

Teller of Tales

by Victoria Cooper

“Three miles,” he shouted to the nearby oak tree, “three?”

Morris nervously shifted further along the park bench from the shouty man. It was a bright, sunny spring morning in Pidley Bottom and Morris had decided, a little rashly, to complete his crossword al fresco.

Thankfully the shouty man stopped shouting, but nudged Morris with a pointy elbow and gestured to a car manoeuvring next to them. It was shunting backwards and forwards, accompanied with furious revving noises.

Morris ignored the car and the man.

“Life, eh?” the man mused, “becomes an ‘abbit dun’ it?”

Morris continued to look down and scrutinise the puzzle a little more determinedly.

“I’ve got three of ‘em,” the man added, as if to explain.

“Three Beemers,” he explained, “I drive the red one on Mondays and Tuesdays, the black one on Wednesdays and Thursdays and the silver one, the convertible on Fridays and Saturdays. Every day of the week. It’s just an ‘abbit I got used to.”

Morris looked up, puzzled, and before he could stop himself asked, “what about Sundays?”

“Eh?” said the man.

“You said every day. What do you drive on Sundays?” repeated Morris.

“I don’t go out on Sundays,” replied the man shaking his head.

“Oh,” said Morris blinking.

“D’you drive then?”

“No,” said Morris, “I like walking.”

“Oh. D’ you? Yeah I like walkin’ me self. That’s why I bought an island.”

The man looked away and started to whistle tunelessly between a few lone teeth.

Morris stared at the back of his head, “you bought an island?”

The man returned his gaze and shrugged, “yeah sumfin’ off the Scottish ‘ighlands. I didn’t mean to; it was just a bet with a mate at some auction.”

Morris looked at him more closely and noticed a large toe sticking out of his boot. The man vigorously rubbed a filthy thumb along his stubbled chin.

“Anyway, must go, I’ve got a meetin’ with me bank manager.”

Morris watched him stagger balletically towards the road carrying a rolled up sleeping bag under his arm.

He returned to his crossword clue of four letters: teller of tales.