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Reg Smith's Changing World

by Richard Rewell

"Bit of a bombshell today. Got a call from my daughter. Wants me to go and live with her and the grandkids, up in Norfolk. I think I'm a bit too old to emigrate. I'm 79. I'll think about it and give her a call later.

More bad news. I was in Lidl's yesterday looking at the Norwegian smoked salmon and comparing it to the cost of the Scottish when that nice Polish lad from flat 67 came up to me and said

'Mister Smith. Have you heard news. Queen's Head is shutting. Is tragic No?'

Well I was stunned; I clean forgot to look at the deal on the Nigerian Rioja and didn't gather all my faculties until I got to the check-outs.

Luckily Monty McGregor was on duty. Been a mate of mine for years. Since school in fact. His Mum and Dad were the first West Indian people to move into our block, back in fifty -eight.

'Hey Reg, you heard? The newsagent's man. It's going to be a nail parlour' said Monty.

Well I thought that makes sense really. Can't get nails and screws 'round here. We need an ironmonger. Otherwise you have to catch the number 38 to B&Q in Leytonstone. Of course, Monty put me right. But I still couldn't comprehend that someone would pay someone else to paint their bleedin' nails.

I walk to Lidl's you know. Gives me a bit of exercise. But I catch the bus back, what with all the shopping and that. So, there I was, standing at the bus stop when I notice this sign, it said 'Due to budget cuts 'Transport for London' is suspending the following routes.' The following routes! They were cutting them all bar one. The 16. And that doesn't count. That goes across the river, south. And who goes down there?

Undeterred by 'Lack of Transport for London' as I call it, I set off walking up the Romford Road, past Marks & Spencer's, the chippie and another new coffee shop. Won't the world run out of coffee beans? The shopping was feeling a bit heavy and I was working up quite a thirst, so I popped into the Crown and Anchor.

A large bulky, not unattractive young lady greeted as I neared the bar where I requested a pint of Speckled Hen.

In a strange hybrid accent combining cockney and German the young lady advised me in abrupt teutonicsque grunts that the pub no longer served British ales.

'It is only the larger you will be enjoying yes.' She said.

'No.' I replied

'Look.'" She said "You have Peruvian, Moldavian and 45 others.'

I thanked her and made a speedy withdrawal without purchasing a drink and continued my trek home only to be welcomed back by the block's lift being out of order. I live on the twentieth floor.

On the sixth floor I met that bloke who's bought flat thirty-three. He's posh but very nice. There's a few others like him that have bought in the block. Monty's Mum said it's all wrong.

'These are council flats Reg. Not for rich kids. They'll be pushing us out, you wait and see. Its ethnic cleansing. 'No, you daft thing' I said, it's called 'gentrification'. We had a good laugh.

It's getting dark now, but I can still see from my little balcony St Pauls, Tower of London and Big Ben. Lovely buildings and not like these Lego kits they give stupid names to like the 'Shard' or the 'Gherkin'. And I miss seeing my dear West Ham's ground. That's gone. They've built luxury flats on it. Nothing stays the same these days does it? Everything's fast, everything changes and everything has to be done or given instantly. Patience seems to have disappeared. Along with proper pubs.

Better go and ring my daughter. I think I will emigrate to Norfolk you know.