

GENESIS

A Short Story by Chris Copsey



TODAY WAS NOT a good day for the Rev Alwright which amounted to just another bad day in an accumulation of bad days. If you were at all interested, Rev Alwright would tell you that his very first really bad day occurred on Sunday 16th of June 2003.

Paul had his Road to Damascus, Alwright had the B1859 to Beagleton. The B1859 was not a road that he had travelled before nor had he ever visited Beagleton but on this day he was curious and it seemed the right thing to do. His first revelation came as he peered through the fog from the car's position from atop the hedgerow. His second revelation came when he realised it was a sunny Sunday afternoon and the final revelation happened when he had doubted the young constable's lineage when asked to blow into the breathalyser even though he could recall marrying the constable's parents.

Revelation Monday followed Revelation Sunday. Mrs Alwright had asked him over the breakfast table at lunchtime, "How many years have we been married?" He had replied after considerable effort, "24 - I think". To this she replied, "Don't bother buying anything in silver" and had promptly packed her bags and left. All he had gleaned from his solicitor was that she had moved to the south coast with another woman. This had at least solved one puzzle for she, who hadn't shown much interest in religion, had asked him the previous year if the verse that said, 'Man should not lay with mankind' applied to women as well. Alwright had been surprised but not shocked by this turn of events for their more intimate physical moments had diminished over the years.

To compensate for this loss Alwright had turned to theological reasoning which told him that, as Muslims and Christians believed in the same God, then it should be permissible to use the Islamic method of di-

vorce. This stated that he could say 'I divorce you' three times and being recognised as legal in the eyes of this One God would save him a fortune in fees. He didn't say this directly to Mrs Alwright of course but addressed it to the One God in the toilet one evening 'sure in the knowledge', as they say, that He would pass the message on. Given his position he reverted back to his Christian beliefs immediately afterwards but was convinced that his actions would have been sufficient to placate the One True God. He had discussed the merits of this innovative theological approach with Miss Givens, the Sunday School teacher, who could only concur with his line of thought before she led him into the bedroom.

All these events Alwright had managed, so far, to keep from his superiors. But his superiors were now adding to Alwright's troubles. As in all parishes over a continuing number of years congregation numbers had been falling. In his younger days Alwright had put this down to the fact that the Church was an uninviting cool box, but with the advent of natural gas other reasons had to be found. Alwright had concluded after extensive research in the local pub that religion was just 'too bloody boring'. '2,000 years and still the same old script and without even a hint that any of it may be true' and 'If the Creator was that good why didn't he create a planet where we all spoke the same language, all believed the same things and had to do as little as possible?'

And it pleased Alwright that all those in the bar that evening agreed with him. Those at the offices of the Bishop had other ideas. It was their exalted opinion that a more evangelical approach was necessary and with that in mind they had asked Alwright if he could start speaking in

tongues and bring a little 'pizzazz' into his services. Alwright, who had retained only a smattering of French from his schooldays, dismissed the first suggestion immediately but had promised to consult with his congregation regarding 'pizzazz'. Old Mrs Ricketts explained to him that since the war she had hated Italian food and Old Mr Ricketts informed him that he thought there was indeed something wrong with his prostrate. Of the remaining four the two elderly Tulip sisters said they would be up for anything that involved a dance, Miss Callow thought it was the Devil's work and Mr Bennett said he would look it up in his botany book but would approve if it brightened up the Church.

Armed with these insights he had replied to the Bishop that adopting American practices would inflame local opinion particularly as half the female population following the war had been left pregnant by returning GIs. Alwright had never received a reply and things returned to a neurotic normality – until the Christening. The Christening was due to take place at 10am on Saturday morning and in earlier days this would not have been a problem but for Alwright now it was somehow relevant that Friday preceded Saturday. He had shared this problem in the pub with Tottering Ted the local poacher who, on receiving a pint of his favourite brew, confirmed Alwright's fears. Saturday definitely followed Friday. A couple of hours later Alwright left to consult with Miss Givens only to find that her house had moved during the evening which made Alwright wonder if work had finally started on the long awaited by-pass.

Unfortunately for Alwright, Saturday had not been bypassed and it arrived with a bright shaft of light through the vestry window. The light formed a halo around the head of Mary who in sombre tones said, "What are we going to do with you Alwright?" Alwright, wondering at first if he had turned Catholic and then looking through eyes that resembled the geographical features of Mars, replied, ➤