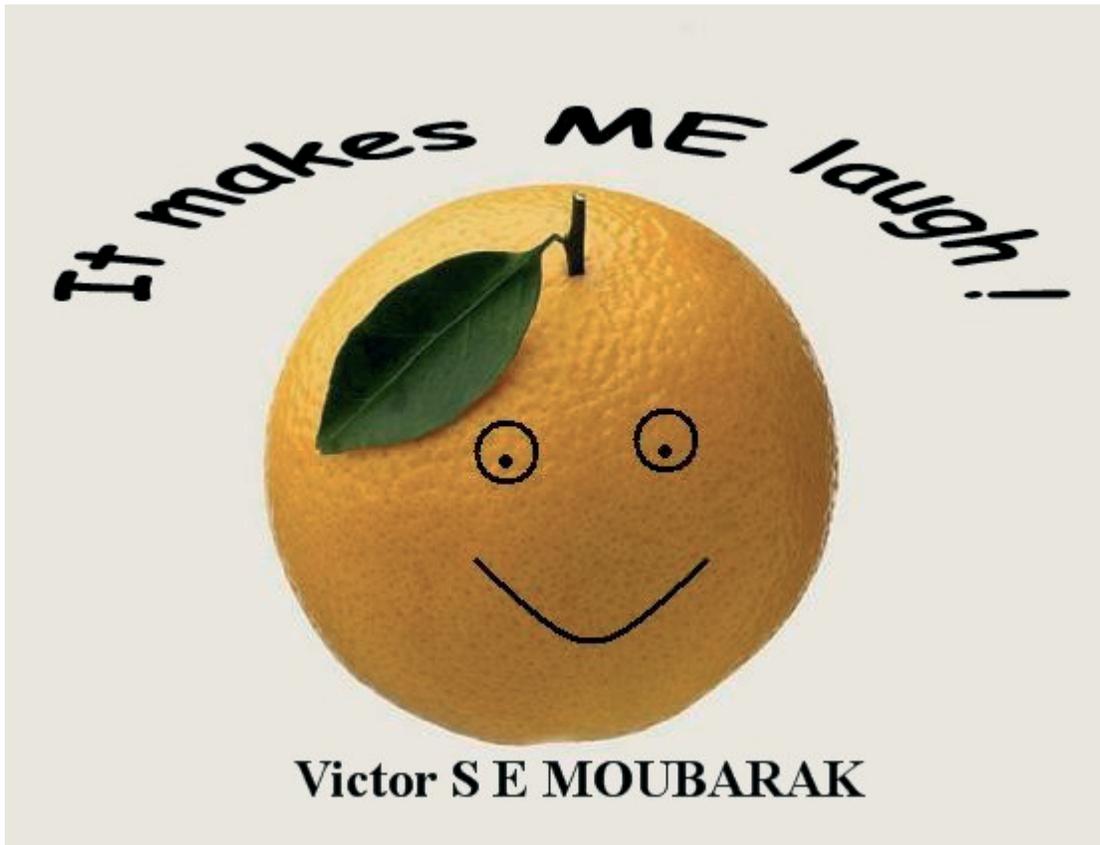


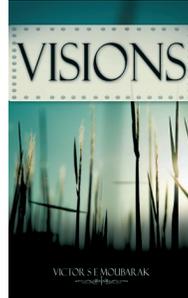
LIFE - IT MAKES *ME* LAUGH

LIFE



FOREWORD

Also by **Victor S E Moubarak**



“VISIONS” (ISBN 978 1 60477 032 2).

“VISIONS” is a fictional story of three children who see an apparition of the Lord Jesus on their way to church. They tell their priest, Father Ignatius, about it; and pretty soon news spreads throughout town.

People react to the news in different ways. Some readily believe; others mock and scoff in disbelief, whilst some react violently towards the children and their families.

Parishioners seek guidance from Father Ignatius whereas the Church seeks to hush the whole story in the hope that it goes away; whilst Jesus appears again and again.

“VISIONS” challenges readers to ask what they would do in a similar situation – as Christians, as parents or just as onlookers.

A vibrant tale of supernatural events, with a fast-paced storyline and strong believable characters, “VISIONS” is a challenging must-read Christian book for everyone ready for a reality check on what they actually believe.

“VISIONS” is available from all good bookstores and on the Internet.

I pray that God blesses each one of you dear readers, old and new, and may He be with you and your families always.

Victor S E Moubarak

www.holyvisions.co.uk

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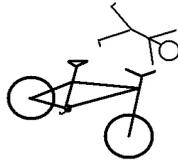
UNCLE HERBERT

ONE CASKET OR TWO?

MADMOISELLE VERONIQUE TOMBAL

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BICYCLE



After much thought and deliberation I have come to the conclusion that bicycles are dangerous and should be abolished. I don't mean motorcycles; but common old pedal cycles.

Let me explain.

In an effort to be environmentally friendly and to save the planet I've decided to cycle to work instead of taking the car. "Quite laudable", I hear you say; and you'd better say it because I've risked life and limb to save this planet of ours from pollution and whatever else it suffers from.

Besides, gas (petrol) costs so much these days, so a bit of cycling would save me money, I thought. These days when I fill the tank it costs me more than the value of the car itself.

As I was saying before I interrupted myself ... I bought a new bicycle and with it a book entitled "How to ride a bike in one easy lesson!" You should read it I think ... all one hundred pages of it!

My first difficulty was reading the book and attempting to cycle at the same time. Can't be done! Not enough hands to hold the book and handlebars simultaneously.

So I rode the bike, leant on a nearby tree on the sidewalk, and read the book.

Passers-by wondered what I was doing but I fooled them by looking at my watch every now and then and pretending I was waiting for someone.

Eventually, I was ready to go. I put the book in the little pannier at the front of the bike, and eased myself gently away from the tree.

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For some unexplained reason my feet froze on the pedals and the cycle did not move. It stood still for a second or two and then fell horizontally to the left.

I hit my head hard on the grass verge, but luckily I was wearing my new helmet which softened the blow somewhat akin to being punched hard by a champion boxer. I waited for a count of ten before getting up again.

I leant against the tree, re-read the first chapter of the book, and started again.

Success! This time I fell horizontally to the right and hit my head hard on the firm tarmac. The helmet was not as effective at softening the blow.

Several falls later, five to the left and four to the right, I decided to change strategy.

This time I pressed hard on the pedals as I moved away from the tree. The bicycle moved forward a few yards but then lost momentum and fell ... to the right I think!

My determination egged me forward as I eventually managed to turn the pedals a few more times and move further on ... wobbling as I went.

And then disaster struck. My trousers got caught in the chain contraption near the pedals and the bicycle jumped forward like a bucking bronco throwing me head first over the handlebars and landing me hard on my back with the bike on top of me still attached to my trouser leg.

The next day I tried again. I really had to master this new mode of transport over the weekend if I'm to cycle to work on Monday.

As they say, necessity is the mother of invention.

I think I've invented, or to be more accurate, discovered, a major improvement to be incorporated in the manufacture of bicycles. They should all be fitted with satellite navigation systems as a standard feature.

This is essential, I believe, to avoid the dangers of cycling at some speed into trees, lamp posts, letter boxes and other street furniture.

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As I managed to gain forward movement I noticed that my cycle always managed to go straight for a stationary object rather than avoid it as a car would do.

Somehow, the handle bars would wobble left and right yet still propel the bike towards the obstacle it is meant to avoid.

Anyway ... what's all this leading to, I hear you say.

Basically, it's that this latest experience reminded me of a story an old priest friend of mine told me years ago.

Once upon a time there was a young boy of six who'd been taught by his parents that Jesus is always with him. Protecting him, helping him, and guiding him throughout life.

One Sunday afternoon they all went out cycling in the park. Mom and dad on their bicycles followed by the six-years old on his small tri-cycle!

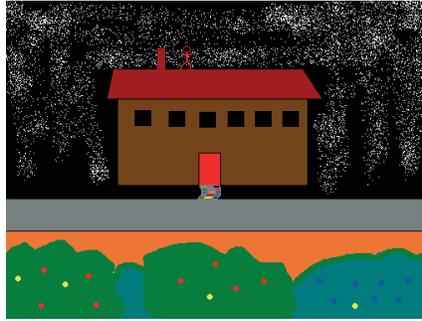
They cycled gently until they reached a small hill. Easy enough for the parents to climb; but a little hard on the little boy, despite his parents' encouragement.

He pedalled as hard as he could with his little legs but the tri-cycle would not move forward; in fact it was sliding backwards somewhat.

Eventually the boy got off his cycle and said: "It's no use Jesus. You'll have to get off the bike and help me push!"

Now why can't we have as much Faith?

HELPING AUNTIE



There are times dear friends when one thing leads to another and a collection of events follow each other as if conspiring to make ones life, or my life to be precise, ever so difficult and embarrassing.

There I was visiting an old aunt in the countryside the other day. She lives in a lovely cottage in a small secluded village where everyone knows everyone else. It's not a big house, two up and two down as they call it in old parlance, meaning that apart from the bathroom and toilet she has two bedrooms upstairs, and a living and dining room downstairs. Not forgetting the kitchen, of course.

She made me a nice pot of tea and biscuits and we sat by the open fire reminiscing about the past and how different life was then.

Whilst chatting with her I noticed that the smoke from the log fire tended, every now and then, to blow back into the room rather than flow gently up the chimney. A typical sign of a blockage somewhere in the chimney, I thought.

As it was the weekend, it would be almost impossible to get the services of a chimney sweep. You know the kind, a Dick Van Dyke sort of fellow like in the film *Mary Poppins*. Come to think of it, I've never seen such a fellow ever; especially now that most people live in air-conditioned and centrally-heated buildings. Not much call for chimney sweeps most of the time, let alone weekends.

Being a kind sort of person, as I usually remind myself, I tried to sort things out for my old aunt.

Big mistake!

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I went outside to see if there was smoke coming out of the chimney and noticed, quite visibly, bits of twigs and straw pieces on top of the chimney. It was obvious that a big bird had attempted to build a nest there.

This can be easily removed, I thought, as I put the ladder against the wall and climbed up quite confidently. Once up top, my confidence began to wane.

How do I get to the chimney, which was situated some distance from the edge of the house? In the center of the roof, in fact!

I eased myself gently onto the roof, stood up gingerly, and attempted to walk very slowly and extremely carefully towards the apex of the roof to reach the chimney.

I looked down and saw my aunt standing there, Rosary in hand.

There are times, believe me, when a Rosary does not inspire much confidence; and this was such a moment. All I needed is a priest and an undertaker standing there beside her to drain any remaining ounce of courage still lurking within me.

I smiled at her and moved on ever so slowly until I reached the chimney.

I reached for the offending debris in order to remove it from the opening and ... dash it all ... it slid gently down the chimney.

I grasped the chimney tightly with both arms hugging it for dear life as I almost lost my footing.

What do I do now? Do I leave the straw there and climb down, having made a bad situation worse? Or do I manly continue with my mission to help an aunt in distress?

What if I reached inside the chimney and try to grab the straw out?

I courageously stood up straight, still holding tight to the chimney, and slowly let go of my right arm and reached down the chimney.

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Can't find a thing ... a little deeper ... yes, I can feel the bits of straw ... reach in a bit more.

Panic! I'm stuck. I can't pull my arm out. Help somebody!

"Are you OK?" I hear auntie calling. She can't see me from where she's standing, so she crosses the road to see me stuck there up her chimney.

"I'll call for help!" she shouts as she vanishes away. I wish she hadn't. A crowd is now beginning to gather; mostly her well-meaning neighbors and other villagers.

"What's he doing up there?" I hear one of them say.

"Poor fellow is threatening to jump and end it all!" replies an elderly man, "Can't blame him, the economic situation being what it is. If I had the energy I'd go up and join him".

"I'm not suicidal ..." I think to myself, "but I'll soon be if I don't get out of this embarrassing situation. I wish I hadn't had that second cup of tea!"

To make matters worse it starts to rain. Not much ... just a drizzle, which is enough to make me wet and cold.

The onlookers are not deterred however. They bring out their umbrellas and stand there on the opposite side of the road looking at me. My aunt is not amongst them. Where is she? No doubt inside the house making tea and serving biscuits to her new found friends. She's never been so popular until now.

I'm getting desperate now. The tea inside me and the rain outside me combine to nudge nature into action. I've really got to go ... can't hold it any more!

What's this I hear? A siren from a distance, getting louder as a fire engine is seen coming down the hill.

Minutes later they extend their mechanical ladder which slowly edges ever closer to me with a fireman standing on the platform at the end. He gently wiggles my arm around and somehow manages to set me free.

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As the ladder platform gently lowers me to terra firma I rush into the house for the toilet to the sound of applause from the welcoming crowd.

So ... what have I learnt from this experience? Two things really!

First, when I got home that evening and re-played the event over in my mind, my thoughts turned to those people who lowered their paralyzed friend through the roof so that Jesus may heal him.

What Faith they must have had. It's obvious this was not their house, yet, they felt confident enough to climb on the flat roof with their friend, take away the tiles or whatever it was that covered the roof, and lower the sick man through the gaping hole regardless of any trouble they may get into with the house owner.

Sometimes we're too tired and ill to even pray, let alone muster enough Faith that the Good Lord will help us. It's at times like these that we have to rely on the Faith of others praying for us and believing that God listens to all prayers, including those made on our behalf.

The second thing I've learnt from my roof experience is that it is just impossible for Father Christmas to get down the chimney and leave presents for children everywhere. There isn't enough room inside a chimney for your arm, never mind a well-rounded jolly old man carrying a sack full of toys. Perhaps he gets in through an open window or by tampering with the door locks!

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AUNT GERTRUDE



For days on end the house was full of excitement because “Aunt Gertrude is coming! Aunt Gertrude is coming!”

I can't understand all the fuss myself; since no one has met Aunt Gertrude and the last time I saw her was millions of years ago in the Jurassic era I believe.

Sure, the old fossil does keep in touch, once a year, when she sends a re-cycled Christmas card which someone else has sent her. Yes, I mean it ... a re-cycled Christmas card! She sticks a piece of paper on the card where previous well-wishers have written and then she writes her Yuletide Greetings. We often peel off the paper carefully and guess who originally sent her the card!

She has always been very tight-fisted as I remember. So miserly that she looks at you from on top of her spectacles so as not to wear out the lenses!

Anyway ... this distant relative, (she lives in Australia), whom no one has ever met except me has decided to visit us. Apparently her husband, a successful business man, had planned a business trip to the UK before he died suddenly, and she did not want to waste the airline ticket!

As soon as he was underground she was over ground and flying.

And I was tasked to go and meet her at the airport. I took the day off work and left early to get there on time. I waited endlessly in the reception area and eventually my eyes set upon the much awaited relative from down under.

She walked very slowly and carried a small case in her hand. I offered to carry it for her and she refused holding it tightly to her chest. We waited for the rest of her luggage which I loaded onto a trolley and then into my car.

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No sooner had we left the airport that she started complaining. “Why do you drive so slow?” she asked, “where I come from we walk faster than that!”

I smiled politely, looked at her from the rear view mirror and said: “There’s a speed restriction area up front. Road works I believe!”

“Why do they have to fix the roads at inconvenient times and near a busy airport? Why can’t they fix them elsewhere?”

I must admit I had no good answer to this one. Why indeed do they fix the roads near the airport and not the ones in a desert somewhere, in the middle of a jungle or up a mountain? How inconsiderate of these road mending people!

“Do you live far?” was her next question.

“It’s about an hour away, I’m afraid!” I replied hesitantly.

“You should consider moving nearer the airport.” she retorted quickly, “it would be more considerate when you have visitors from abroad.”

Once again, she was right of course. We should all leave our place of employment locally, and where the schools are close to hand, and move near the busy airport on the off-chance that our distant relative, (not distant enough right now), might one day in a lifetime get hold of a spare airline ticket and choose to use it rather than attempt to get a reduced refund.

I remained silent and then started to panic as I saw the traffic build up right ahead. There had been an accident and we soon came to a stop on the highway.

“Are we there yet?” she asked.

“No!”

“Why have we stopped then?”

“There’s been an accident. The police is re-directing us another way.”

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“Not many accidents in Australia.” she claimed, “My husband drove for fifty years and never had an accident. Except once! When he reversed on Aristotle, the cat! Didn’t like him anyway ... the cat. Didn’t like my husband much either ...”

I said nothing and left the highway slowly as directed by the police.

A few minutes later my cell-phone rang. I stopped the car to answer it.

“Where are you? Why have you not picked up Aunt Gertrude from the airport?”

It took a few seconds for my slow brain to realize what I had done. I’d picked the wrong aunt from the airport!

How was I to know? She wore spectacles. She walked slowly. She looked old ... she WAS old! She looked Australian; she spoke in an Australian accent and came off an Australian plane!

Was I to check her identity in her passport double-locked in her hand bag held tightly against her chest?

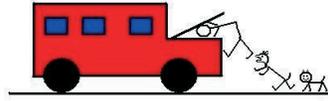
Why is it always my fault when everything goes wrong?

That evening I opened my Bible and read: “Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name; you are mine.”
Isaiah 43: 1-5.

I bet He knows the right Aunt Gertrude better than me!

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CARNIVORE



I sat in the car whilst parked on our drive and I turned the ignition on. The engine started running ... tat ... ratatat ... tat ... ratatat ... It didn't sound quite right. It wasn't that smooth running sound you normally get from an engine when all is well. The ratatat bit was new and sounded somewhat off key. Like Luciano Pavarotti singing with one shoe off ... you know what I mean. Hobbling with your voice!

“One of the sparkling plugs must be loose!” I said confidently to my wife sitting beside me. I really didn't know what it meant ... I had read it somewhere and I thought it would make me sound intelligent and knowledgeable. It's good to build up your confidence in the eyes of your spouse ... after all, she know you more than most!

“Should we call the Emergency Repair Services?” she said reflecting her confidence in my mechanical abilities.

“Not at all ... it's a simple matter ... I'll soon have it sorted,” I replied getting out of the car and leaving the engine running.

I lifted the bonnet (car hood) up like a professional would. Quickly and smoothly!

Now I should explain that this is an old car ... and it has a little metal rod on the side which you have to pull out vertically and hook it under the car hood so that it holds it up. In modern cars the car hood opens up smoothly and stays open by some clever pneumatic device. But my car is old ... so old that the Instruction Manual is written in Latin. You have to lift the car hood by hand ... then pull out the metal rod ... hook it under the hood in a special place and it keeps the hood up whilst you work in the engine. If you're a wimp that is ... If you're macho like me you just lift the hood up and hold it firmly with your left hand whilst working with your free hand in the engine.

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So there I was holding the hood up in my left hand and looking down at the vibrating engine going tat ... ratatat ... tat ... ratatat ... There were wires everywhere but no labels or signs telling you which bit of the engine does what. I mean ... what does a sparkling plug look like? Is it a light that sparkles on and off?

With my right hand I just pushed and prodded all the cables and wires confidently.

And that's when I got the most horrific electric shock you could imagine. It went straight up my right arm through my chest and up my left arm holding the hood. It was like those cartoon videos you see when a character touches a live wire and sparkles on and off.

In my agony I let go of the hood which fell with great weight and a single thud on my head knocking me down into the engine.

I could not decide for a moment which hurt the most ... the electric shock I'd just received or the clunk of heavy metal at the back of my head.

Neither of these pains soon mattered because the little fan that goes round and round inside the car engine compartment caught my tie and dragged me in further choking me all the time.

The whole scenario looked like a car eating its driver as the hood bounced up and down as I struggled to free myself from the fan's throttling grasp. I was slowly being eaten up by my own car as my legs were flying in all directions.

At that particular moment my cat decided to come walking by beside me and I must have accidentally kicked it.

Instead of running away ... the cat decided to attack my legs by scratching hard at them and shouting "Vengeance is mine!!!"

This attracted our lazy dog who usually lies on the mat in front of the TV watching the Dog Channel.

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Not this time ... there was something more entertaining going on outside!
So out he came and decided to jump on me biting me several times ...

Luckily my wife switched off the ignition and the engine reluctantly released its grasp on my tie. I was still stuck head down though as I could not loosen the tie enough to slip my head out.

The tie was eventually cut with a sharp knife and I decided to phone the Emergency Repair Services after all.

I told them the tie must have been left in the engine by some careless mechanic at the workshop where I took the car for a maintenance service. That's probably what caused the odd sound in the engine.

They agreed that this was a distinct possibility although they wondered why I had the remains of a similar coloured tie round my neck.

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NEIGHBOUR JEREMY



Solemn occasions are meant to be just that ... solemn.

Well, at least that is the intention, although at times events conspire to turn things differently.

As happened at Neighbour Jeremy's funeral.

Jeremy was generally a good neighbour. I liked him well. Always polite, wishing me "Good morning" when we met on our way to work or "Good evening" should we happen to see each other on our way home.

He kept himself to himself and never parked in front of my driveway blocking me from going in or out whenever I wished; unlike some other neighbours of mine! But the least said about them the better. After all, we're meant to love all our neighbours; are we not?

Every so often Jeremy would borrow some of my garden tools, or other bits and pieces he required, but he always returned them cleaned and in pristine condition.

Anyway, like all funerals, Jeremy's was certainly a solemn occasion.

Relatives and friends and neighbours gathered in church and then followed him to the graveside. There were tears aplenty as we all remembered him and in our own way knew that we would miss him.

Although I'm no relative of Jeremy, at the graveside I was one of those who stood near the gaping hole as he was lowered down; purely because I had taken with me in my car one of his relatives who had no transport of her own. This elderly lady stood next to me on my left; and on my right was another neighbour, a young lady, who also had no transport and had come with me.

I noticed whilst the priest was saying his final prayers that the young lady on my right was somewhat tearful and had nothing to wipe her eyes with. Being

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the gentleman whom I am, I put my hand in my right side pocket and pulled out, fortunately for me, a brand new handkerchief which I handed to her.

As I did so ... dash it all ... my car key had got into one of the folds of the handkerchief and fell to the ground, on the grass, without making a sound, and then ... dash it all once again ... it rolled into the open grave just as the coffin was being lowered.

No one noticed except the young lady on my right. She took my handkerchief and asked: "What was that?"

"My car key ..." I mumbled quietly.

She burst out laughing and then stifled her laughter with the handkerchief, pretending to be emotionally distraught and unable to control herself. Her outer appearance to one and all was one of utter despair and total grief; yet I knew from the shaking of her shoulders that she had great difficulty controlling the hilarity engendered by my predicament.

One or two mourners raised their eyebrows and wondered why this young lady was portraying more grief at his demise than Jeremy's own wife standing nearby. But let's not feed suspicious minds when my own is doing backward somersaults trying to figure out what to do next.

Almost instinctively, I placed my arm round the young lady's shoulders and ushered her away from the graveside. As I did so, I accidentally bumped into the frail old lady on my left and almost knocked her into the grave with Jeremy. Luckily, she fell backwards away from the hole.

The young lady and I walked away from the crowd and stood a distance away by some trees. She continued laughing out of control but mercifully not loud enough to raise any suspicions.

What could I do in this situation? I could hardly let Jeremy borrow my car when I knew sure well that he had no intention of returning it?

If I did nothing, how could I possibly get home, and what would I say to the frail old lady expecting a lift back in my car?

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I noticed the grave-diggers sitting some distance away ready to complete their work once everyone had gone.

I left the young lady still laughing by the trees and walked towards the grave-diggers to explain the situation.

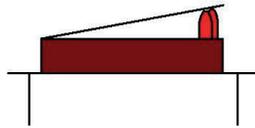
When all the solemnities were over and done, I arranged for someone else to give the two ladies a lift home; and explained that I had some urgent business to deal with at work.

The grave-diggers brought Jeremy back up and retrieved my key; and for once, Jeremy did not get to borrow anything of mine!

P.S.

One should always have dignity in death.

I attended a clown's funeral once and he was lying there peacefully in his open coffin with a red nose and a big smile painted on his face. They couldn't put the lid on because of his big feet!



OF CHURCH MICE AND CHURCH MEN



I visited an old church in the countryside the other evening.

There was this historian giving a talk entitled “The influence of the Church in England from Chaucer to Henry the Eighth and Beyond”.

Given a choice between listening to that lecture and watching an important football match on TV I would choose the lecture every time. You know me, always willing to oblige and to please ... Why is it that old fashioned marriage vows included the words “to love and obey”? Was there not a clause about football games in those vows? There should have been!

Anyway, the old historian did not disappoint. He lived up to my every expectation and went on and on giving us every minute detail about this most fascinating subject. He reminded me of one of the priests who visited our church recently; Father Ontoo Long!

He too went on ad infinitum reading his sermon from notes he must have typed on an old type-writer and stopping at every punctuation mark to add boredom to everlasting tedium.

I wondered as I sat there on those hard wooden pews which very soon numb the lower parts of your body ... I wondered, if this historian stood side by side with Father Ontoo Long and they talked in unison would they put us to sleep in stereo?

My boredom was soon to be relieved by an unexpected distraction.

I noticed a few feet away just by the radiator standing against the wall a mouse crawling slowly towards me. He’d probably been disturbed by the historian’s monotonous voice, I thought.

The mouse stopped suddenly then ran back towards the wall. No one noticed him except me.

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He then walked ever so slowly close to the wall towards the left of the radiator. Then he stopped again. Moments later he was joined by another mouse following a few feet behind. He too stopped and then the first mouse turned round facing the second mouse. They faced each other for a few seconds then the second mouse ran back towards the radiator followed by the first!

I bet those mice are married, I thought. Probably having an argument I shouldn't wonder. Something like this:

Mr Mouse: Oh ... why do we have to go to church every Sunday? That priest is so boring!

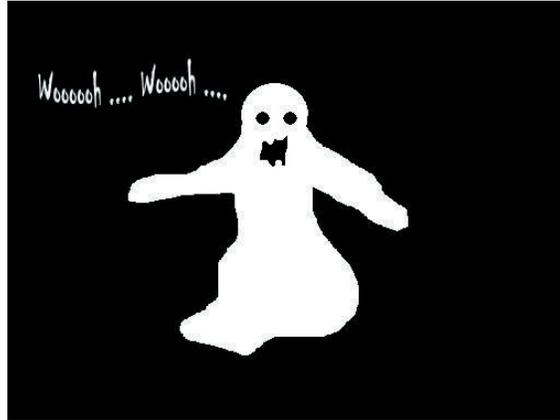
Mrs Mouse: We don't go to church to see the priest. We go to meet God and to pray.

Mr Mouse: But God is everywhere. Why can't we meet Him at home? I bet He'd love to watch the football match on TV!

At that point a sharp elbow dug deeply into my side and a harsh voice whispered "Stop snoring!"

Oh well ... back to Chaucer and Henry the Eighth I suppose. Did they have church mice then?

CLOSE ENCOUNTER OF THE GHOSTLY KIND



There are times in life when you're compromised in a situation and you have to do the best you can to get out of it.

This happened many years ago when three friends and I went out on a Friday night. Colin was driving his old Mini and Peter was sitting next to him. Harry and I were at the back.

I thought we were going to a pub somewhere in the countryside and was somewhat concerned when we stopped outside an old cottage somewhere remote.

"What are we doing here?" I asked, and was assured that it'll be OK and I'll like it really.

We entered the house and were greeted by a middle-aged lady who ushered us into a waiting room where another five people were waiting. An old man, two middle aged women, a young woman and a man in his thirties or so.

Eventually we were led into a darkened room lit by a couple of candles and asked to sit in a circle round a large table. It was obvious that we were to witness a séance where a medium would attempt to communicate with the other side.

Peter had mentioned the subject a few days earlier and Colin had shown an interest in attending such an event. I had made it perfectly plain at the time that I did not approve of such things which explains why they had not told me where we were going.

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So there I was, sitting round a table with Harry on my left and the old gentleman on my right.

The woman who greeted us when we arrived entered the room and sat opposite me. We were asked to remain silent and hold hands.

After a few seconds the so-called spiritualist asked “Is anyone there?” and at that very moment, as bad luck would have it, my stomach started to rumble. I had not eaten for a while and I was somewhat hungry.

“I heard something,” said one of the women “it sounded distant and from a great depth!”

“Yes, I heard it too ...” said someone else “it was creepy ...”

My stomach rumbled again in response.

“Please remain silent” said the medium sternly.

And my stomach gurgled yet again defiantly.

The medium then started breathing heavily and deeply.

“What’s the matter with her?” asked the old man sitting on my right; and the young lady sitting on his right whispered gently “She’s in a trance!”

“She’s going to dance?” he asked, “why is that?”

“In a trance ...” I whispered emphatically under my breath.

“In France? How can she be in France and sitting right there?” he asked loud enough to be heard by one and all.

“Please be quiet!” reprimanded the medium.

It was then that I noticed Harry on my left sniggering and having great difficulty stifling a laugh.

This didn’t help me one bit as I too tried hard not to laugh. I looked at Harry and noticed in the dark his shoulders shaking uncontrollably in silent

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laughter. I closed my eyes tightly and tried to think of something serious ... something dire and terrible to make me stop laughing.

But no ... my vivid imagination got the better of me. I could see in my mind's eye the medium doing a dance in France. The cancan it was. There she was kicking her legs high in the air as the lively music which usually accompanies that dance whirled round in my head ever so louder.

The harder I tried to suppress my laughter the worst it got, especially as I heard the old man on my right say to his companion "this chap here said the medium is going to France!"

I blurted out a laugh and pretended to sneeze. Harry did the same and "sneezed" too as the old man said "bless you!"

It was then that I felt a presence in the room. It wiped any shred of hilarity within my body as I froze solid.

I kid you not ... there definitely was a presence in that room.

Something brushed gently against my left leg and then seconds later against my right leg ... ever so gently but forcefully enough to turn my suppressed laughter into total panic.

It certainly stopped my stomach gurgling once and for all. In fact it was the best cure to stomach noises in the whole universe albeit it could have triggered other natural reactions!

I opened my eyes and looked at Harry and the old man on my right. Harry had stopped laughing and the man on my right was silent too. No one had noticed the evil presence in the room. They silently looked ahead at the medium still breathing deeply and heavily in and out.

The presence brushed against my legs once again. I was petrified with fear.

I looked down and saw a cat walk past my legs and out of the room.

The séance ended soon afterwards with no spirits calling on us that evening. I suspect they were all in the pub enjoying a drink!

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ELEGY ON A CARPET

R I P

I'll admit I'm not the best man at do-it-yourself type work at home. Be it woodworking, painting, plumbing or electrical work. I always seem to get it wrong and more often than not I hurt myself.

For example when I hammered hard on my finger, missing the nail altogether, as I did this morning, my first instinct was not to say calmly and in a quiet voice "Jolly gosh, this was a tad uncomfortable for me!!!"

I threw the hammer in the air in pain followed by a string of un-repeatables unworthy of your tender ears, or eyes ... dear readers.

The hammer struck the beautiful crystal vase of flowers which we'd treasured for years as a special present from the in-laws. The vase shattered into a million pieces pouring water everywhere which caused an electrical short circuit which blew the TV into a loud bang and sparks.

And my finger still hurt.

Instead of sympathy I got earache!!!

"That was a wedding present from ..."

"I know ... I know ..." I thought silently, "... I never liked the thing anyway, but I'd better say nothing and pretend I'm more hurt than I really am." No use. The deceased vase got more sympathy than me.

Better get on with my work. After all, laying a carpet in a room is easy. Take out all the furniture. Well ... most of the furniture anyway, why bother with the coffee table, the TV and the ... Anyway ... Let's measure from here to there, and from there to over here. Match the measurements to the carpet. Lay the carpet. No ... wait ... fix that loose floorboard. Hammer the nail in ... miss it altogether ... hit your finger hard and we're back to where we started.

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An hour or so later I managed to lay the carpet in the room ... well, kind of. There were areas where the carpet was somehow bigger than the room. Don't know why. Maybe the carpet stretched as it was laid down and grew bigger and curled up a little up the wall. Never mind ... it'll be hidden when I put the furniture there and no one will notice.

And in some places the carpet did not quite reach the wall. It was a few inches short. Perhaps it shrunk a little over here whilst it stretched over there. What if I move more furniture over here to hide it?

Now wait a minute. What's this bump here in the middle of the room? It looks like a small mound a few inches high. It doesn't move much and it feels as if there's something under the carpet.

I can't take the whole carpet off and start again. Dash it all. Where's that hammer? I'll bash that mound hard and flatten what's under there ... ah ... that should do it!!!

As I finished flattening the carpet with the hammer I heard a young voice from the kitchen ask "Mom ... have you seen my hamster? He's not in his cage!"

"Dear Lord ..." What do I do now? Put those flowers from the broken vase where the mound was and say a prayer?

Better say nothing ... perhaps they'll think the hamster went out for a walk. It's a nice day out there and Dodo will enjoy the sunshine.

Appropriate name ... I thought. This particular hamster is now as extinct as his namesake. I hope he doesn't stink under there as he decomposes away!!!

I shudder away the dark thoughts as I move the furniture back into the room nonchalantly as if nothing happened. If I confess I'll open up a new can of worms and tears will flow for ever more and I'll never be forgiven by anyone for eternity for what I have done.

It is sometimes kinder and much more loving to ease away the pain of others by not telling them what they don't need to know. Better to believe that

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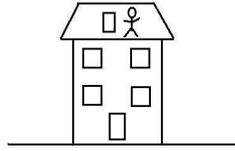
Dodo has gone for a walk and met a Miss Dodo and they're living happily ever after in the fields behind our house.

Just as I finished putting the furniture back I heard that young voice say "Mom ... I found Dodo. He was under the bed."

Now then ... has anyone seen my brand new cell-phone? I can't find it anywhere!

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SUICIDAL ME



I work in an old Victorian house three floors high. My office is in the attic.

It was hot and I had left the window open when I heard the noise of fluttering wings and saw a few feathers floating by.

I looked out and saw a pigeon hanging upside down on the edge of the roof. It had somehow gathered some twine on one of its legs and as it flew here and there with the string attached, it eventually got caught on the rainwater gutters of our building. So here it was hanging upside down by its leg on the edge of our building fluttering madly to free itself.

What do I do? Ignore it and let it die a slow death? Hit it on the head with my cricket bat which I bring to work on match days and put it out of its misery? Or phone the Animal Protection people and let them deal with it?

The more I thought about it the more the poor creature fluttered away desperately to set itself free. In sheer desperation I did a desperate thing.

I opened the window wider and stepped out on the ledge. It's wide enough for me to walk on slowly if I lean gently against the tilting roof. It seems solid enough despite the age of the building. And if I'm careful ... very careful ... I can ease myself slowly near the bird and then, if I bend down a little, I can untangle the string from the gutters.

Great plan! Badly thought out and executed. As I neared the bird it fluttered even more wildly than before and somehow freed itself from the string as it flew away without a word of thanks.

It was then that things got worse. I could not move back towards the window. No ... No ... It was not panic ... or fear of heights ... or anything like that.

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It was much worse. My trousers got caught in some loose nails on the roof. It was where you have those loops through which you thread your belt ... I think. Anyway ... I was caught ... or nailed to the roof by the seat of my pants. I couldn't move backwards or forwards.

Dash it all ... why do people gather in the street at a moment's notice? Have they got nothing better to do?

I hear my boss talking to me gently through the open window.

“Come back in ... I'm sure we can discuss matters like grown ups. Perhaps you need a few days holiday?”

Why do people jump to conclusions whenever someone stands on a ledge? Why can't they believe my story about the pigeon? Where is that stupid bird? Why is he not here confirming my story?

Miss Frome, the beautiful young Company nurse leans well forwards out of the window and soothingly tries to calm me down. Her décolleté revealing top confuses my troubled mind even more than it is.

Do I look away modestly and lead her to believe I'm not listening? Or do I look her in the eyes ... if I can ... and explain my predicament.

“Look at me ...” she says calmly, “we all care for you ... this is a caring employer as you know ... despite all the job losses of late ...”

I turn back at her but don't know where to look ... I can't speak as I stand there open-mouthed.

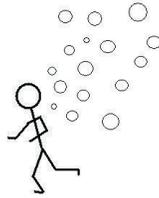
“Ehmmm ...” but my voice fails me as no sound comes out.

She continues to calm me down by reciting platitudes about how good our employer is until eventually the fire brigade arrive and release me from the nails which held me captive by the pants. I don't know what's more embarrassing. The story about the pigeon or leaving half my trousers back on the roof!

Had I fallen to my death leaving my trousers behind how would I have answered St Peter when he asked “And where are your slacks young man?”

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BUBBLES BUBBLES



There I was dressed in my best suit and heading for an important business meeting in the City.

I got out of the taxi and walked on the sidewalk towards the building I was heading for when suddenly I was showered from above by what appeared to be a green “gunge” smelling of disinfectant. I really don’t know where the unpleasantly sticky, semi-liquid substance came from. I looked up at the tall building and there were a few windows open. Anyway ... no time to go in and try to complain.

My head, hair, raincoat and suit were totally covered by the substance.

I rushed into the building where I was to have my meeting and headed for the Gents Toilet.

Have you ever tried to wash your hair in those tiny wash basins? Water bounces off everywhere and strategically lands on the front of your trousers with embarrassing results! I can’t go to the meeting like that! What will they think of me?

I tried bending backwards like a limbo dancer and standing under that contraption which blows hot-air to dry your hands in the hope that I could at least dry my trousers a little. But ... dash it all ... I was interrupted several times by people coming into the Gents so I stood up quickly and pretended to dry my hands. At one stage a lady cleaner came in to clean the toilets and eyed me suspiciously and walked out saying nothing.

I gave up drying my trousers and tried to wash the gunge from my hair instead. It must have been an industrial strength liquid because it started to foam profusely like shampoo on my head. The more I put water on it the more it foamed but eventually I got most of it off. Now to dry my hair under that hot air dryer! Dash it all once again ... someone came in suddenly and

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as I got up with a start I banged my head hard against the infernal contraption knocking my glasses off to the ground.

I now turned my attention to my raincoat and suit. Pointless adding water to them I thought. I have no time and must rush to my meeting. I used a million paper towels and wiped off any excess substance that had not yet permeated into the material and headed for my meeting.

As luck would have it ... Oh thank you God, thank you ... the meeting had been cancelled due to some other business emergency.

Great ... I headed back home.

My return journey on the train was somewhat hot and a strong smell of disinfectant filled the air in my vicinity. A few passengers sniffed at me suspiciously and moved away to other seats, or stood by the open windows. I pretended not to notice.

As I walked back home from the railway station it started to rain and I was forced to put my raincoat on. The water reactivated the green gunge which started to foam. The more it rained the more it foamed as I ran home followed by millions of brightly colored soap bubbles filling the air behind me. People stopped and looked at me thinking I was a walking advert for soap powder. It brought the traffic to a standstill as drivers switched on their windshield wipers to wash away the soapy substance from their cars.

When I got home I threw the raincoat into the washing machine with a good dose of washing powder.

Big mistake!

The green gunge combined with the washing powder to create even more bubbles. I rinsed the garment several times and every time the machine discharged its load through the drains the bubbles insisted in floating away in the garden rather than disappearing with the rest of the water. On and on the bubbles floated away decorating trees, bushes and everything in their way.

I opened the washing machine and more bubbles came out invading my whole house and threatening to evict me from my home.

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I grabbed my vacuum cleaner and headed for the garden intent on capturing as many bubbles as possible in mid-air before they covered the entire world.

I put on my Wellington boots which are usually kept just outside the back door for emergencies. No sooner had I walked a couple of paces than I felt a slimy feeling in my left boot. I hurriedly pulled the boot off to discover that a family of snails had set up home in my boot and were now in the final throes of agony around my toes before meeting their Maker.

It started to rain again popping the bubbles in mid-flight; so I gave up and left bubbles and snails to their own fate as I retrieved the raincoat from the washing machine to find it had shrunk sufficiently to fit a Barbie doll ... or should that be a Ken doll?

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MEMORIES OF MATILDA



I came across an old photo the other day which reminded me of Auntie Matilda.

There I was a young boy wearing a multi-colored pullover. You know the type? Several horizontal lines each a different color – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet and then red again and so on. I looked like a proper walking rainbow.

It was a jersey which Auntie Matilda had knitted for my birthday and hideous as it was I had to wear it all day because she was visiting us for the day.

Thinking back, the main thing I remember about Auntie Matilda was her constant knitting. She always had a pair of knitting needles in hand and a bag full of different colored balls of wool as she talked and knitted, and ate and knitted, and drank tea and knitted and did everything else imaginable as she knitted. If knitting was an Olympic Sport she'd win medals for England for her knitting.

Every birthday, Christmas, Easter, Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation or other family event was rewarded by Auntie Matilda knitting us something or other. Pullovers, scarves, hats, caps, gloves, mittens, socks, she'd knitted them all in every color imaginable and in every kind of stitch that it is possible to knit in. She'd even knitted little cozies to keep the teapot warm, and to keep the soft-boiled eggs warm before serving them, and to keep the plates warm before serving a meal and also, would you believe, to keep the thermos flask warm when you're out on a picnic.

She then diversified into more adventurous items such as knitting a cover for the tables, the chairs, the TV and every other piece of furniture imaginable. We had bed-spreads made of knitting, tapestries on the wall made of

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knitting, toilet seat covers made of knitting and to cap it all she had a large bag made of knitting to hold her knitting wool and needles.

I guess that if you unravelled all the things she had knitted for us as a family the wool would stretch to Pluto and back several times over.

I remember as a child I'd asked my parents for a fire engine for Christmas. You guessed it ... she told them not to buy me one and she knitted me a bright red fire engine!

What's the use of that? I couldn't run it on the floor and make fire engine noises as kids do!

As she grew older Auntie Matilda continued knitting. There was no stopping her.

I was once given two Ballet tickets by my boss.

Now let me confess straight-away that I hate ballet. I don't see the point of a stage full of people walking on tip-toe. Why can't they hire taller dancers and be done with it?

And I equally dislike the Opera too. It's so unreal. It's the only place where someone gets stabbed, or has a sword run through him or takes poison and continues to sing for at least ten minutes. And the other actors, instead of helping him out and calling an ambulance they sing even louder too. What's all that about?

Anyway ... I did not want to go to the Ballet but was coerced to take Auntie Matilda with me because she loved it so. And after all, she was my Aunt and not anyone else's ... she was from my side of the family so I had to take her.

We sat there at the balcony and as soon as the lights went out and the performance started, out came the knitting needles and the balls of wool. I swear she was knitting in tune with the music!

After the performance was over, my boss, who had influence in such circles, invited us to a private party back-stage to meet the cast, choreographers, musicians and so on.

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Auntie Matilda was overheard discussing in a loud voice with the producer the benefits of having knitted tutus for the ballerinas. She also suggested knitted trousers for the male dancers!

“It’ll help keep them warm when you’re touring Scotland in winter,” she said “and it’ll also cover the revealing men’s bits ... you ken!”

I put my old photo away and said a silent prayer for Auntie Matilda now long departed.

Remember friends, when you’re in Heaven, should you see Jesus walking around with a multi-colored scarf and bonnet you’ll know that Auntie Matilda got to Him first!

THE ELEPHANT

Once upon a time there was an explorer in the jungle doing what explorers normally do ... exploring. I believe he was writing a book about something or other ... various toppings for pizza I think, and he was out in the jungle searching for inspiration ... anyway ... it doesn't really matter what he was there for. The fact of the matter is that this explorer was out in the jungle and he came face to face with an elephant. Well ... not quite face to face ... he, being a short man and the elephant being as big as an ... elephant!

Oh ... I forgot to tell you. This short explorer had previously been a doctor. Being so short he became a knee specialist since this is as far as he could reach.

So ... to cut a long story short he became an explorer and here he was face to ... body ... with an elephant.

The elephant was lying on its side with its trunk in the air and flapping its ears ... well, he was flapping one ear really, because the other one was under his head as he lay there on his side.

The short explorer also noticed that the poor creature was bleeding from its front paw ... or foot I suppose. Do elephants have paws? It's not a foot either is it? Not like a human foot. Anyway ... let's get on with the story. This is taking longer than I thought!

The short explorer got nearer to the elephant and noticed a big thorn stuck there at the bottom of the elephant's foot.

"Aha" ... he thought, "I remember reading a story about a man who found a thorn in an animal's paw ... it was a lion I think. Then the man took the thorn out and the lion and he became friends. They met again many years later and the lion recognized him and befriended him all over again!"

Cheered by this happy story the man approached the elephant ever so slowly and using a pair of pliers which he happened to have on him ...

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All right ... don't ask me why a short explorer in the jungle happened to have a pair of pliers on him. Maybe he had been a dentist and this was a tool he had to extract teeth ... after he gave up being a knee specialist.

To continue ... using the pliers he extracted the thorn from the elephant's foot. The elephant was so relieved! He stood up at once and let out a big trumpet sound to say thank you and ran away happily in the jungle.

Many years later the same short explorer was visiting a zoo whilst on holiday and would you believe it ... there in the elephant's enclosure was a majestically big elephant.

The explorer looked up at the elephant. He was still short that's why he looked up. And the elephant looked down at the man.

Their eyes met each other ... not literally, just a figure of speech to say they looked at each other.

The elephant moved slowly forward and put his trunk through the big metal bars of the enclosure and ever so gently with his trunk he caressed the explorer's head. The short man smiled. A tear ran down the elephant's eyes as he continued caressing the explorer.

Then suddenly the elephant wrapped its trunk round the explorer's neck and started to strangle him tightly until he was blue in the face. Luckily the zoo-keepers managed to free the explorer before he was killed.

Why did the elephant behave this way? You may ask.

The answer is simple.

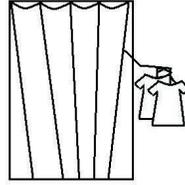
It was not the same elephant!

And the moral of the story is: Not everyone who says he's a Christian is necessarily so.

Not everyone who calls me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do what my Father in Heaven wants them to do.
Matthew 7:21

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UNDRESS IN HASTE



I needed some new clothes for work so I visited this large Department Store in town and started looking around. Pretty soon I found the perfect pair of trousers in varying colours. What would suit me best do you think? Dark blue? Black? Grey?

I took all three and proceeded to one of those cubicles where you can try your clothes on before you buy them.

The man in charge led me to a cubicle and asked me to press a little button if I needed any help.

I got in and tried the first pair of trousers ... too tight. The second pair was too long in the legs. And the third was too tight and too short.

Why can't they make trousers that fit exactly as the size it says on the label? Admittedly the three pairs of trousers were made by different manufacturers but the labels clearly said the same size on all three. And that is my size. The size I measured myself at home and the size of my current trousers which fit me perfectly well.

I proceeded to take off the last pair of trousers and pressed the little button as instructed.

Immediately, almost instantaneously, the male attendant turned up and I explained the situation to him. He took the items away and promised to get me bigger sizes.

I turned round to get dressed and ... disaster!

The silly man had taken away the trousers I was wearing when I came into the shop as well as the other three.

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So there I was. Trouser-less in a cubicle, and also minus my wallet and car keys which were in my trouser pockets.

I pressed the little button frantically again. Nothing happened. I pressed and pressed and still nothing happened.

Eventually the man returned empty handed.

“I’m sorry Sir; we don’t have any other sizes!”

I explained what had happened and he went away trying to retrieve my own trousers which he had put away with the other trousers to be sold in the store.

I waited for what must have been an eternity. Trapped in a store with no trousers to my name!

Eventually a female voice was heard to say, “Try these and we’ll see if they’re OK!” and a hand came in through the thick curtain and handed me two dresses. One pink and one light blue!

Almost instinctively, I don’t know why, I took the dresses and for a few seconds stared at them. It then occurred to me to look out of the cubicle and call the female attendant back.

Too late! She too had vanished in the store never to be seen again.

“Dear God ... what do I do now?” I muttered under my breath.

Well, I suppose the Good Lord must have been listening because there, standing beside the socks rack, was our Parish priest.

In desperation, I tried to attract his attention without making a scene.

“Pssst ... Pssst ...” I uttered nervously as if calling a cat.

At this point I should tell you that Father Frederic is somewhat old and hard of hearing. He didn’t move one inch and continued looking at different pairs of socks.

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“Psst ... Psst ...” I went again. No response.

“Father Frederic!!!” I said quietly yet forcefully enough that he might hear.

He stopped what he was doing. Looked around and saw no one calling him. Then he looked up to Heaven and made the Sign of the Cross.

“Over here ... Father!” I said more forcefully.

He saw me hiding behind the curtain of my cubicle and approached me tentatively.

“I thought the Good Lord was calling me!” he exclaimed.

“No ... it was me,” I replied still holding the two dresses, “I’m in an embarrassing situation Father!”

“Oh dear ...” said my priest, “it is embarrassing. I didn’t know you liked to wear women’s clothes!”

“Hein? I DON’T!!!”

“No need to be shy about it my son. You really must resist the temptation ... and you must come to Confession too.”

“Father ... you don’t understand ... These are not my clothes!”

“No of course not,” he interrupted, “they’re women’s clothes and you can rest assured that your secret is safe with me. It’s as if you told me about it in Confession. Come to think of it, this curtain is lovely and thick ... we need to change the curtains in our confessionals!”

“Father let me explain ... I need a pair of trousers!” I said as calmly yet as firmly as possible.

“What? You came here without trousers? You didn’t wear a dress in public did you? That’s rather foolhardy you know. What if a parishioner saw you ... you’d bring the whole congregation into disrepute you know!”

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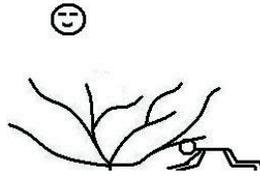
At that point I think Saint Anthony must have stepped in and come to my rescue; even though I'd forgotten to pray to him.

The male attendant returned with my original pair of trousers, and my wallet, and car keys.

A week later at Confession Father Frederic whispered to me through the brand new confessional curtains "Are you sure you have nothing else to confess? Something pink and something blue ... and worn by pretty ladies!"

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THE FOX AND MOON



It was a lovely summer's day as I sat on the park bench enjoying the take-away meal I just bought from my favourite burger bar. I'd just finished my large portion of French fries and I put the empty packet on the bench to dispose of it later. To stop it blowing away I put my cell-phone and keys in the empty fries container to weigh it down, and proceeded to enjoy my burger and cheese bun.

As quick as a flash, a fox came out of the bushes, no doubt attracted by the smell of food, grabbed the empty fries container in its mouth and ran away.

I ran after it frantically and it eventually dropped my cell-phone, but unfortunately it hid in the bushes before I could retrieve my keys. I searched everywhere to no avail. The bushes in that area were quite thick and almost impenetrable. I walked back to my car intent on phoning for help when I found a park ranger standing next to my vehicle writing in her notepad.

I immediately recognized the lady in question.

I'd seen her several times in church talking in the car park after Mass with friends but I never spoke with her. She's a short woman in her late forties well built all over and rotund as can be. She must have a great sense of humour apparently since she's always laughing loudly outside church with a contagious laugh which makes you want to join in the fun even though you're not part of the conversation.

Today of course it was different. Dressed in her tight ranger's uniform she was as severe as befits a person in authority.

"You have parked beyond the stipulated time," she said sternly, "and I must issue you with a fine to be paid within a week!"

I tried to explain what had just happened and why I was late driving away from the parking space.

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“You’re from our church ...” she declared, “I recognize your face. Show me where it happened.”

We walked back to the bushes and I showed her where the fox had run away.

“We have had sightings of a vixen and a young family around here,” she said, “the mother is probably trying to feed her cubs!”

She handed me her jacket and continued, “I’ll go in there to look for your keys ... I wouldn’t want you to disturb them if they’re in there!”

She got down on her hands and knees and like a dog she slowly and carefully made her way forward into the thick bushes until all I could see was the sole of her shoes. Eventually she said “I got them ...” and started reversing back slowly, on all fours, just as she got in.

Suddenly, there was a loud ripping sound and her very tight trousers tore from top to bottom at the back revealing what’s on your imagination.

I stood there frozen holding her jacket.

To my amazement and total confusion she suddenly burst out in uncontrollable fits of laughter. She stayed there on all fours for a few seconds laughing herself out of breath.

She then continued reversing ever so slowly, presumably to avoid disturbing any foxes which would no doubt be as confused as myself; and then standing up and still giggling she said, “You can stop ogling me and help cover up my modesty!”

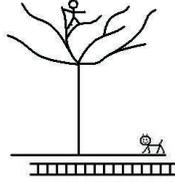
She wrapped her jacket round her waist to cover her rear and said, “I must have given you quite an eye-full there. How are you going to explain that to Father Frederic in Confession?”

Before I had time to reply, she continued, “You’ll have to drive me home to get changed.”

I did drive her home and we became great friends with her and her husband.

LIFE - IT MAKES *ME* LAUGH

OF MICE AND MAN AND SMILING CAT



After a lot of training, my cat is now fully competent at using the cat flap. He goes in and out of the kitchen when it wants and is master of his domain once again.

Not so the dog. He still has to make it obvious that he wants out and we open the door for him. Once he's finished his business outside he comes back in and watches TV all day long.

Once he mastered the use of the cat flap the cat had to be trained to stop bringing dead creatures into the house. Easier said than done! How exactly do you train a cat to do what cats normally do?

Eventually, after a lot of talking, mostly to myself because the cat refuses to listen, and after taking the dead creatures out in the garden over and over again, I believe the cat finally got the message that he is not to bring dead animals into the house.

At first, whenever I pointed at the garden and said "Take it out there!" the stupid cat just looked at my index finger and jumped at my leg hoping I was about to feed him. But I believe at last I got through to him ... or so I thought.

Sadly, the attempted truce regarding the matter of bringing dead mice and birds in the house did not hold for long. In fact the truce did not even get a chance to see the life of day.

The cat still insists on his feline rights according to some International Convention or other and decided to totally ignore me and bring in whatever dead creatures he chooses.

He even brought in the remains of an old bird's nest the other day. Just to make his point, you understand.

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I have been demoted to collector of these dead creatures and cleaner-upper of the house once the carcasses have been removed.

I took a dead mouse out of the house the other day and to the back garden to throw it in the bin. I was followed by the cat jumping at my legs hoping I'd give it the mouse to play with.

The dog, clever one he, sat on the mat undisturbed watching TV.

The cat kept jumping at my feet while I was in the garden and in his stupid acrobatic jumping he landed on the door slamming it shut.

I have a back door that opens from inside, but it requires a key if you are out trying to get in. You guessed it ... I did not have a key with me.

The cat ran into the house through the cat flap, leaving me stranded, and locked out of my own home.

I saw him through the window sitting next to the dog enjoying TV. Then he jumped on the table and enjoyed my chocolate milk-shake and biscuits.

I had to climb up a tree and squeeze myself into the house through a narrow window ... (Thinks) ... I need to lose weight.

No sooner was I in the house than the front door bell rang. It was the police trying to arrest me for breaking into my own house. Someone must have seen me getting in through the window and phoned them.

A few days later the cat was at it again.

He took it upon himself to start a vendetta against me. Ever since I tried to stop him bringing dead mice and birds into the house he decided to fight back, and fight really hard, to undermine me in my own house.

Yesterday I could hear him meowing distressfully from a distance. I looked for him everywhere and could not find him. He was not locked in the toilet ... not in the bathroom either ... or in any of the bedrooms upstairs. He was not in any of the cupboards having entered there mischievously while I was getting something. He was not trapped behind the settee or any other furniture. He was not in the fridge either!

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Of course, the lazy dog did not help with the search for his companion. He just sat there on the mat watching TV. Must have been the Dog Channel or something just as inane!

Anyway, I could still hear the cat calling for help in distress. I looked in the garage and there he was ... up a big tree in my back garden.

This huge tree is on my side of the fence between me and my neighbor and pretty close to both our houses.

I called for the cat to come down. He meowed even louder and stayed up there frozen stiff. I brought him some milk in a saucer to tempt him down. No movement whatsoever. I tried to get him something to eat ... opened a tin of best quality salmon for him. Still no movement!

Whilst I was getting the salmon, the dog came out in the garden, drank the milk in the saucer and went back in to watch TV just as the adverts had finished and his program had started.

I even waved a dead mouse high above my head to entice the stupid cat down but to no avail. He just would not move.

I brought out a tall ladder, placed it against the tree trunk, and up I went; having of course said a short prayer in case this was my last ever act on this beautiful world.

Up and up I climbed until I found a branch strong enough and thick enough to carry my weight (generous as it is) and I gingerly left the ladder and stepped onto the said branch itself. Unfortunately, as I did so, I felt the ladder slip from under me and down it went crashing to the ground.

Miraculously it did not break the fence or the lovely pots of flowers nearby, but it left me stranded half-way up a tree as it lay peacefully on the ground far below me.

The noise the ladder made as it fell startled the stupid cat who suddenly discovered long hidden courage and jumped from one branch to another in athletic leaps and bounds until he got down to the ground and into the house through the cat flap.

LIFE - IT MAKES *ME* LAUGH

So there I was up the tree unable to get down whilst the cat was watching TV with the dog.

At this point I must tell you that my neighbor is a young lady living alone. Oh ... I might as well mention that the tree, from that height, overlooks her bedroom and bathroom windows.

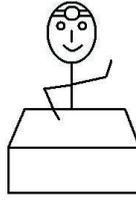
Anyway ... what could I tell the police? They would hardly believe the truth would they? Not after the episode when the cat locked me out of my house.

I could not even tell them that I was picking apples from a huge oak tree!!!

I don't think they believed my story that I was pruning the tree. The absence of a saw or any other gardening implements was a dead giveaway.

LIFE - IT MAKES *ME* LAUGH

AT THE DOCTOR



I started the day by visiting my doctor.

The poor man was not well and I thought it's kind to visit the sick.

As soon as I entered the doctor's surgery he asked me to lie down on the couch. I asked him why and he said: "I want to vacuum clean just where you're standing!"

Then he looked at me and asked "Do you get severe headaches in the morning, followed by stomach pains and trembling of the knees?"

I replied "No ... why?"

"Because I've been getting these symptoms for a week and I wondered if you knew what they were!"

"Anyhow ... what are you here for?"

I showed him my arm and said "I've hurt myself in three places ..."

He replied, "Stop visiting these places!"

"And another thing doctor," I continued, "when I drink tea I get this very sharp pain in my eye."

"Take the spoon out of the cup before drinking!"

As I got off the couch the doctor asked me, "Tell me, do you have a horse?"

"No I don't!"

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“Pity,” he said, “I have some horse pills I got from a vet ... you wouldn’t like to try them do you? You’ll soon be off at a gallop!”

He brought out a selection of chewing gums and asked me “Would you like one? It’s a new flavor ... garlic!”

I shook my head.

“I’m trying them out for a friend,” he continued, “he’s opening out a new line in chewing gum flavors ... garlic, garlic and onion, anchovy, smoky bacon ... I like the mayonnaise flavor best!

“I’m thinking of going into partnership with him and invent chewing gum which slowly releases medicine as you chew it. Do you wish to invest in this new venture?”

I shook my head again and smiled.

“The good thing about this gum is that it doesn’t stick anywhere. Completely non-stick! Here see ...” he took the chewing gum out of his mouth and stuck it on his forehead ... or tried to. It fell to the ground.

“So no more messy gum stuck to the sidewalk, or underneath the desk at school or the table in the restaurant or library!”

He then took me by the window and asked me what was up there in the sky. I said it was the sun and he said, “Well, your eyesight is all right!” Whilst still standing there he asked me to stick my tongue out as far as I could. I asked him why and he replied “I don’t like that neighbor living opposite and sticking your tongue out at him should annoy him somewhat!”

He proceeded by poking and prodding me and listening with his stethoscope before announcing “I think I’d better give you something or other to take ... people expect to be given some medicine when they visit the doctor you know!”

“Is there something wrong with me?” I asked hesitantly.

“I don’t really know ...” he replied, “but I have so many free samples here I might as well get rid of some of them.

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“Of course, I don’t always give people medication you know,” he continued with a smile, “sometimes all they need is advice. I had a chap here the other day suffering from rheumatism. You tend to get rheumatism when the air is damp. So I advised him to avoid all dampness if at all possible. Now he sits in a bath and vacuum cleans himself!”

He continued searching frantically into a cardboard box and eventually gave me a small packet and said “Here, that should do it. Take one of these a day!”

“What for?” I asked, “I hate medicine!”

“You know what they say ...” he chuckled, “a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down ...” he sang heartily.

“But these are suppositories!” I protested.

“Oh ...” he exclaimed “In that case ... A spoonful of sugar won’t do will it? How about Supercalifragilisticxpialidocious?”

LIFE - IT MAKES *ME* LAUGH

UNCLE HERBERT



Uncle Herbert came to visit us the other day. He's a lovely old gentleman much liked by the whole family for his kindness and extreme generosity. He always arrives laden with gifts for everyone and I must admit to looking forward to my large bottle of vintage single malt whisky every time he visits.

He certainly is an expert at choosing great gifts that we can all love and appreciate, Uncle Herbert is. Anything from something decorative or useful for the house to lovely toys and various presents for the children!

All are received gratefully with open arms ... as well as Uncle Herbert himself of course. If there's any spare space available in our open arms he is received gratefully there too.

Even the lazy dog lying on the mat opposite the TV reacts to Uncle Herbert's arrival. He looks up ... yawns ... and goes back to sleep.

The cat of course hurries in the corner of the room and consults his book of tricks to see how he can embarrass me in my own home in front of my own family and friends.

Oh what a lovely meal we had last Sunday when Uncle Herbert called.

The best steak that money can buy, all sorts of roast vegetables, with Yorkshire pudding, gravy and all the trimmings. All washed down with fine wine (and orange juice for the kids) followed by a steamed plum pudding with custard and a glass or two of port – just to celebrate you understand.

After such a sumptuous meal the rest of the family decided to go out to the park for a walk to help the digestion ... and I was left alone with Uncle Herbert.

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He settled in front of the TV in his favorite armchair and pretty soon he felt the effects of the food and drink and followed the lazy dog into the land of nod.

I sat on the settee for a while relaxing and pretty soon the conniving cat was up to his tricks again. He jumped on the back of the armchair just behind Uncle Herbert and gently tried to paw his head whilst he was asleep.

I should mention at this point that Uncle Herbert wears a wig. It's pretty obvious to anyone I think except himself. He's obviously self-conscious about his bald head and prefers to cover it with some falsies instead ...

Hey, why not. If it makes him happy why should we interfere?

Sensing a potential disaster with the cat standing just behind Uncle Herbert's head I quickly, but silently, tried to entice him away with a morsel of food from the dinner table.

Eventually, the cat moved away and I cleared the dinner table and went to the kitchen to wash the dishes, leaving Uncle Herbert and the dog fast asleep.

Half an hour later when I'd finished washing up I returned to the living room to find Uncle Herbert still asleep in the armchair minus the wig.

What could have happened ... I panicked. Surely the cat did not take it away without waking Uncle Herbert!

I searched everywhere for the missing wig. First behind the armchair ... pretty obvious place. Then on either side of the sleeping man in case the wig fell by his side. Then ... as usually happens in these circumstances ... I widened the search area.

They say when you're looking for something it will always be in the last place you think of looking ... again, pretty obvious ... because once you've looked there and found it, then it will be the last place and you'd stop looking. The thing is ... where is this last place where the wig is supposed to be?

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It was one of those quick and frantic searches yet carried out very quietly because I did not want to wake sleeping Uncle Herbert. It had to be done hurriedly before the children came back from the park and discovered that their uncle had detachable hair.

I prayed to St Anthony to help me find the missing article, but the Saint must have been busy with something else that day because the wig was no where to be found.

A cold sweat covered my forehead and trickled silently into my eyes. My heart was pounding in my chest like a drum sending my blood pressure to new highs.

Think ... think ... think ... where else could it be? I even looked in the fridge and in the washing machine ... although why it should be there is beyond anyone's imagination. But when I panic ... I really panic ... I'm expert at it.

And panic makes you do stupid things ... like go out in the back garden hoping for inspiration ... or just to escape from being inside where all the panic is.

How could I possibly explain to Uncle Herbert that his wig had disappeared?

What if the family came back and the children asked him if he'd shaved his head as a fashion statement? Do you think he'd be angry enough to want his whisky back?

Questions ... questions and more questions ran through my mind as I stepped into the garden for inspiration.

Just as well I went out because that's exactly where the wig was ... right in the middle of the garden. That wretched cat will be the end of me one day ... I can read it in the Medical Journal already ... heart attack induced by family cat!

I picked up the wig which was by now covered in dirt and cat's saliva. How do you clean a wig? Anyone know? More questions.

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I can't put it in the washing machine ... the spin dryer would turn Uncle Herbert into a curly head.

I can't vacuum clean it ... it would get sucked up in the machine and transformed into a mop.

I can't beat it hard against the wall to knock off the dirt ... it would probably moult and lose or shed hair ... and poor bald Uncle Herbert would have a bald wig to cover his bald head.

I rubbed my hand across the wig gently and slowly wiped away the cat's saliva with a clean cloth. I then tiptoed into the living room and tried to replace the hair-piece onto its rightful place ... one problem ... which way is forward and which way is backwards ... it all looked the same to me.

I gently let it drop on Uncle Herbert's head and quickly sat on the settee pretending to be asleep just as he woke up and straightened his wig to its pre-destined position without any care or notice.

A few days after Uncle Herbert left us his generosity visited us once again.

The other day a large van drew outside our house and they delivered a large box. We weren't expecting anything apart from a book that is. I'd ordered a book from the Internet called "How to Control your Cat – Or your Money Back!"

Come to think of it, that book never arrived. I bet the cat intercepted it and returned it for a refund. But I digress. This big box arrived and when we opened it, it contained a huge armchair.

Not a normal type of armchair, mind you ... no, this was an inflatable armchair. And not the kind you inflate with air ... it would take ages and strong lungs to inflate something this size. No, this armchair had to be filled with water. It's like a water bed but armchair shaped. And it's in the most hideous blue plastic color.

With the gift was a short note from Uncle Herbert saying "I saw this in the shop and thought of you."

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WHY? Why would an oversized fluorescent blue inflatable armchair lead a kind, albeit somewhat demented old man, think of me? Do I look fat and wobbly maybe? I never even wear blue, so what led him to buy it for us?

Anyway ... one has to be kind I suppose, and as Uncle Herbert is visiting again next week we decided to inflate the armchair with gallons and gallons of water. I must have emptied three local lakes to fill it.

It was placed in front of the TV where our dear Uncle often sits. It wobbles and moves as you sit in it and it makes you sea-sick, especially when the blue plastic reflects the light from the TV set.

So there was I yesterday sitting uncomfortably in this huge blue lagoon moving from side to side when I eventually fell asleep. There was nothing good on TV except the dust accumulated by the static.

As I lay there sleeping, dreaming of being on a Pirate's Ship with Captain Blue Beard no doubt, when suddenly my dream turned into Titanic.

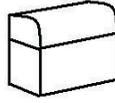
The stupid cat got wedged between the armchair and the wall and struggled to get free by scratching wildly with his sharp claws on the back of the chair.

There were gallons of water flooding everywhere as I slowly sank down to the ground trapped in the infernal armchair as it folded itself with me in it ... and then I shot up violently like a rocket as the water made contact with an electric appliance in the living room sending a million volts of electricity up my backside!

Thank you Uncle Herbert!

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ONE CASKET OR TWO?



Why is it that the phone always rings at home at the most inappropriate time when I'm doing something else more important?

And why is it that it always rings for someone else and I end up answering it and either taking messages or calling the person for whom the call is intended.

Yes ... we do have an answering machine, but we only use it when we're out. When we're in I'm the alternative human answering machine!

That said; the worst calls of all are from a variety of sales people trying to sell you something or other. A new credit card, an insurance policy, new double glazing to keep the house warm, and every other imaginable service or product which I most definitely don't want, has been offered to me on the phone by people I don't know, nor wish to know. And they have the impertinence to address me by my first name too, as if we're long standing pals.

"Hello Victor!" one said, "are you well today?"

"No, not really ..." I replied, having guessed it was yet another sales person, "I've just swallowed a fly."

Well, that certainly stopped her in her tracks. She sympathized and then proceeded to expound on the benefits of her Company's products.

The most bizarre phone call however took place last week and it went something like this.

"Good morning Victor! (First name terms straight away). I am Gilbert D Funct and I represent Pets In Peace, a new service provider just established in your town, and our aim is to share and ease your pain when your beloved pet departs this vale of tears."

"Hein?" said I.

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“PIP ... that’s our initials, will be there to provide you with a casket in which to place the remains of your dear departed pet. We have caskets in all sizes for goldfish, budgies, hamsters, rabbits, cats, dogs and any other animal or insect which may share your home as a member of your family. All caskets are made to the highest standard of professional workmanship in mahogany, oak, elm, cedar wood and pine. And they are lined in satin or silk in a variety of colours such as white, black, and velvet being the most popular.”

“I see ...” I said, and before I could tell him I’m not interested Gilbert D Funct went on.

“Furthermore, Victor, as part of our service we would conduct a solemn ceremony of whatever religious belief you desire, and then we would bury the casket containing the remains of your family pet on your property so you can visit him whenever you wish ...”

“I live in an apartment!” I interrupted. “Will you bury the pet under the carpet?”

That certainly stopped him.

“Oh ...” he said, “do you not have access to a piece of ground?”

“We have a few herb pots in the kitchen ... you know ... fresh mint, parsley, thyme, rosemary and such like. But the pots are too small to bury a casket in.”

“Yes quite ...” he hesitated. So I took the initiative and went on.

“We had planned to flush the goldfish down the toilet ... you know ... naval burial and all that. Are your caskets water soluble?”

“Er ... no ... I don’t believe so ...” mumbled Gilbert, obviously unaware of my sarcasm.

“And then there’s the cat ...” I continued, having gained the upper-hand in this sales pitch, “he’d be too big to flush down the toilet ... I’ve often wondered how we’d dispose of him after he’s used up his nine lives ...”

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“Are you familiar with cremation?” asked Gilbert gaining an advantage point.

“My wife is expert at that ... judging from her many Sunday roasts! Perhaps she could do the same to the cat!”

At this point, as luck would have it, she came in the house from one of her shopping trips.

“This is for you ...” I said handing her the phone, “someone researching roast recipes for a cookery book he’s writing ...” and I quickly rushed to the pub.

MADemoiselle VERONIQUE TOMBAL



We had a visitor from France at work this week. A top executive named Mademoiselle Veronique Tombal came over to negotiate a big contract with our Company. We were all on our best behaviour hoping to impress her about the quality and cost of our products.

It wasn't until our meeting was over when my boss made an announcement without having cleared it with me first.

"I hope you'll enjoy your stay overnight at the hotel we've booked for you Mademoiselle Tombal," he said with a smile, "Victor will meet you at seven this evening for dinner, and then he'll take you to the theatre to see a performance of our beloved William Shakespeare!"

"What?" I thought to myself silently, "I have other plans for this evening!"

Mademoiselle Tombal said she looked forwards to a pleasant evening and left with one of our executives to be chauffeur driven to the luxurious hotel we had booked for her.

My boss apologized profusely as honestly as he could possibly lie and explained that he had planned to take her out himself but because of urgent family business he'd be for ever grateful if I did it instead.

"And you speak French so well," he said flattering me, "she'll be so impressed by it!"

I didn't believe him but had no option but to accept his unwelcome decision.

I made sure I was impeccably dressed and my shoes very well polished when I picked her up at the hotel and took her to a first class restaurant. We made polite conversation about this and that and I prayed that this evening would soon be over.

After our meal we were chauffeur driven to the theatre for a performance of Hamlet by some of our top British actors.

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My boss, who certainly has style, had booked us balcony seats all to ourselves. There we were, Veronique and I in our own balcony, when two men came in pushing a trolley with a bottle of champagne in an ice bucket, two glasses, and a large box of the best chocolate truffles you could imagine.

“My boss is certainly keen to win this contract ...” I thought to myself, “he hasn’t missed a trick so far ... luxurious hotel, chauffeur driven car, grand restaurant, a balcony at the theatre and now this ... I’d better be on my best behaviour ... I wouldn’t want to be the reason why this contract is lost!”

Before the performance started I tried to make small conversation about Shakespeare and Hamlet in particular, trying hard to remember what I’d been taught at school all those years ago. But it soon became apparent that Veronique was very well educated in English literature having spent some years at a top British University in her youth.

“Something else which my boss had omitted to tell me ...” I thought to myself cursing him in the process.

Thankfully, the performance started giving me the opportunity to remain silent and praying that the evening would soon be over without me making any more silly mistakes. Once this play is finished, I’d accompany her to the hotel and hey presto ... I’m free to go home to my family!

As the play progressed I noticed she held a handkerchief to her eyes several times.

“Was she getting emotional?” I thought, “Hamlet is not exactly a comedy, but I saw no reason for tears ... Maybe she remembers her time at University in England ... an old friend perhaps had come to mind ... some handsome young man she once loved maybe ... and now she wonders what could have been ...”

I didn’t know what to do. I looked ahead pretending not to notice her and every so often I looked sideways at her without moving my head. I think she was crying all right. She kept raising her handkerchief to her eyes every now and then.

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If I said nothing she'd think I was an un-caring so and so ... and if that's the way I deal with a person who is clearly upset then our Company certainly doesn't deserve this big contract. And if we were to lose the contract my boss would blame me and most possibly fire me for ruining it all for him.

On the other hand, if I tried to console her and say something she'd probably resent it and be embarrassed by the whole affair and blame me for making it obvious that she's distressed. And we'd lose the contract and my boss would fire me anyway.

Perhaps if I offered her another chocolate truffle? No ... that might remind her of her boy-friend who used to take her to the theatre and buy her chocolates and ...

My mind was doing somersaults and I did not know what to do for the best.

Maybe I should pretend to cry too, wipe my eyes every now and then ... that would show her that I am a sensitive man well moved by this magnificent performance of Hamlet. But then, people expect business men to be tough ... and we'd lose the contract and ...

On the other hand, she might think that it's nice for a man to show his feelings ... in touch with one's feminine side and all that ...

To cry or not to cry? That is the question which repeated in my mind.

It was then that she said, "Would you assist me please? I seem to have lost one of my contact lenses. It just fell to the ground.

"I have another pair in my handbag. They are in a little tube. Would you mind getting them for me please?" And she handed me her handbag.

I opened her bag gingerly on my knees and put my hand in to try and find a little plastic tube containing her spare contact lenses.

Why do women have to carry the whole world and his uncle inside their bags? Why do they need all this stuff?

The first thing I picked out was a tube of lipstick ... I put it back in. Then a small bottle with some cleaning fluid for lenses, a tube of cool mints sweets,

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a small box with needles and thread, a packet of French cigarettes ... and several other items too ... !!!

“The container is in a side pocket on the left” she said.

I looked left and right and left again but it was far too dark to see anything in her handbag. I pushed my head almost right into the handbag resting on my knees but I could not find her contact lenses.

Then I found a cigarette lighter and I thought “Aha ... let there be light!”

I lit the lighter ... held it in my hand and carefully put it in the handbag ... I put my face right into the handbag and peered down in the darkness therein to see if I could find the contact lenses.

And that’s when it happened.

As the man on the stage was saying loudly “To be or not to be” I set my hair on fire.

I dropped the handbag and its contents on the floor ... tried frantically to put the fire out without drawing the attention of the whole audience to a separate comedic performance in our balcony ... whilst Mademoiselle Veronique emptied the bottle of champagne on my head, followed by the bucket of ice, and then proceeded to hit me several times with her theatre program to ensure the fire in my hair was well and truly out!

I was soaking wet with champagne and freezing water and quite a few of my curls had perished in the forest fire which took place on my cranium.

Eventually the fire was out and we found her spare contact lenses.

She thought the whole performance was hilarious ... and I don’t mean Hamlet!

We did win the contract but I had great difficulty explaining my singed hair to my wife and family ... and my boss is pleased that I’d go to any lengths to gain a contract for him.