

The Saga of Arthur Watson

By David O'Neil

There comes a time when it seems that everything is against you. You know what it's like, the dog is sick on the carpet. The cat has kittens in the bed in the guest bedroom and you don't find out until mother-in-law is coming through the front door.

For Arthur Watson it was that sort of day. There was no dog, no cat, and for that matter no mother-in-law; all there was, was Ugly Fred, currently minder for Gordon Applegate, the local loan shark.

Now in fairness, Ugly Fred was not in so many words ugly, more your handsome Adonis type, always well turned out, never a wrinkle in his socks, and hair tidy to the extent of immaculate. No it wasn't for his appearance that they called him Ugly Fred, it was for what he did to people he got that name. For those who avoided conflict with Fred's principles, there wasn't a more reasonable, gentle, soul in the neighbourhood, but cause a crease in Gordon Applegate's brow and you'd better watch out. Fred's method was simple and direct, for each crease. A crack, arm, wrist, shoulder, and in extreme cases knee. All very painful events, none of them involving blood. He was very particular about that. Arthur had heard it mentioned that it was because on one occasion in chastising a client, a spot of the client's blood happened to land on Fred's lapel. It being a newly purchased item from Saxon Hawke of Saville Row Fred became incensed and lost his temper, by the time he had finished that particular job his suit was completely ruined, and the client in question, had been wiped off the books literally. I cannot vouch for the truth of the story as I was not present at the time, but I do know that it is true that Fred now only breaks limbs, never the skin.

For Arthur Watson the outlook was not sunny, in fact to the rest of the neighbourhood, it was positively stormy. The odds were that this would be a full house, with extras. Extras being the excessively painful manipulation of said broken limbs subsequent to their actual breaking. It had only been employed once in the recent history of the district. A crime regarded as worse than murder at least in the eyes of Mr Applegate.

That crime; actually was to carry out a bank robbery in Mr Applegate's manor, without previously warning Mr Applegate, or even offering to share the proceeds with Mr Applegate. The unfortunate robber not only still needs the wheelchair that Mr Applegate, known for his charity, donated, but was stripped of the proceeds of his successful bank raid. As Mr Applegate pointed out the local bank was the repository where he kept his own current account; he was always spouting about support local business, thus the money stolen actually belong to him. His convenient memory allowed him to ignore the fact that the insurance had reimbursed him in full, thus the raid had netted him more than 100% profit.

It is difficult to express an opinion on the crime committed by Arthur Watson. After all in this day and age his crime is hardly thought of as a crime at all. The regular detail of the shocking

carrying on of politicians and other public figures, whose shoddy affairs litter the tabloids with monotonous frequency, make a minor transgression like sleeping with another man's wife seem trivial, unless the wife in question happens to be Mrs Applegate.

There are those who say that the wife in the case should shoulder some responsibility for the affair. Unfortunately Mr Applegate insisted, having slapped his wife Gracie around a little, that she had been overcome by the wiles of Arthur Watson, thus the blame had been placed firmly on the rather narrow shoulders of the said philanderer. Mrs Applegate was nowhere to be seen at the time of the publication of the details of the offence. It might have been embarrassing for her to appear with the two black eyes and the wired up jaw inflicted in the slapping from her loving husband.

It is probably a perversion of justice that the chastisement awarded would be administered by Ugly Fred, who had within the recent past also sampled the delights for which Arthur Watson was to suffer. Mrs Applegate had long been known for her generous nature, and the forthcoming chastisement destined for Arthur Watson, caused many a sympathetic shiver among her former beneficiaries.

It can be said that Fred's reaction to any criticism in this regard would have been to remind his critic that the crime was not the event, it was being found out. In his case this had not happened. It is presumed that any person unwise enough to bring the subject up in Fred's presence would have suicidal tendencies. Such tendencies would undoubtedly be encouraged, nay insisted upon by Fred.

And so the meeting between the two protagonists finally occurred. To the disappointment of the general public within the area, the actual encounter was within the privacy of Arthur Watson's home, a sturdy semi-detached house in the corner of the cul-de-sac, only separated from the Applegate residence by the length of their joint gardens; 30 yards on the Watson side, 300 yards on the Applegate. The significance of this juxtaposition had been lost on the inhabitants of the manor. It only dawned on Ugly Fred when he arrived at Arthur's front door. His discomfort was already showing when Arthur's wife answered the door. The stunned man entered the house with a growing sense of unease, disquiet even. The matter of fact attitude of Mrs Watson did not help. She chatted brightly as she ushered him into the lounge, albeit through the constriction of her wired mouth, the skilful make-up reduced the bruises to a shadow on the smooth skin of her face.

Arthur waited for his wife to leave the two men alone, a little nervously he spoke. "Fred I know why you have come here. I think you realise now that you are wasting your time. If you work me over, you will have to answer to Gracie, and possibly to George."

Ugly Fred's mind was in turmoil, he could not understand how this could have happened. Arthur enlightened him.

"Gracie has a split personality, she married George, when she was Violet. She has no common memory between her two selves, Gracie and Violet. Obviously at one time there were more persons involved, When we were first married, Gloria used to appear now and then, she was a real handful, I seem to recall you had a fling with Gloria, I'm right aren't I?" Uncomfortably Fred nodded.

With a small smile Arthur said "Must have been a shock to discover she was the boss's wife with a different hairstyle.

"She didn't seem to know me, never commented or came on to me again!" Fred said.

Arthur continued, "She faded from the scene leaving just Gracie and Violet. I bought this house because of the convenience, since Violet goes away a lot, I get to see Gracie more and more, I'm hoping that one day she will discard her 'alter ego' entirely and stay Gracie for the rest of our lives, but until that happens we'll just have to manage." He stopped and looked at Fred. "I presume George doesn't realise?"

Fred shook his head, "He's always been so busy being boss, he hardly notices whether she's there or not. The trouble is that she has been here a long time this time and other people are noticing; if word gets back to George you will be dead. If I give you a slapping people will think it's been dealt with and forget about it."

Just then Gracie walked in looking helpless. Arthur took one look and took her arm escorting her to the kitchen saying, "I'll get some sugar Mrs Applegate, won't be a moment."

As Fred watched the woman brightened up and waited while Arthur brought a cup of sugar. Whilst she was standing in the kitchen Arthur picked up a hairbrush and turning to Gracie/Violet he said "Your hair is a little blown about, I'll just tidy it before you go home."

To Ugly Fred's astonishment Gracie sat down in a chair and allowed Arthur to restyle her hair into the form favoured by Mrs Applegate. He chatted while he worked; finally he was done and stood back to look at his handiwork. "Right now Violet if you would just like to pop upstairs you can slip your things on and I'll have your sugar ready to take home."

As Violet left through the back door across the garden to the house next door, Fred sat down on one of the kitchen chairs and let his breath out with a thankful whoosh. "How long have you been doing that?" He said with interest.

"It'll be 17 years on Tuesday" Arthur said, "When we got married I didn't know. She said she was still known as Gloria Peters, her maiden name at work. It was only after our first anniversary I realised that her cabin staff job with the airline was actually a Ground Staff position, and whenever I thought she was away, she was actually being someone else. I also realised that she had to be aware of her problem because she always insisted that she could not be contacted while she was at work, as they could not know that she was married otherwise she would lose her job. I only found out by accident, when she was not well. I rang the company to explain and I was put on to the ground staff supervisor. She was sympathetic, I said I was Gloria's brother, she said ground staff often posed as airside staff, it sounded much more romantic."

Ugly Fred got to his feet, "Would you mind if I give you a single slap, just so I can say honestly that I gave you a slapping. Frankly I should be proud to shake your hand for sparing everyone's feelings for all these years." At Arthur's nod he reached across the table and smacked him lightly on the cheek. "I suggest a holiday for a month or so just to let the bones heal, he reached into his breast pocket and produced a thick wad of high value bank notes. Peeling off a selection he thrust them into Arthur's hands. "Leave a note for Gracie/Violet; I'll see she is all right

while you're away." He turned for a last look at Arthur "Go after dark, nobody will see you then."
Then he was gone leaving the astonished Arthur, hand on his cheek, one thousand pounds in his other hand, wondering what Gracie would say when he told her.

Probably something like,

Come off it Arthur; you're having a laugh, no one's that daft!"

