said to her companion, “look at that little barn. It looks as if someone might live there. There’s a washing line and a battered table and chair.”

“Well it’s nice on a day like this,” her husband replied, “but I wouldn’t fancy it in the winter. Suppose you became ill. There’s no help for miles around.”

As they neared the barn the women sniffed and said, “can you smell that? It’s like an animal has died nearby.”

“Certainly can! What a stink.”

They knocked on the door and, getting no reply, they looked through the small window. Arthur lay as he had fallen six weeks previously after a massive heart attack.

A few days later the local paper had a headline on an inner page;

‘Man found dead in remote barn. Police are trying to identify the body.’

Nobody was interested.