

A Masterpiece of Construction

It was a masterpiece of construction, of that they could all agree; impenetrable, complex, brutal almost. Not one of the three occupying the table in the corner had ever been allowed in. Another thing they had in common. Over a glass of white wine and soda, a half pint of lager, and a pint of cider and black variously, comparisons of experience were indulged and exchanged. It was, suggested Suzanne, as though he had built it entirely out of steel mesh and razor wire. Kathleen laughed gutturally, before adding a year's supply of corrugated iron to the ingredients.

Peculiar, how all three remained fascinated despite their failure to be allowed in. Almost as if it had been a test, a challenge, a gauntlet laid: who could breach security first. Or even at all. Kathleen had spent three weeks trying to get in, Suzanne's attempt was singular in duration. Perhaps, they joked, the hurdle at which they fell was the f-word. Kathleen had found football an insufficient glue. Don't say you fancy the opposition's number nine when he scores all four goals: advice suggested too late. Much to Suzanne's surprise, food did not live up to its promise either. Note to self, she said: pork scratchings in a vegetarian pasta dish are unwise. A lesson learned.

Victoria had been the most successful of the trio, if measurement of time could be counted as such. Just over a half century of days had elapsed before the fortnight away brought a close to proceedings. A key had been cut, admission more likely than ever before. But the perks of work can provide simultaneous perils. Fourteen days in a hotel on a management getaway, sufficient time for that key to be

lost. Just as well, she considered with a giggle of slight inebriation; the door was probably booby-trapped with drawing pins.

From behind the trenches, the old oak bar upon which drinks at the Scotswood were served, I heard it all. None of it mattered. Not remotely. Not until Victoria suggested the f-word was 'feelings'. Too close to the bone. They laughed. Another round was suggested. I served Victoria with a smile. Retiring to the till, I picked up a pen. The ultraviolet pen, the one used to check fraudulent notes. On the back of my hand I wrote, invisibly tattooed: "Beware, my heart," then passed her some loose change.

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