

This is a piece done for one of our "write ahead nights."

The title was Confession

They say confession is good for the soul. I'm not so sure. I'd confess to anything if I thought it would benefit me in some way. Confessing to a total inability to cook has meant many women find they have a reason to invite me for an evening meal. Those have led on a significant and pleasurable number of occasions to late-night cycle rides home through the village. Cycling is the best way for a bachelor like me to get about. A car moving about after midnight can have the neighbourhood watch twitching their curtains.

Which is why I became the neighbourhood watch coordinator. You see this gives me the excuse to knock on any door at any time. I find spinsters and young widows are particularly vulnerable to crime today so I find I need and want to concentrate on their needs. So it was with some alarm when I received an invitation to visit Roger Castle at his home. Roger is the senior churchwarden of Saint Mary the Blessed Virgin here in Highton Wembow. I have always suspected he was an advanced curtain twitcher and as he lived on the corner of my lane I am unable to get home without passing his house.

The reception was very formal. Frosty indeed. He ushered me into what I presumed was the lounge. There was no fire and coffee or something stronger that was not offered. I was shown a large overstuffed armchair. Too low for me but I perched awkwardly on the front edge. Castle stood with his back to the empty fire. He cleared his throat in a way I haven't heard since maths in the sixth form.

"The vicar is leaving us."

I was sad to hear that. Isabel had only been here 12 months but I've come to look forward to a steak supper with extras at the new vicarage most second Fridays. I wondered if the new vicar would be as attractive. Maybe a blonde at this time. Vicarages were tempting targets for thieves. I would make sure that she understood that fact. And also in my lack of skills in the kitchen, but not elsewhere. Roger went on "She confessed to me behaviour which is totally inappropriate in a minister."

David Smith