

Reg from Cardiff

By Andy Strowman

I first came to his house on a December evening. The garden was a paradise for weeds. His front door was peeling and the porch light was smashed. When I knocked on the door, I expected to meet a desolate man. What I saw was a frail eighty-year-old, wearing tortoiseshell glasses, whose hair was swept back, and a very thin body who had a broad grin.

He welcomed me inside. I looked at his living room. There were no pictures. A feeling of greyness hung about the room. I noticed two pipes. One was locked into a marble ash tray. The other rested gently on the mantelpiece. Both pipe ends were well chewed. A newspaper opened at the crossword lay on his chair.

*I introduced myself. He told me his name was Reg. He asked me, "Why have you come?"*

*I said that I heard he lived alone and perhaps he needed somebody to visit him? After I said this, I sensed his shyness. We had a drink together and talked about Christmas. What would it be for him?*

*"I have a daughter," he told me, in a strong Welsh accent, "Maybe she'll come over to see me. I haven't seen her for sixteen weeks. She only lives in Watford. It's not far away, is it?". He was originally from Cardiff.*

*He said all this like one used to practising a sentence over and over again. I listened and, in my silence, I heard the voice of the Social worker when she told me, "Reg is a lonely man and he drinks a lot of alcohol because he is lonely. He has a tumour on the brain and his eye sight is going. Reg doesn't know about the tumour yet."*

*As I left the house Reg shook my hand as if I was the last person, he would ever see. It was full of warmth and his grin was transparent yet again. I came home very sad. Wrapped up with a picture of Reg inside my brain.*

*It would be easy to get too involved. That wouldn't be too good for me or for Reg.*

Reg from Cardiff Part two .By Andy Strowman,

I got asked by a woman called Mrs Haynes," Has he told you about his wife?" Mrs Haynes had been his social worker.

I replied, "No."

She said, "Well, give him time. He will."

One day Reg told me," I had a good job, Andy. I used to go to London every day and be home by seven in the evening. I came home one night and I walked in through the door. I found the television wasn't on. That's not like my wife, I thought. I found her asleep on the couch. The Doctor said she died in her sleep."

We live on the edge of everything. Birth, going to work, marriage, and death.

“I’ve got over it now,” Reg said, “You don’t believe me, do you? I miss her, but we’ll meet up again. I’m a great believer in that.”

For some strange reason I left Reg that night very content. The weeks went by. We had our funny moments like the evening he came to visit where I worked in the Science laboratory.

We both couldn’t find the light switches and both of us held onto the walls.

I visited again on Christmas Eve to deliver a calendar and a card. Reg seemed surprised. On Christmas Day while I was eating my lunch, I suddenly thought of him. Was he alone or had his daughter come?

After Christmas I visited him every week. One evening he brought out a photograph album. He opened it ever so carefully. Inside were black and white pictures when he was in India during World War Two.

“These were my mates, Andy,” he said. “They were all great blokes.”

I stared at a photo showing a group of young soldiers. I asked Reg simply, “Are any still alive?”

Tears appeared in his eyes. “They all died. Every one of them.”

“What did they die for? Why couldn’t I go with them?”, Reg said.

He shut the book, “I’ll go and put the kettle on,” he said in a whisper.

I sat and listened to the clock ticking and heard sniffing coming from the kitchen. Then the voice of Reg.

” They were all great blokes. Bloody great blokes.”

I found this story forty years after I had written it. Time has flickered by. I come to one conclusion: people like Reg are in the community. They are not rare.

Like many others who witnessed and saw, they keep their silence.

I was sitting on a train a few years ago. I looked up and saw an advertisement from Age Uk for money. The advertisement said, " Three million old people over 65 don't see anyone for a week. One million for a whole month. "

End of story.

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Ineptitude  
For Reg from Cardiff

In-between the forests of rhyme,  
I sit and fold the night away.  
Colours, meditate with me.  
Blankets of desire and ineptitude.

Now, all is vision. Secret vision.  
Go craftily, MP's will need

Your silence.

Afterwards, we awake and baffle.

Who are we?

Where do we belong?

I ask the swollen curtains every night.

Andy Strowman

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