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The Landlady

by Malcolm Walker

I need to tell you about my landlady, well not mine exactly. She was everyone's or at any rate she was regarded as such by the denizens of the Spreddeagle. Her smile was fetching, her bosom ample and her vitality engaging. There is no doubt she increased the patronage rapidly and substantially.

I would seek to engage her in earnest conversation fervently hoping she would be persuaded that despite the difference in our age and the gulf in class, she would ultimately succumb to my blandishments. Her education had been cursory and intermittent, her origins questionable, her poverty of thought clinging to her like a clammy damp cloth. And yet there was something about her that was compelling. It was not that she had a cuteness or even a prettiness sufficient of itself, it was more an enigmatic underlying feeling- prompting an urge to find out more.

She left school at fifteen, without any qualification of note other than a certificate for woodwork. It transpired that the teacher had been mightily impressed with her mortice and tenon joints but she was not prepared to elaborate.

A short spell as a bus conductress had followed as her first foray into the real world at the time when coloured bus tickets were in use. Sadly she was red/blue colour blind and she soon found herself using her woodworking skills as a lumberjack in Nova Scotia. This was short lived as she had no head for heights. A spell in hospital for a fractured skull had led to a desire for deep sea diving. She had penetrated Bermuda's hidden depths until a serious attack of the bends had compelled her to call it a day. It was then that she concluded that she might as well go on a few benders by working at a brewery.

So it was that she arrived at the Spredaeagle, first as a barmaid whose skill at pulling pints assumed legendary status in no time at all. Her ability to cope when the bar was swamped with thirsty punters was adroit and her demeanour assured. And yet—there was something about her as the weeks and months passed. She had an underlying tiredness, a look of the haunted.

“You look as if you are burning the candle at both ends,” I said one evening after the regulars had left.

“Aye love, it’s been a hard day.”

“No I mean not just tonight. Have one on me and come and have a chat.”

“Now, now it’s too late for that malarkey. I’m off to bed. Thanks for the concern.” With that she ushered me out. I did not see her again for ten years.

Her replacement was a convivial fellow and pleasant enough company but lacking the sexual frisson which I had grown so fond of with my landlady. He it was who told me that she had hardly slept and unknown to the owners of the pub had lived there rent free all the time she worked there. From time to time when passing the pub in the early hours I had seen a glow but mistakenly took it to be a security light.

In the event they discovered that she had been day trading on the Australian stock exchange during their hours of trading. When discovered she had fled. Rumour had it she had made a fortune.

My desire to hunt in Alaska was fulfilled when I took a tenancy of a flat in Juno. My surprise was only exceeded by my elation to discover that the landlady was my heart throb from The Spredaeagle and we intend to marry at the New York stock exchange next year.