

Summer Sun

By Mike Selby

Alf was watching the cricket through the pavilion doors. He heard 'Fore' shouted from somewhere on the field and ducked in panic.

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about that. The ball rarely gets anywhere near here these days." Jean had walked in with two trays of sandwiches and placed them on the trestle tables.

Alf looked round. "I thought I was the only one in here" he said and then added "What do you mean that it rarely gets anywhere near?"

As she turned to him, her blue floral print skirt swirled, and he noticed her white trainers beneath. A long-sleeved pale-yellow blouse covered her arms. She didn't like her arms. "We can just about get a team together these days. All the young ones leave to get jobs, so it's just us old ones left" she said.

"Do you have someone on the team then?" asked Alf

Jean was a little put off by Alf's navy shorts and contrasting never seen the sun legs. "Oh no, Dave was the council groundsman. He died seven years ago, cancer, smoking. I just keep coming, you know, it's what I always did, and it gets me out and chatting". Jean tired of explaining about Dave and provided the answers to avoid the follow up questions and draw a line.

Alf could feel that Dave was now a closed subject. He observed that Jean took care with providing the cricketer's tea. The ironed white tablecloths and the neat presentation of the sandwiches covered and labelled, ham, and cheese and cucumber, with the latter having their crusts removed. The tea urn was plugged in and just starting to make hissing sounds.

"What do you do for the vegans?" asked Alf.

"Have you seen how many cows there are round here? I've never heard anyone admit to being vegan here. Are you vegan then?" Jean looked at him with a mixture of puzzlement and surprise.

Alf smiled. "No, we only moved here nine months ago and all the work dos and the like always had the 'vegan option'." Alf thought and then added "I say we; Julie died of heart disease soon after we got here. Our retirement to the country." Alf paused and then said "Anyway, my daughter said I should get out and here I am, out".

“Oh, I am sorry,” said Jean. “That’s hard. So, you’ve come to the cricket. Do you like cricket then?”

“I haven’t got the foggiest about the game” said Alf shaking his head. “I went for a walk and saw it on the village notice board. Thought I’d take a look.” His eyebrows raised slightly as if in renewed expectation at some fresh experience. “And the loos were handy,” he added.

Jean was setting out the cups for the teas and coffees with a rhythmic clink and clatter of a practiced hand. “You see the man sat over there with the white hat?”

“Yes.”

“Well, that’s Brian. He’s the scorer and if anyone can explain what is going on, he can. Don’t even try asking me.” Jean knew the game inside out but had enough to do and so feigned ignorance.

They were suddenly interrupted by huge cheers from the small crowd and a smattering of polite applause, most likely from the visiting team.

“Someone’s hit a six” said Jean immediately realising that it would be difficult to continue the charade.

Alf smiled knowingly and looked out to see the ball being returned to the bowler. He had played some cricket at school in PE all those years ago.

Jean, setting the last of the plates offered “Well if you find cricket’s not your thing you can always try the quiz nights at the Kings Head on a Wednesday night. They’re always looking for someone to make up a team there.”

The crowd took up the applause once again and as the teams came in for their tea, Jean was suddenly busy with all the people she knew and had known for all those years.

Alf lost sight of Jean in the mele and the conversation in the room turned to which side was most likely to win. He walked out the wide folding door thinking about quiz nights.