

## NOTHING LIKE A GOOD BOOK .1 Frostick

A tiny blue glow flickered from the centre element "of Joe's gas fire, he had adjusted the controls to give an illusion of warmth in a misguided campaign for economy.

Dressed in a Burtons suit, shiny with lap-held meals that dribbled on to a golf club tie and down the cardigan, knitted by, Mary his wife forty years ago, Joe's eighty-five year old frame sat, bent like a wind-blown rowan tree on Skiddaw, presenting a sad sight in these affluent times, a condition of choice as he had savings but since Mary's death five years ago life had lost its sparkle.

Joe cut corners at every opportunity. He was never a tidy man in the home, living alone had closed his eyes to dust and dirt, reminiscing and dozing were far more important and rewarding

He was still active in the town. Charisma overcame arthritis when he attended church and golf committee meetings. Working for a large building company he had made many contacts who remained friends, visiting regularly, with today's first caller due at eleven o'clock.

Sunshine poured into his front room as the doorbell rang. Mrs Railton-Smeed, wife of Sir Gordon Smeed didn't wait to be admitted, she strode in, calling as she approached. 'Morning, lovely day, are you well?'

'Yes fine, and you?'

'I am well Joe, I have brought you a bunch of snowdrops, they are first of the season.'

Lady Smeed sat down, elegantly resting her arm on the moquet arm that had worn through to base material. An antimacassar draped across the back had once been pale and embroidered but was now almost black. The cushion shone with dried dinners, while numerous plums from Morton pie fillings amalgamated into the Wilton carpet.

The lady who had led a life of luxury in which comparison was unnecessary, ignored her surroundings concentrating on structural problems experienced at home, that had once been Joe's professional responsibility They drank tea from chipped mugs and the good lady made her exit like a galleon in full sail.

Lunch was a low-key affair. Just two rounds of bread accompanied by cheese that had dried to become deeply fissured and hard.

Two callers had invited themselves during the afternoon, both with religious intentions. The first, Elaine Thurtle arrived with a restless stabbing of the door bell. 'Joe, I've just popped in to confirm you will be at my bible studies tomorrow.' Elaine, who had been a high-flying executive in London, now at home to retire, where she planned to enlighten a backward bunch of, straw-suckers.

Joe was a believer with reservations. Not too happy about the origins of Jesus, he chose Isaiah who promised a human visitation from Heaven without an actual date, eliminating any chance of the New Testament hippies being proved wrong.

Elaine, who chose a relatively clean dining chair with loose joints on which to rest her substantial frame did not move when expected, rendering Joe restless as caller two was due to arrive but as if God came to the rescue, number one left as number two pulled up in her modest motor.

Susan, natural blonde and beautiful had a nature matching her appearance, but she was a Jehovah's Witness, considered by Elaine to be a cult run by the devil and reason for Joe's apprehension. He never attended Witness meetings or agreed with their strange restrictions but he loved the girl's fruit cake for which he was prepared to buy their literature promising, membership-only entrance to Heaven, negotiated by Charles Taze Russell in eighteen fifty two.

Susan indulged her host's passion for the Old Testament, gave Joe a kiss on his head and set off on a recruitment drive for Charles.

Joe relaxed, turned down the heating and dozed.

'Joe, Joe! I've brought you one of your favourites, *'Steers across Arizona'* I prefer war stories.' Sid from next door had delivered a library book. After thanking him and thinking, 'If he had pulled the trigger on a reluctant German soldier, leaving his widow to cry forever, war would not be so attractive to him.

Yesterday's left-overs heated and eaten Joe settled down, pulled on a Stetson, swung a leg over his beloved horse and ploughed a dusty trail into the sunset.