

Friends' Story

How it all began

I'd been retired for about 6 months, had an apartment in a rather dull town with little to keep me there. Hardly surprising the feeling kept coming to me that there must be somewhere with a community I would fit into. Near to the sea, and with some countryside nearby would do nicely. Sounds like a lot of places, so first I narrowed it to a few areas, and, since it was already autumn, and the schools were back, I had no trouble in visiting, taking my van, which I could sleep in if there was no accommodation available. I made appointments with estate agents, organised myself with online searches and got prepared. After 3 or four trips, I was getting used to it, knew what to ask, what to look for, where I was wasting my time and how to figure out if people were being straight with me or not.

There were sad little towns, on the coast, which had seen far better days. Places too gentrified and haughty to offer any sort of real community, but also on two that seemed promising. It was on one of those trips that I met Mr. Wills. He had a couple of properties to show me, all well and good, but really at the top of my price range. All of a sudden, he seemed to get quite excited and suggested he had one more property, older than I'd had in mind, but definitely interesting, whatever that meant.

So, thinking I was here anyway, off we went. Yes, even from the outside the house had character, I'd give him that. We entered through a small hallway into a large kitchen, diner and living room combined. At the back was a conservatory leading out to a stone patio, big enough for afternoon tea, and a rather pretty if not well kept garden. I was interested.

We looked at the other rooms, all good. The price, cheaper than I'd imagined. Mr Wills then started to tell me, the place had been rented out for some years, that's why the garden was unloved, and the owners had decided to sell. One condition was the leasehold, some condition from the landowners that one should not build on the property. That was a bit odd, but since I'd seen the double garage, the workshop behind, and all the rooms upstairs and in the attic it really didn't ring one alarm bell. I had more space than I could ever need unless a whole family moved in with me. Then he said something even odder "they won't just sell to anyone, you know". I started imagining some family feud in the background, some fight over the house, or money, but seeing my expression he assured me that it was simply because the house had been very important to them in their younger days, and they couldn't bear to see it fall into more disrepair than it was already, which was only superficial, I hoped.

Had I the house that I would really be happy in? Would the owners sell? I went home with 100 questions, but had in reality decided this was the house for me. In a cul-de-sac, the end of which led into a path between some woods and a large vista of arable farmland, the sea only 20 minutes with the car, and a few shops not far away. I checked out the town that afternoon, pleasant, and with a train station.

2 days later I checked in with Mr. Wills, the house would be mine if I wanted it. After a survey, I'd sign the papers, and get my solicitor to start on the conveyancing. The surveyor was very quick to reply, saying there was something not quite right. His measurements and original plans were not in

agreement, but otherwise everything was structurally fine. Mr. Wills came in and suggested he check it once more, at the owners' expense, and this time no difference. Whatever had gone on, I was now reassured and the sale went through. I went over a couple of times, met Mrs McLafferty, who seemed to be not just Mr. Wills assistant, but helper, cleaner and generally useful person. She offered to give the place a thorough going over, so I could move in as soon as I was ready.

And so we moved in, that's me, and my little friends, toys and stuffed animals I'd accumulated over time. Just a normal removal firm, nothing special, nothing broken, furniture built, and a lot of boxes to be unpacked into various cupboards, drawers and wardrobes. A few things I'd bought new, and they had been delivered, so it was all much less stress than I had mentally prepared for.