

The Tangletree Village Bike Race.

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Tangletree Major is a sleepy little village deep in the country. The main road, though it isn't very busy, runs through the middle and passes the village green and the Parish Church. The village green is very pretty and, at one end, near the Church, there is a pond with fish and a family of ducks. There is also a Post Office Store and the 'Lonsdale Arms', a pub where the villagers often meet for a drink in the evenings and sometimes before lunch on Sunday.

Opposite the green, on the other side of the road, there is a bakery, a newspaper shop and a garage and bike shop owned by Mr. Saddlepump, a newcomer to the village who has not been living there for very long.

At the other end of the green is a lane that leads to a big old manor house, the home of Sir Henry Plumrose, whose family has lived there for hundreds of years. Sir Henry thinks that he is the most important person in the village and is pompous, arrogant and often rude to his neighbours.

The Vicar, Reverend Fontpew, agrees that Sir Henry is very important, as does the Post-master, Mr. Stamper, but most of the other villagers either don't care or think that Sir Henry is a stupid old twit.

Every July, the villagers hold the 'Tangletree Summer Fayre' on the Village Green. Everybody helps by running stalls and organising activities to raise money for the church. Each year, Sir Henry opens the Fayre with a boring speech; the only really important thing he ever does.

Reverend Fontpew is in charge of the organising committee and fusses about, getting in everybody's way. Mrs. Fontpew sells plants and vegetables from her garden; Mr. Kegfroth, from the pub, sells old-fashioned beer to the grown-ups; Mr. Stamper and his wife have a 'bric-a-brac' stall selling ornaments, second-hand toys, unwanted presents and other things; Miss Doughbun, from the bakery, runs a cake stall and other villagers run a tombola, lucky dips and all the things that you usually find at a fayre.

The Tangletree Summer Fayre is always the same; Sir Henry, in his boring opening speech always refers to 'history' and 'tradition', in fact his speech is always the same, many of the older villagers know it as well as he does.

Mr. Saddlepump, without meaning to, caused a big row when last year's Fayre was being organised; he thought that it would be a good idea to have bike races for the children. He said that he would provide bikes for any children who did not have a suitable one of their own and the kids, or their parents, would be expected to make a small donation to the charity to enter and should get sponsored by their relatives and

friends. Mr. Saddlepump would make all the arrangements and give a valuable prize to the winner. The vicar and the committee said that it was a splendid idea so Mr. Saddlepump had entry forms printed and put up some big posters around the village. The Vicar agreed to put an advertisement for the race in the Parish magazine.

Sir Henry was away in London when the posters were put up and, as he drove home in his old Rolls Royce, he just happened to notice a new poster on the Church notice board. His car screeched to a standstill, he got out to see what it said and was furious; he nearly exploded with rage, "How dare they!" he shouted as he tore it down, getting very red in the face, "How dare they do this to MY Fayre?"

He threw the screwed up poster to the ground, stormed back to his car and drove the short distance straight to the Vicar's house. He banged on the door shouting, "Fontpew, Fontpew, where are you, man?"

The vicar opened the door, Sir Henry carried on shouting, "Fontpew, how dare you, what are you playing at.....?"

"I'm sorry, Sir Henry...."

"Don't interrupt, man; what are you up to?"

"Well, er...umm..."

"Don't interrupt while I am talking, who do you think you are?"

"I'm sorry, Sir Henry; I am really sorry."

"I should think so too, now, I will leave it to you to sort it out, Good-night, Vicar, Good-night."

Reverend Fontpew was very confused, he did not know what Sir Henry was so angry about, and he didn't know what he had to sort out.

CHAPTER 2

Early next morning, before it was light, the Vicar was making himself a cup of tea; he had not slept very well, worrying about Sir Henry's outburst, and decided that there was no point lying in bed wide awake. While he was pouring his tea, he heard the milkman outside and, as he arrived at the door, asked him if he wanted a cup.

The milkman, his name was Michael Fullchurn but most people called him 'Mick the Milk', said he would have a quick cup and sat down at the kitchen table. He could see that the Vicar was uneasy and asked him if there was anything he could do to help.

Reverend Fontpew told him about Sir Henry's noisy visit the previous evening and said that he really didn't know what he had to do. Mick said that he would see what he could find out from his other customers; someone might know what it was all about.

Mick the Milk delivered the usual four pints to the Inn, Mrs. Kegfroth knew nothing that would help. Mrs. Dustpan, Sir Henry's housekeeper at the Manor, thought it might be something to do with bicycles, "Sir Henry came in last night in a very bad mood," she said, "he was ranting and raving about bicycles but I really don't know why, I have no idea."

Miss Doughbun was more helpful, she said that she had been walking her dog on the village green when Sir Henry came home, she had seen him stop his car and tear down one of the posters; she heard him shout, "How dare they do this to my Fayre!" as he screwed up the paper and threw it to the ground. She continued, "I was still on the Green when he came back a few minutes later, he must have felt guilty about dropping litter, because he picked up the paper and put it in his car."

Mick began to think that the problem could have been that Mr. Saddlepump had not asked Sir Henry's permission for the bike races. Sir Henry must have thought that he should have been asked; he was, in his opinion, the most important person in the village; it was HIS Fayre and nobody would do anything without his permission.

Mick was worried that the argument might spoil the Fayre for everyone. He went back to the vicarage when he had finished his milk round and told the Vicar what he had found out.

The Vicar was very upset, "Oh dear," he said, "what am I going to do? Perhaps Sir Henry is right, bicycles are very dangerous things and we don't know much about Mr. Saddlepump, he hasn't lived here very long, has he? And what about Health and Safety?"

"Now listen, Vicar," the milkman replied, "the bike races are an excellent idea, Health and Safety has got nothing to do with it; we all agreed about it, and I'm sure that Mr. Saddlepump will do a very good job...."

"But Sir Henry says no," interrupted the Vicar, "he won't allow them and we must do what he tells us."

"I don't agree, he might think that it is his Fayre but it isn't, it's the Village Fayre."

By now, many of the villagers had heard about Sir Henry's rage; news travels quickly in a small community and people began talking in small groups. Most of them said that Sir Henry was wrong, it wasn't his Fayre and they all thought that the bike race idea was a good one.

Mr. Kegfroth called in at the vicarage, he wanted to keep in Sir Henry's good books and said to the Vicar, "Ah! Fontpew, you've made a right mess of things haven't you? I hear that you've upset Sir Henry. You should have had more sense."

"But you agreed that the races were a good idea." he replied.

"No point in arguing, old man; what are you going to do about it?"

"I shall have to go to the garage and talk to Mr. Saddlepump. I don't suppose that he'll be too pleased, will you come with me?"

"No Reverend, I will not," he replied, solemnly, "it's your problem, you, I'm afraid, will have to sort it out."

In the meantime, the milkman had driven back to the dairy and on the way had stopped to warn Mr. Saddlepump that he could be in the middle of a big problem.

"Thanks for warning me, Mr. Fullchurn...."

"Call me Mick, please, everyone else does."

"Okay. Mick, but what should I do about it?" he replied.

"Don't do anything yet; I have a plan that might work. Let's hope that the old wimp, Reverend Fontpew, can't find the guts to come and see you for a while," the milkman explained. "I must get back to the depot and make a phone call; leave it to me, as I said, I have a plan."

From the office at the dairy, Mick phoned his area manager, confirmed that the dairy's 'Sports Sponsorship Scheme' was still running and then outlined the problem, and his idea for a solution.

Within minutes, the area manager had phoned Sir Henry. He picked his words very carefully, he had been told that Sir Henry was a difficult man to deal with and liked to think that he was the one who had all the good ideas. The area manager explained to Sir Henry that the dairy had some money to give to local charities and that they were looking for a village Fete or Summer Fayre to support. He said that he had been told that Tangletree Major always had an excellent Fayre and wondered if it would qualify, and he, Sir Henry, would be able to accept a donation for his charity.

Sir Henry was very flattered and said that it was an excellent idea, he would be delighted to accept, on behalf of his committee of course.

"Splendid," said the area manager, "we thought that we could sponsor part of the event, perhaps you could organise a bicycle race or something like that; though we are particularly keen on bike races; you could call it the 'Tangletree Milk Race'. Our local man, Fullchurn, can make the arrangements with you, perhaps you've got a garage or cycle shop in the village that could help him?"

At the same time that Sir Henry was on the phone, Reverend Fontpew had persuaded Mr. Kegfroth to go with him to talk to Mr. Saddlepump. The Vicar felt very uncomfortable and didn't know what to say and Mr. Kegfroth was no help, he was quietly enjoying seeing the vicar's discomfort. The vicar talked about the weather, the ducks on the pond, the amount of traffic passing along the main road and all sorts of trivial things and, eventually, he plucked up courage and blurted out, "We can't have the bike races at the Fayre."

At that moment, Sir Henry walked through the door. The Vicar smiled at him, weakly; Mr. Kegfroth moved quietly towards the door, ready to escape if it became necessary; Mr. Saddlepump took in a deep breath and glared at Sir Henry, ready for an argument.

"Fontpew, you idiot," said Sir Henry, "Why can't we have bike races, what's wrong with bike races, I'm sure that the youngsters will love them."

"But, Sir Henry..."

"Don't 'but Sir Henry' me you silly old buffoon, I was thinking that a bike race would be a good idea for the children, it's time we brought our Fayre up to date. I've

spoken to the area manager at the dairy. The dairy is going to sponsor the race and donate some money to the Church. I think it's a first class idea and I want you, Saddlepump to organise it for us. Fullchurn will give you a hand."

Reverend Fontpew and Mr. Kegfroth walked back across the green feeling quite stupid; they could not understand why Sir Henry had changed his tune. Saddlepump phoned Mick to tell him what had happened and arranged a meeting to work out the details.

CHAPTER 3

Tangletree Major Summer Fayre was a great success; it was a lovely day and everyone enjoyed themselves. The bike race was particularly exciting, the start was on the Village Green and then up the lane, past the Manor House, into Badger's Wood and then, eventually, back to the Village Green. The older children would have to do four laps and the younger ones would only do three. Reverend Fontpew dropped the flag and the cyclists raced away, past the Church and into the lane that passed Sir Henry's mansion. They then turned off the lane and into the Wood. The racers followed the winding bumpy track through the woods and past the ancient twisted Hazel tree that gave the village its name, until they came to the lane behind the pub. From there it was a quick dash, back to the Green, and the start of another lap.

Jeremy, one of the younger racers, who had to do only three laps, was already well into his last lap when the main racers rushed into their final lap and started to close up the gap between him and themselves. Anthony and Katie passed Jeremy as they came onto the green for the last time and Katie put in a great effort; she passed Anthony a short distance from the finish line and won the race. He was very surprised when she passed him and tried to put on a spurt but his foot slipped off the pedal and he almost fell off his bike and Jeremy, who was still very close behind Katie, managed to sneak past to snatch second place.

The public address system had been reporting on the race and, as it finished, there was a large crowd cheering on the competitors. As the racers finished, they were all so tired that they tumbled off their bikes and collapsed on the grass.

Most of the children in the village had entered the race and everybody cheered the eventual winner. There were three prizes, The Saddlepump trophy for the fastest girl and the Tangletree Milk trophy for the overall winner. There was also a prize for the winner of the four-lap race.

Katie Kegfroth, the Innkeeper's daughter won the first two prizes, the overall winner and the fastest girl. Her father was very proud when Sir Henry presented

the prizes to her. Jeremy won the prize for the three lap race, he was the fastest younger entrant.

Reverend Fontpew fussed around, still getting in everyone's way but he was very pleased with all the hard work that was being done and the money that was being collected for his church. He kept repeating, "Ah, splendid, splendid..... Bless you, my child..... Wonderful, wonderful.....God bless you."

Mick the Milk felt very pleased with himself as he stood by his milk float giving free pints of milk to all the children as they finished their race. His clever plan had saved the Fayre from disaster.

"Well done kids," he said, "this is what you need; a nice bottle of milk is far better for you than all that fizzy stuff you get in cans." Mr. Saddlepump and the milkman were the only ones who knew what made Sir Henry change his mind and they both kept it a secret. Reverend Fontpew kept asking Mick what he had done to make Sir Henry change his mind. The milkman didn't tell him, he just replied, "Vicar, you of all people, should know that the Lord moves in mysterious ways...."