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Smallholder Sid...

...gets my goat

They normally had the snug to themselves in the Cowpat and Fly - just the three of them. There was Smallholder Sid, red faced overweight, balding and, frankly, ugly. Then there was Allotment Holder Alice, petite, a little like one of the geraniums that she did not grow on her window sill. And finally there was Farmer Fred, gaunt, with a thick crop of hair and a perpetually worried expression on his face.

The trio have met together for many years in the snug to discuss matters agricultural and horticultural and to grumble about the government, Brexit, Remain, the price of onions, the state of the law and many other things that concern not only this trio but the loyal readers of Harrowing Times.

They always drink pints of Old Fart and many wrongs of the world are put to rights over this foaming brew.

Usually Fred begins to nod off after his second or third pint of Old Fart but of late he has begun to show something of an interest in Alice. His advances have so far not been entirely rebuffed. Indeed on this chilly February evening Fred had called round to Alice's tiny thatched cottage somewhere beyond Edingthorpe and brought her to the Cowpat and Fly in his elderly pick-up. He even removed some of the straw from the seat before collecting her.

Now they were all together but they were not alone. Sitting in the corner, away from the blazing log fire (around which our trio was nestled), was a man who looked a little like an elf. He had a goatee beard and a triangular face. He was immersed in a magazine and occasionally took little sips from his glass.

As usual Sid kicked off with his grumble of the moment. The other two tried not to exchange glances but Alice achieved a surreptitious wink without Sid noticing.

"It's these bloody people with goats," he bellowed. "They think they can rule my life. I am trying to grow a crop of wheat but crows, rabbits and heaven knows what else land on my field and chomp away. The crops would not stand a chance."

As he said this, there came a little bleating noise from the man in the corner. Sid gave him a dirty look before resuming.

"So I have these old fashioned fire crackers. I have them on my fence and they go off at irregular intervals. Cor you should see the crows caw. That makes 'em jump. I reckon it's cut down the bird nuisance by at least half."

"So what's the problem?" ventured Alice.

"It's that man with the goats". Never seen him but he emails me all the time. And yesterday I got a letter from a so called solicitor telling me I was committing a public nuisance and causing his goats to have a miscarriage.



Bloody nonsense. I bet he is one of those London types and doesn't know one end of a goat from another."

From the corner of the snug there was a loud clatter. The man with the beard stood up, knocking over his chair and hurling down his magazine. Later Alice was to swear that the magazine's title read "Elf and Safety."

In a reedy voice the man shouted at Sid –

"Them's my goats and I am NOT from London. I am from Hindolveston and proud of it. AND two of my nanny goats have had miscarriages. The bangs from your crackers make them jump over the fence and escape. In fact one of them went into your field and started to eat your crops, so a fat lot of the bangers do. My goats can out-eat a dozen birds at any time."

Sid was not used to people standing up to him, especially if they looked like an elf. He went red in the face. His eyes bulged. His nostrils flared. He started to inhale deeply. The tension mounted.

Alice and Fred held their breath. Which way was it going to go? Would a fight break out? Would they be kicked out of the snug, never to return to the Cowpat and Fly?

Then suddenly Sid exhaled.

"Er... ok mate, yes I guess they was a bit noisy. Sorry and all that. I'll just use them occasionally then."

To the astonishment of Alice and Fred, Sid not only stretched out his hand to the Elf man, but did something he almost never did: he offered to buy him a drink.

It was a close run thing, but peace was not only restored but the elf man came to join them. He introduced himself as Gordon and talked so long about goats that Fred started to nod off despite being kicked in the shins several times by Alice.

Will the trio become a quartet with the addition of Gordon the goat man? Read the next thrilling instalment to find out.

Vaguely Serious legal note

Having a bird scarer is not in itself illegal, but the local authority can investigate noise nuisance. If a complaint is justified in terms of loudness and/or frequency an abatement notice can be served if a land owner does not cut down on the noise. In an extreme case the Magistrates Court can impose a large fine. All in all Sid was therefore wise to make peace with Gordon the goat man.

By Richard Barr

For more of what he writes grab a copy of his book *The Savage Poodle* (available on Amazon) or log onto www.richardbarrwriter.co.uk

Listen to him from time to time rattling on about law on BBC Radio Norfolk (the Chrissie Jackson mid-morning show every month or so).