

Retirement Dream

by Ivor John

The door to the public house was always locked with two long sliding bolts one at the top, the other at the bottom. As well as a Yale lock and a Chubb deadlock. They had been recommended by the security advisor from 'Bsecure Security Solutions' who carried out a survey after the second time the premises had been broken into. The last time, it wasn't what had been stolen. It is hard to carry off too many cases vodka or a beer keg. No it was the damage they had caused forcing the door and smashing the backs off the fruit machines. The truth was though, that those machines took more money most days than went across the bar. Even that was getting less every day that passed.

Less people were coming. Those who did, had less money to spend. It was increasingly apparent too, that customers didn't use cash now. Most paid with their smart phones, particularly so since Covid. They didn't have cash for the fruit machines.

Today had been better than some. A group from the industrial estate had been in at lunchtime for a leaving do. Probably a dozen of them. They had food from the bar and had bought a bottle of Lambrusco so not too bad. They had used the small side room, which they had decorated with a handful of cars and tin foil balloons. 'Enjoy your retirement Terry'. They couldn't help talking about work. Even as they joked about care homes and what his wife would do, now that he would be home all day.

When they had all left, around two, to go back to work, Terry, he assumed Terry, had looked crestfallen. As they slapped his back, and wished him well, then had continued their conversations about what needed to be done. He picked up the cards from the table, and along with a left over quiche, put them into a carrier bag and left. A future without work ahead of him

Gordon remembered his own leaving party, after thirty-five years in the London Fire brigade. He had booked the backroom in the Pear Tree, Brighton Road, just down from Purley Fire Station. There had been a good turn out for him. The head of station had made a lovely speech. He had a good pension to look forward to and his mortgage paid off. He remembered though how hollow he had felt when, at the end of the evening he had left. He put it down to the amount he had drunk. Brenda had driven him home.

They had their plans though, to look forward to, he told himself. They had always dreamed of having their own pub. He imagined a bucolic future. A typical country pub with a pretty garden. A range of real ales, a guest beer which would change every time he put on a new barrel. The Crow's Nest Inn, Swanage was not that. It was on the edge of an estate rather than rural as he had always imagined. Brenda hadn't liked it. They had their pensions she had said, they were OK financially and anyway the kids were nearby and she had her friends in Purley. But he had persuaded her, that life in Dorset would be better. She could run the kitchen, they would build a reputation for fine dining and having good beers. They would be together, making a new future. It is difficult to admit that one is wrong. Particularly when one has been wrong for a very long time. He pushed the bottom bolt across with the back of his heel. He'd leave the clearing up until tomorrow. Brenda would be back from her sisters. He hoped so anyway.