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## Big Joe

by Richard Lewis

“Here about the restaurant on the moon? Great food, no atmosphere”.

“A soldier survived mustard gas in battle and then pepper spray by the police, he’s now a seasoned veteran”.

“They all laughed when I said I wanted to be a comedian. Well they’re not laughing now”.

So it went on. Big Joe loved to tell a joke. He was the type who might not remember your name but he never forgot a good, or bad joke. However, he failed to appreciate jokes made by others. Joe’s appetite for humour was matched only by his love of food. He was an overweight, lumbering man, bald as a badger’s backside, with whiskers sprouting around the margins of his rude face, where the razor had refused to go.

He could be found performing his endless repertoire to a willing audience, at the local bowls club. It’s true he could be funny but I never felt comfortable around Joe. The constant barrage of jokes seemed a way of fending people off, like a form of social distancing.

I just couldn’t have a normal conversation with him and wondered what he might be hiding.

Joe’s compulsive need to tell jokes was increasingly becoming a problem at home, where he would burst out laughing in the middle of the night, having thought up a new joke, waking his wife Mary in the process. He seemed totally unaware of how inappropriate this had become. Eventually, unable to cope with his endless outpourings, Mary persuaded him to see the doctor who referred him for an MRI.

On arriving at outpatients, he tried out one of his latest offerings on the radiographer but she told him firmly, “this is no joking matter”, wondering how his large frame would fit into the scanner. Having managed to squeeze Joe into the machine, he fell uncharacteristically silent. Being claustrophobic, he couldn’t wait to escape.

A week later, back at the GP surgery he asked, “So doc, what’s wrong”?

“Well, said the doctor, “on the right side of your brain there’s nothing left...and on your left side, there’s nothing right.”