

The Argument Over Nothing

By Charlie Watts

Every morning begins the same.

The chairs come down before the kettle goes on. Someone asks if the weather's changing. Someone else says it already has. Edmund delivers bread before half past seven, always pretending he hasn't brought an extra loaf because he knows somebody will forget breakfast.

People think running a public house is mostly pouring ale.

It isn't.

It's listening.

This morning's great debate began before I'd finished polishing the first glass.

Reggie insisted the swallows had returned three days earlier than last year.

Virgil said they hadn't.

Reggie claimed he'd written it down.

Virgil asked where.

Reggie said, "On the calendar."

Virgil pointed out that Reggie hadn't bought a calendar since 1909.

That seemed to offend him.

By half past eight there were six men discussing migrating birds as though the future of the Empire depended upon it.

Mrs. Fenwick wandered through, listened for perhaps thirty seconds, shook her head, and announced they'd all forgotten the geese.

Nobody knew what she meant.

She refused to explain.

Another mystery solved.



Fernando de Gerste, Charlie Watts, Miss Sloane Duffy

Or unsolved.

It's much the same thing around here.

Just then the front door opened.

In walked Alfie Potts.

Before I'd managed to say good morning, old Reggie looked up and shouted—

"Here comes the First Lord of the Admiralty!"

Half the room joined in.

"Winnie!"

"Winnie!"

"The Admiralty's ashore!"

Alfie removed his cap with the sort of long-suffering dignity that only comes from hearing the same joke for the better part of twenty years.

"My name," he announced, "has always been Alfie."

"Has it?" asked Virgil.

"It has."

"Funny."

"What's funny?"

"We've been calling you Winnie so long I'd nearly forgotten."

The room erupted.

Even Alfie smiled.

He tried not to.

He failed.

I poured his usual before he reached the bar.

"You encourage them," he muttered.

"I do no such thing."

"You absolutely do."

"I merely serve refreshments."

He looked over at Reggie and Virgil, who had somehow resumed arguing about birds.

"Still at it?"

"They'll have it settled by lunchtime."

"And then?"

"They'll start on the weather."

He nodded.

"As it should be."

That's the thing about villages.

Outsiders imagine they run on grand occasions.

Truth is, they run on small disagreements, familiar faces, and knowing which pint belongs to which hand before it's even ordered.

If ever those things stop...

Well.

I'd sooner not think about it.

Now then.

If you'll excuse me, someone's insisting the robin arrived before the blackbird.

I'm expected to have an opinion.

I don't.

But they'll ask anyway.

Charlie Watts is a fictional character in the Duffy & Ward universe, created by Sloane Duffy Media LLC. He has been behind the bar for as long as anyone can remember—and has no intention of standing anywhere else. © 2026 Sloane Duffy Media LLC.

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