

SERENDIPITY by Graham      November 2024

Andrew lived in Hastings in a one-bedroom flat on the top floor of a block in Saxon Way at 11 Castle View which, as its name suggested was situated within view of Hastings Castle.

Andrew who was single and approaching 50 had lived in the flat for the past 14 years and was beginning to feel reasonably settled. Even prior to the pandemic he had worked almost entirely from home for a company who at a cost specialised in providing travel insurance cover for the very elderly and those with known medical conditions.

Andrew belonged to his local library, and he particularly liked reading historical novels. He also enjoyed walking, photography, knitting and Strictly.

He largely kept himself to himself and tended to avoid social gatherings excepting family weddings and funerals. In fact he would go to the most extraordinary lengths to avoid even informal interaction and to this end he hadn't made the acquaintance of a single soul who lived in Castle View.

When shopping he always went to the self-service till and as far as Andrew was concerned Amazon Prime, WhatsApp, Internet banking and the suchlike were all absolute god sends.

Andrew did occasionally wish that he could meet another likeminded soul but he had in effect given up and he largely lived in a state of singular contentment.

Andrew recognised that he was a dull person but nevertheless kind and above all a harmless soul who had slid unannounced on to life's stage and who would in all probability make an unpretentious exit.

Normally on his annual leave he travelled by train to the lake district where he stayed in the same B&B and walked the fells on his well-trodden routes. However, on this occasion inspired by the recent Olympic coverage he had made for him what was a once in a lifetime decision to venture abroad and to go by Euro star to Paris.

As he stood in front of the Eiffel Tower it caused him to shiver with a mix of excitement and disbelief and tears of emotion slowly trickled down his cheeks. He methodically raised his phone to take a photo and looked at the resultant image with a certain amount of pride and satisfaction that he had ventured to the continent.

Suddenly a rather timid female voice said, "Excuse me". It startled Andrew and he quickly turned to come face to face with a plain but pleasant enough looking woman in her forties who continued... "Would you mind taking my photo?" Andrew panicked somewhat and fumbled to find a pocket to put his own phone before blurting out... "yes where do you want to stand?" She smiled and replied.. "I think in front of this tower would be best" Andrew managed an anxious smile and nervously took the camera from her outstretched hand and then after a number of attempts somehow managed to fit in the woman and as far as he could judge most of the Eiffel Tower... She took her camera back, looked at the photo and said "that's perfect thank you so much...where have you come from?"

"Err Hastings in Sussex"

"That's a coincidence I'm from Hastings... whereabouts in Hastings?"

Andrew hesitated as he certainly wasn't used to this level of familiarity but, he felt somewhat cornered....

"Saxon Way".....

"Snap so do I in Castle View up on the top floor."

Andrew began to nervously wonder if she was a stalker but he was beginning to relax and said..

"That's extraordinary I live on the top floor at number forty two".

She stood back with her hands to her face and began laughing uncontrollably. Andrew smiled and laughed along with her when she managed to say... "I'm at forty three... ..my goodness we're next door neighbours! ".

They arranged to meet the next day and walk along the Champs Elysees. As they approached the Arc De Triomphe Andrew surreptitiously took her hand, and they briefly glanced at one another with a knowing smile.