

Indoor Life

Nigel Ford

He doesn't go out, lives entirely indoors and is not interested in windows.

He eats chocolates only occasionally, and then usually raspberry truffles. He has a companion now, with who he is deeply in love, for the first time in his life, and late into his mature years. His is concerned she is putting on weight, largely owing to her adoration of chocolates combined with a spectacular lack of exercise.

His Auntie Margaret lived indoors for many years. One day she announced, opening the front door and peeking out, 'There's no point in going out there anymore. There's nothing out there that stimulates my interest. Much better to stay indoors in the warm. Especially, or specifically, there are several, what could be called, intellectually stimulating television channels nowadays, instead of just the one. And I shall be able to write as much poetry as I like, which is what I always wanted to do.'

Auntie Margaret had a penchant for chocolates unfortunately. The consequence of this, what could only be described as an addiction, became apparent when first, one of her arms needed to be amputated from the elbow down

and then one of her legs. Followed by the remainder of the partial arm, followed by the other leg from the knee down. At which point she passed away. Which was fortunate, for who knows (we were all worried about this situation, it frequently being an eager topic of conversation at family get-togethers, such as birthdays, Easter and Christmas) what might have been taken off had she lived on.

She was very cheery, always had been, possessed a lovely giggle, right to the end.

This was not what started it, however. Although what started it had a definite association with confectionary.

His paternal grandfather had built a house for his mother (that would be his paternal great grandmother) at the bottom the large garden. She was referred to as “Granny Iverson says this, Granny Iverson said that” in her position as the family prophet.

She moved into her new house in her mid-fifties, never to emerge, apart from at the end. All supplies could be delivered in those days; the milkman called of course every morning very early and the grocery van, the butchers van, the fishmongers van, the fruiterers van and the bakery van all delivered once a week. The doctor too, visited on a fairly regular basis to administer a check-up (although she was never ill, as far as he could remember), as did the vicar, at least every fortnight. The services of a dentist were not required owing to the tradition in his family at that time of having all their teeth taken out when they turned of age, and replaced by dental plates.

False teeth were all the rage in these days, people would resort to such measures to avoid having to visit the dentist for extractions and fillings, the pain being atrocious there not being any local anaesthetics to speak of. The annual dentist appointment weighed on their minds heavily during this epoch – the fear and the dread sticking like a limpet all year round.

Those who had all their teeth taken out at once were invariably kind and merry it seemed to him. You could always tell the difference.

There came a time when he would be rewarded for walking down the garden to Granny Iverson's house to pay her a visit on Saturday mornings.

Recently, upon the occasion of her sixtieth birthday, she had announced at the end of her birthday party, to all and sundry – there being thirty seven members of immediate family in attendance – and these being female in majority, owing to the past two Great World Wars, Granny Iverson's husband and three sons having been lost in the first, that since there was no point in going outside because there were no men left alive to speak of who might be interested in her at her age despite her being attractive, which generated a round of chuckles and merriment, a lot of it too, owing to them being a merrily toothless bunch, that she would now be retiring to her bed for good.

She had hired the services, she said, of a gipsy lady from the council estate across the road. A Mrs Bailey, who would be coming in every day to do for her. A very kind and

pleasant woman, she said, full of interesting stories, who allowed her to win at gin rummy.

Visitors would be welcome, but not too frequently if you please, because she would need to get her rest.

When he was staying with his paternal grandparents, which was quite often, because his own parents travelled quite a lot, he was allowed to go and visit Granny Iverson on Saturday mornings when he was on leave from boarding school, at 10.30 a.m. for twenty minutes.

He would sit on a chair especially arranged at her bedside, the lounge now being used as her bedroom; a light and airy place surrounded by French windows, looking out onto a courtyard of white seashell gravel, studded with bright flower pots and surrounded by climbing plants of myriad sorts and sizes, and she would let him in on all the gossip she had heard on the radio and from the delivery boys and, at length, on her opinion of it. During this period of conversation she would reward him with four expensive chocolates. One when he arrived, when she invariably pulled open a small draw in her elegant ebony bedside chest-of-drawers, which stood on bowed legs and was fitted with brass handles and said 'Let me see, I might have something here,' at which he would invariably exclaim with surprise and delight, the delight being genuine, the surprise not, 'wow granny, that's amazing!' At which she would chuckle merrily and check to make sure she had her teeth in. Then two at regular intervals during their conversations and one when he left.

He always bestowed a peck on her thickly powdered cheek when he arrived and left, and she always offered her cheek for him to do so, while she herself kissed the air, knowing wisely that small boys dreaded intimately expressed affection.

One chore he never tired of doing for Granny Iverson was putting the wooden clothes pegs away in a kitchen drawer that she bought monthly from a tinker who visited her at her bedside and told her fortune.

‘The world has come to me at last,’ she had a habit of saying. ‘I have become a social institution,’ she would giggle, ‘I know that’s what I say when you come to see your poor old Granny, but it’s perfectly true. My gipsy cleaning lady, the grocer’s boy, the fishmonger’s boy, the baker’s girl, the fruiterer’s girl the tinkers et al, my life is one long social whirl. It’s as going shopping used to be but more private. But not so much the milkman, only him on Fridays when he collects his money. He’s too early a bird otherwise.

By the time Granny Iverson died she had displayed on her wall five carefully framed telegrams from the Queen, congratulating her on her 100th, 101st, 102nd, 103rd and 104th birthdays.

Throughout his life, he considered Granny Iverson a good example of how to live properly and enjoy your life without a lot of fuss and bother and without imposing on other people.

Once boarding school was over, he entered the academic life with alacrity.

He grew into a good-looking lad and popular with the ladies, several of whom he got to know intimately. Once an intimate relationship had been established, these ladies would begin to drop such remarks as 'when are you going to get a job?' 'What do you intend to do once you have your degree?' and even once, 'When are you going to grow up?'

His answers to these questions being respectively, 'Never, I hope,' 'Get another,' and 'Never, I hope.' Responses that made some amused and angered others. On the whole, he began to realise, he got on better with those who became amused. One thing all these ladies had in common was that once they had received answers to these a questions they invariably suggested they should alter the relationship and become friends rather than lovers. To which he invariably agreed without dismay, always being ready to discover and investigate the new aspects invariably revealed by new relationships. One lady became annoyed at what she called his ready acceptance of her conditions of future relationship and informed him with dreadful certainty that he would never be happy because he would always think the grass was greener somewhere else. Which it was not, she emphasised, such an assumption would always turn out to be a fallacy.

He considered her prediction carefully and privately decided that it was a good thing she had warned him of this problem, and that accordingly, when grazing on greener pastures, he would remind himself that his grazing here would only be temporary and that he should make the most of it, before moving on, retaining his happiness, to the next

pasture. The faithful application of this allegory was to turn out to provide satisfactory rewards throughout his life.

Until.

‘Would you like a chocolate?’

He turned looked into the box of chocolates she was offering. There was one left. A raspberry truffle he recognised. He looked up into her face eagerly through his trim white beard. She smiled back calmly through her pretty tousled hair.

‘Never touch them these days,’ he said.

‘How wise.’ She took a chocolate from the box and popped it into her mouth, stuffing the box into a campus park wastepaper bin.

‘Muuummm,’ she grunted, ‘scrumptious.’

‘Just like you.’

‘I’m too young.’

‘Nonsense,’ he protested.

‘Just kidding,’ she said. ‘Where are you going?’

‘To my house.’ He turned and made to walk away.

‘Can I come too? I’m fed up with the outdoors.’

He turned back, stepped up to her and held her by her shoulders, looking into her face, amazed, brow wrinkled, wearing a slightly lopsided, very quizzical expression. ‘What did you say?’

I said, ‘I’m fed up with the outdoors.’

'And you like chocolates?'

'I adore chocolates.'

'In that case, you'd better come along with me.'

Based in Sweden, **Nigel Ford** is a writer, poet, and philosopher.
