

**My Six Minute  
Stories,  
So far, . . . .**



**Mick Cooper**

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Minute  
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So far,....  
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I dedicate this book to all my writing friends,  
but in particular, Charlotte Comley, the group leader  
at 'writers@lovedean' who has been my  
inspiration in recent years.

Please note that some of the stories are a little  
'naughty.'

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First published in Great Britain, 2014  
by Mick Cooper.

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## **MY SIX MINUTE STORIES ???**

**Most of the stories in this book were written at creative writers groups and were meant to be about 6 minutes long. In the early days, starting at South Down College, then for a few terms with Denise, a few years with Keir, and more recently with writers@lovedean and the marvellous Charlotte. In some cases only six minutes were permitted for them to be read aloud to the group. The majority are short stories, some not so short, plus some flash fiction, and a few work day pieces, poetry, mini-sagas, and some became minor epics.**

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PLEASE! Read at a leisurely, even sleepy pace, with the occasional yawn!

## The Cat and I



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I had finished my breakfast, and just slid the dirty crockery into the warm soapy water in the kitchen sink. On returning to the living room, I again looked out of the window at the day. 'Hmm!' I sighed, 'I suppose I'd better think about what I'm going to do with this day.'

At that moment I heard a meow from behind me. The cat had finally woken up, was sitting, looking at me, and asking for food.

"OK Cat, I thought it was about time I got some ear-ache from you, let's see if there's any of your tins left."

I walked into the kitchen and she followed.

I had called her 'Cat' ever since she had adopted me. As a stray, she had suddenly appeared on my doorstep one day, now nearly six years ago. At first she was very timid and easily scared off. Gradually and patiently, I had won her confidence. She was about twelve years old, mostly black with a dab of white on her chest, and had the largest set of white whiskers I'd ever seen. I suppose it shows a lack of imagination not actually giving her a proper name. I never have been one for 'labels.' 'Cat' she was, so 'Cat' she is. I often wondered what she called me.

For most of those six years it was just Cat and me. We had been good company for each other. I fed her and she sank her claws into my lap whenever she wanted, a rather unfair bargain.

She me-owed repeatedly and paced around as I opened the tin.

"There you go Cat, get yer choppers 'round that."

She chewed heartily into a fresh bowl of her favourite food. I took pleasure from watching her enjoy it.

"I don't know Cat, if only you could talk, I'll bet you could tell some stories...."

"I wonder what you were in your previous life?"

Cat looked round at me, there was a sparkle in her eye then she carried on eating.

For the last four weeks her back legs had been somehow paralysed and she was dragging herself around with her two front paws. The Vet had told me that he believed she had a trapped nerve in her spine. Apart from her obvious disability, she was in perfect health. Her coat was shiny, her appetite was excellent, and her waterworks flowed! If she had been in any distress I would have asked the Vet to deal with it. On one occasion when she was trying to clean herself, somewhat comically, she lost her balance. Legs were splayed in all directions. Once she had regained her equilibrium, the expression on her face was one that I wish I could have captured in a photograph. It was as though she was asking, 'Who did that? who pushed me?' then her eyes found me.

'It wasn't me Cat, honest!' I assured her.

As soon as I realised she had a problem with her legs, I had bought a litter tray and a large bag of cat litter. Almost immediately it was obvious that she couldn't get her hindquarters and legs over the 4 inch high walls of the plastic tray. So, in true 'Blue Peter' style, I fashioned a new one out of a cut down cardboard box, a polythene bag and some sticky tape. Cat found it very acceptable and made good use of it.

I found, and sank down into my favourite armchair and again pondered on the coming day. After a few minutes, Cat was at my feet asking to be lifted onto my lap. I duly obliged. She settled herself down.

"Now don't you think you're there for the day, I've got to go out later, Cat."

She turned her head towards me but did not answer.

"Oh well, it can wait a little while," I added.

I relaxed, still feeling a little sleepy. I yawned, my eyelids became heavy.

I heard a knocking and then noticed a face at the window. Mary, the lady from over the road, was looking in. I mouthed loudly, "Come on in, you know where the key is." She knew I hid it on the small ledge over the front door. Mary was a 'lovely old sort', in her late sixties, a widow with a heart of gold. She was a chubby, bingo-playing, dyed pink-haired, bespectacled lady. She just popped her head around the door, knowing that if she came in to the room, Cat would be startled and jumpy.

"Hello Mary, how are you," I enquired.

"I'm fine, just popping down to the supermarket, do you need anything?" she asked.

Last winter, when I had had a rather nasty bout of flu, Mary had been the proverbial good neighbour, fetching and carrying, and making the odd cup of coffee and bowl of soup, and generally seeing I made a good recovery.

"No thanks, I've got to pop out myself later on. I've got a few calls to make, so thanks anyway."

"How's Cat today?" she asked,

"Much the same as yesterday," I replied, trying to sound positive.

"Hmmm," she said knowingly. I'm sure she was unconvinced. The cat and I listened to the radio for an hour or two, and I decided I would leave my shopping trip until after lunch. The room was now cosy and warm and I didn't feel much like moving.

Late in the afternoon, Cat tucked into some freshly cooked fish, and then curled up on the rug in front of the fire. During the evening, she found a comfortable spot on my lap again. She purred loudly and we watched the television together. There was little on the box to interest either of us. I dozed, she napped. After what seemed only a short while, I woke up and looked at the clock. The time was twenty past eleven. I stretched but Cat was still asleep. I lifted her gently off of my lap and laid her on the rug before the fire. There she lay, neatly coiled.

I leaned across and turned the gas fire off. Cat woke up and looked round at me as if to say, 'Hey what's going on?'

"Ah well Cat, it's been a long day, and tomorrow's another one."

I took a deep breath, "Time to turn in. See you in the morning," I paused as I got to the living room door. I turned my head and asked, "Are you OK Cat?"

"Fine thanks," replied the cat, so I switched off the light and went to bed.

29/10/91.

## Granddad

It was a job nobody wanted to do, but, as I was Granddad's only next of kin, the job fell on my shoulders. He had died three weeks earlier, at the grand old age of 83. The funeral and will reading went without a hitch or surprises, but now, someone had to go to his house and sort out his belongings and clear the place for sale.

Last Tuesday morning, after the kids were safely at school, my Sally and I went round, armed with black bags and brushes and bottles to help clean and tidy.

He didn't have much. The furniture had seen better days, and the clothing in his wardrobe would probably have been rejected by Oxfam. Never-the-less, we bagged up what we thought would be useful to some poor African native, and then separately bagged up the remainder for the bin men. A quick phone call had arranged for a local dealer to take away, or dump, as necessary, Granddad's furniture, and the house was clear and ready for the estate agent.

Sally realised that we hadn't even thought about checking the garden shed. So we broke the flimsy padlock on the door and had a look in. Again, there was little to interest anyone. Just as we were leaving, Sally noticed a large tin box about half the size of a suitcase, tucked away underneath the work bench. We pulled it up onto the top of the bench. I cleaned off the dirt and cobwebs and with the help of a rusty screwdriver, and some force, eased the dusty and dented lid open. Inside there were several piles of old letters and some small boxes.

I opened the first velvet covered box and was somewhat taken aback to find a small medal. The inscription on the back read 'for meritorious service', and in another box, another medal read 'for heroism beyond the call of duty' followed by Granddad's name. In all, there were eight boxes and medals all with similar or more praiseworthy inscriptions, and in one

box was a metal lapel badge for the Parachute Regiment. Sally and I were amazed and shocked to think that, long before I came along, Granddad had been a war hero. Two of the medals had French writing on them, which we couldn't understand.

There were packs of letters, and I started looking through the first pack. Several of them had 'On his majesty's service' across the top and on reading them I found most of them were quite uninteresting. On a few were the initials S O E, which I realised meant Special Operations Executive. They were instructions to start 'missions' and other official business matters in War Department jargon. I was about to gather the whole mass together and dump the packs into a black bag, when I noticed the phrase, 'dishonourable discharge.' on a letter near the bottom of the pack. It seems that Granddad had been in trouble. After what seemed exemplary service, he had been sacked, jailed for three years and kicked out on his ear! There's gratitude for you, I thought.

Reading on, it seems he had apparently been scheduled to go on a mission, but had simply not turned up, gone AWOL, as I think they used to say. Sadly the letters did not say why. As I read the letter aloud, I looked over to Sally, feeling empty and sad that Granddad had never once spoken to me of this. I thought we were close, but, obviously not close enough. Did any of the family know about his early life history?

A hero, and then a deserter.

Way down at the bottom was a small stack of letters tied with ribbon. Sally opened them and started reading the first one to me,

"It's got a French stamp on it and a 1946 postmark, and it's in very broken English" she said, "A bit difficult to read" but she did. They were from a French woman and some of them were quite romantic, even fruity. It seems, she was someone Granddad had met whilst in Europe. They must have been very close. The lady's name was Cecile and she wrote very passionate letters. Her final letter left me feeling uneasy. Her words seemed to be words of despair. I could imagine as they were written, she was in tears, even heart broken, at the end of her tether.

I wonder what happened to her.

Did he ever go back? He married Nan in 1949. Perhaps he had met Nan by 1946 and decided, maybe somewhat coldly, to remove all of his war year memories from his head, and hide them in a metal case at the bottom of his garden. I suppose it's quite likely that Cecile would have married and had lots of kids of her own by now, even grandchildren.

In a small envelope was a screwed up piece of newspaper cutting, I opened it with care and tried to read it but the article was all in French. Most of the French language I had learnt at school was now long forgotten, but, I did recognise several words. 'Femme' that means woman, and what's this? 'soo a cee day', "Doesn't that mean....." I mused. "Suicide?"

## Emergency

I opened my eyes, but all I could see, was darkness. I was confused and my head was hurting and spinning. I tried, but I couldn't move any part of me. Then, I attempted to move my eyeballs in their sockets and closing my eyes and squinting each of them in turn, and as I did, dust fell into them. I closed them quickly and tried shaking my head but it was impossible. I took a deep breath, but the air was full of dust. I felt something running down my right temple, across my cheek and down into my mouth. Was it blood? My blood? Could it be water? I tasted it, and it was vile. It was neither blood nor water. I spat it out and roused more dust.

I then realised that I was lying, with my left arm pinned under me, and only the fingers of my right hand had any room to wiggle. The weight on top of me was incredible. What had happened? I remember falling, and then thumping into the ground, and then the world fell on me. What time was it? How long had I been here? I knew not. There was no way of checking my watch. The dust had got to my lungs. I began coughing, and felt very sick. Suddenly, a pain in my left leg became unbearable, as a muscle, that must have been trapped, demanded I move. I ignored the demand, I had no option. My head began to clear and now all that I heard was a ringing and then, silence. My heart started racing, and I began panicking, I was short of breath and I became very scared when I realised my predicament. My feet were cold, and I knew it wouldn't be too long before the whole of my body temperature would start to drop. That would mean only one thing.

My fingers could feel something smooth. Was it wood? Was it glass? I pulled my fingers away fearing cuts and danger. My bladder reminded me it was still there and about to function. I squeezed my legs together in the hope of relieving the pressure in my lower regions.

Again I listened, but there was nothing. I must have slipped into a short spell of unconsciousness, and then I woke, snorting and coughing, it tasted like blood. I sighed as I realised it was blood I was coughing up.

I managed to clench the cheeks of my bottom and there was a warm pain and the inside of my leg became wet. My bladder had won the battle.

What now I wondered? Minutes passed or was it hours. There was a strange smell, it smelt like..... acid..... or electricity. My spirits dropped at the thought of the inevitable. I relaxed every muscle, and shivered. Not so long ago, it was an ordinary day, and now? Probably my last day. Today I'm taking the rough with the rough. I thought of my loved ones. Mary is probably leaving work about now, but when is now? The thought of my new tiny alien world without a clock to obey, deflated me even more.

I began to feel hungry, and for once started thinking logically. It would mean about four hours since my last meal, breakfast, so it must be about twelve o'clock. High noon, but in total darkness. I heard music and couldn't believe my ears. It was a tune I seemed to know. I started humming along with it and as I did my eardrums became very painful.

Shout! I thought, shout. I shouted as loud as I could. Help! and Help! again, more pain and then the silence returned. It's no good, why bother. For a moment, I thought I could hear bird song. I listened, but there was nothing. Then I heard dogs barking, and I dismissed it. I swallowed hard and grit slid down my gullet. Boy, I was thirsty. I'd have killed for a cold pint of lager, swiftly followed by another. I could still hear dogs barking.

Is this it God? Is this what it's all come down to? Was that life? Is that all there is? This is a fine time to get religion. The barking got louder. Again I dismissed it. Then the rocks above me started moving. Was it starting again? This is it! I heard voices speaking in a strange tongue. Dear God make it quick. The smells around me, together with the odours from my body, were overpowering. The rock above moved and a shaft of unexpected, very bright light made me close my eyes. I

took a deep breath; there was clear air, almost. The barking was now hurting my ears. There's someone there, more rocks were moved and I struggled and found an unknown energy to lift my arm towards the light. Someone grabbed my hand. I squeezed it hard, and an overwhelming gratitude gushed through my body. Soon, only the lower half of my body was still trapped. He pulled my arms, and I winced in agony. My legs were still not free and I yelled in pain. My left foot had twisted and was trapped behind my right leg. The weight of rocks on my legs gradually disappeared and I was able to stretch, oh the relief, the wonderful relief. I was lifted onto a stretcher. Under the blanket my clothes were stuck to me. As I was carried away, I was blinded by the unkind but very welcome sunlight of the day. I took a long deep breath of good, clean, freedom.



"It's Ricard! Ricard is my professional name now. I arrived at Heathrow late last night."

"How are you..... and your mother?" enquired Roger.

"Fine! She's very well." Roger quickly looked Ricard up and down, as the queue behind him grew longer.

Roger's eyes suddenly became very warm and moist, as his throat and lips dried. His mind was confused as he searched for a few appropriate words. He gazed at the neatly and expensively dressed young man. His face was smooth, and tanned and healthy. Roger gulped and quickly composed himself. "So this is what the good life on the other side of the world has done for you, hmmm, you're all grown up now." The two men were totally oblivious of the sounds, activities and smells around them. Roger sighed at the thought of too many lost years. Years he could never get back. Were they really wasted years? He took a deep breath and swallowed hard.

"Your programs on twice a day, here, I watch it most days. So why are you here?" he wondered aloud.

"It's been 13 years since mother and I left," said Ricard, "I thought it was time for a re-union, in fact....." Ricard handed an envelope to Roger.

"What's this then?" he asked as he took it, somewhat cautiously.

"I..... have a ticket for..... you," a sly grin came to Ricard's face, "It's an air ticket to Melbourne." Roger looked again at the envelope and then at Ricard, trying to make some sense of this unexpected situation. "Mother's marriage to Shane collapsed and ended years ago," continued Ricard, "He was a worthless lay-about beach bum, so good riddance to him. She talks of you, more and more. You'd best come over for a visit, she misses you."

"No, I don't think that would be a very good idea, do you?"

Roger tried to rationalise.

"On the contrary..... Dad, I would say, she needs you now."

Their eyes met again, and Roger soon became resigned to what appeared to be the inevitable. "OK!" he took another deep breath realising he had nothing to lose, and asked "when do we leave?"

October 2001

## Another busy day

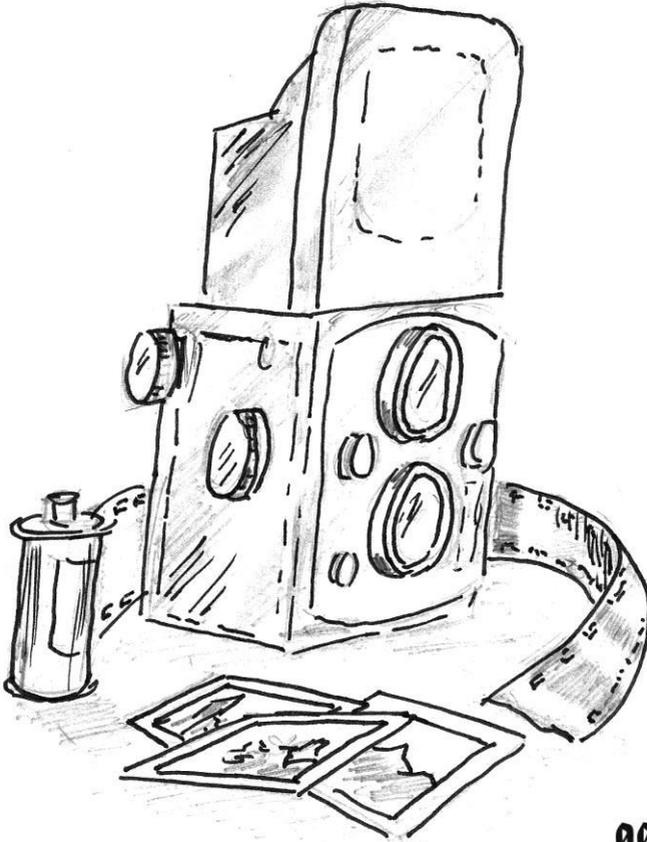
At first it seemed a very ordinary day but it was to prove anything but.

My local councillor was the City's Lord Mayor elect, and also a good friend of mine. Knowing my occupation, he asked me to take photographs at his Mayor making ceremony in the town hall. This I readily agreed to do, and at a very reasonable rate. I had looked forward to the occasion for weeks, and on the day, was told that I could go anywhere I wanted in the town hall to get the best possible vantage point to take my shots.

The hall was full and the ceremony began. Very soon the entire City's dignitaries were on stage, with the outgoing Mayor in the seat of honour. I busied myself racing from point to point to get the best angle at the crucial moments during the proceedings. At the split second the old Mayor placed the Mayoral chain on the new Mayor's shoulders, I was there to capture the moment, perfectly. He turned and smiled to greet the audience. The applause was deafening and I took more photographs. The occasion was getting to me and a tear welled in the corner of my eye. I was proud to be there to see history in the making. As the new Mayor moved to the edge of the stage to descend the steps and walk down the centre aisle of the hall, I was there snapping away.

The Lady Mayoress was at his side and smiled as if she was royalty. Trumpets blew and yet more applause. Just as the Mayor reached the edge of the stage ready to descend the steps, my footing slipped and I realised I was tumbling to the floor. Somehow, the Mayor's foot and mine came into contact, and I felt an excruciating pain as the Mayor fell backwards and his weight bounced on top of my body. His legs flew up into the air, his ermine

and robes sailing into space and his chain stretched around his throat which in turn made his eyes nearly pop from their sockets. Various other dignitaries came to his rescue, and very soon the new Mayor was upright once again, and recovering his dignity.



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It seemed, however, that I had been ignored and left to my own devices to get back to my feet. The audience had

gasped and the sustained hush continued until the trumpets started again and the new Mayor successfully descended the steps and moved out of the hall.

That evening, the front page of the local newspaper was covered with photographs of the spectacle. It seems that the newspaper's own photographer was there and had captured every movement in glorious colour, and now, I am nearly as famous as the Lord Mayor.

But that was yesterday, today, there have already had many phone calls. One from that morning TV show asking me to appear on their programme early tomorrow morning, and then the girl from the 'Richard and Judy' show has actually offered me money and hotel accommodation to tell all, on their programme.

However, there was just one worrying moment when a researcher working for Dennis Norden, of 'It'll be all right on the night' fame, phoned, saying that the BBC TV cameras, were also there on the day.

Oh well! It's a busy life. Now I have to go to the police station with these two detectives as I'm being charged with 'bringing the City into disrepute! and if they put me away?..... phew!..... rest at last.

## Cabbie conversations

Hello Gov, jump in, where to?

Right that'll take about ten minutes, but with this traffic.... call it thirty to you.

Where you from mate? Where? Amazolo, that's cooking oil ain't it? Oh! There!

Cor blimey, you won't be used to this rain then will you? We get it all the time, but it is good clean water, and it's up to all European standards, and passed by Tony Blair himself. I did say passed didn't I?

Wouldn't it be a wonderful world if everybody used their indicators? And the same to you mate, with knobs on.

Look there's the Houses of Parliament and that's Big Ben standing tall, well the tower of Big Ben. It always reminds me of Tom Jones. He's the one who thinks he's a sex bomb. At his age, he should be so lucky. To be honest, gov, it's a big fuss over a little thing, believe me. Here, how old are you, thought so!

Are you going to meet the Queen while you're here?

You should, you know, look there's Buckingham Palace. If you go in there on a Wednesday afternoon at 4 o'clock she'll give you a cup of tea and a few chocky bickies. Watch out for them Corgies though, they bite yer ankles, but you probably eat them animals where you come from, huh?

Now look down there, that's Wardour Street and Soho, that's where you go if you want to meet some ladies nudge nudge, top totty down there mate. Go careful though, the police are cracking down on the street ladies, and now, even the masochists are demanding a fair crack of the whip. D'ya get that? It was a joke. Nah forget it.

Do you get football in your country, mate? if you want to see some good football while you're here, whatever you do, don't go down to White Hart Lane and see Spurs then. They were playing football in a saucer last week, next week they're in the cup. huh huh. Up the Gunners.

Madam Tussaud's? That's OK, yeah you'll like that, but, if you go in there, keep moving, just in case they're stocktaking. Get out the way lady, are you all right there gov? Sorry about that, but she pulled right out in front of me. Stupid cow. I'll tell ya this mate, whatever you do while you're here, don't get run down or get sick. The NHS ain't what it used to be. I had to go for a blood test last week, and they told me my blood group had been discontinued. Here we are gov, forty five minutes, that's not bad for this time a day in London. A drink on you? Oh that's very kind gov, thanks. Have a nice holiday. What's this? Cor blimey it's a bloody tea bag.



## George

To date, George's career had been a glittering one. His public adored him, and the country loved him so much, that he had been showered with many City, County, and National honours. Not a soul had a bad word to say against him. All the menfolk admired, and had striven to be like him. The women swooned at his feet, and he took his choice.

Full of the joys of a bright and warm spring day, George rode his horse slowly down the valley towards the wood. He felt particularly good, dressed in a fine, brand new, red and white striped, satin waistcoat, and hadn't a care in the world.

His muscular body fitted well into the saddle, and into his clothes. His long dark hair was blown about by the breeze revealing the wound where his right ear had been sliced off, in a previous battle. A single bead of sweat ran down from his deeply tanned temple, then round and down and under the slope of his bristling chin and onto his waistcoat.

As he rode into the forest, he was only just aware of the stillness. There was an uneasy feeling, but, after a momentary pause, he thought no more of it. He took no account of the unaccountable strangeness around him. Riding on, and looking around, he began to realise that there were no birds in the trees. He found this, and the smell of smoke, odd. It should have rung bells in his head, but, as he was at peace with the world, nothing registered between his ears.

Suddenly, hundreds of animals rushed out of the trees ahead, and towards him. They ran passed and disappeared in the distance behind him. This, very definitely, made him stop dead in his tracks.

He looked up to see the trees ahead of him, quivering. Suddenly, the trees parted and were flattened hard to the ground.

There before him was the largest, and meanest, fire breathing dragon, larger than he had ever seen before, in his short life. From a far off twin towered castle, a fanfare could be heard. George's back stiffened, and his chest swelled with pride and determination.

His hand, automatically and instantly reached down to his side for a trusty blade. He raised it high and triumphantly into the air and yelled, "For my King and for my Country." The dragon looked up and saw him. A quizzical gaze spread across the dragon's face as he leant his head to one side, scratching the back of it with a claw.

'What does this silly man think he is going to do with that silly little piece of metal?' he wondered.

Already, a small crowd, dressed mainly in red, had gathered on the overlooking slope. Several of them held banners and placards, one of which read, 'Saint George for England!'

A solitary male wearing a tall blue hat, was standing on the opposite hillock. He was banging a drum and blowing a bugle, louder than the crowd in red were cheering.

George looked up and smiled at the dragon. He knew from his past match statistics, particularly games played and all of them won, that this dragon was the underdog, and without a hope in hell, and for this Saint, slaying dragons was all in a day's work.

The dragon moved towards him, slowly at first, and then faster. George had not moved, when the dragon, no more than fifty feet in front of him, slipped and fell flat onto his belly, spread eagled in the muddy ground at his feet. With his chin embedded in the dirt, the dragon's eyes looked up, sheepishly, at George.

"Hmmm," said George loudly and confidentially, "This won't take a moment, prepare to me thy maker, dragon!"

George thwacked his sword down heavily onto the dragon's skull, and as it came into contact, the blade broke into a million pieces. George was more than a little surprised that his 'twenty niner' had finally let him down at a most inappropriate moment. The dragon, realising that he was still breathing, raised

himself up slowly onto his front legs, and the widest of smug grins slipped across his mouth. He puffed blue smoke into George's eyes, and the acrid smell of his own burning whiskers, rose through George's nostrils.

George now realised, he was in urgent need of a change of underwear. He made a mental note to speak later with the patron Saint of underwear, St Michael, at Marcius and Spensahram.

The dragon snorted loudly, pressed his face close to George's, and said,

"Well, human, you should remember, sometimes the dragon wins."



## *The big ship*

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The big ship had been docked for about 24 hours, and was taking on provisions for the long journey ahead. The city streets around the harbour, were buzzing with hundreds of people, many families and individuals had set out to see the brand new and amazing vessel, the biggest that had ever been seen. The hotels and shops were doing good business with all the interest and the pubs were full of seamen determined to spend their last penny on the last booze they would get on this side of the ocean. All police leave had been cancelled and the side streets were full of ladies plying their trade, and pick pockets were becoming instantly rich. There were pleasure trips on small boats around the harbour to see the big ship from water.

George had been down to the docks several days before, and signed on as crew, at the shipping office. Most important of all, he had obtained his pay book, without which, he would not be allowed to join the ship.

He lived in a two up and two down house just a few streets from the docks, with his widowed mother and two younger brothers Sam and Harry. A good job was hard to find, and George had been lucky, by being in the right place, at the right time. Many of the men in his neighbourhood would have killed for the job he had.

Sam had been nagging George to let him have the pay book and swap places, but George was having none of it. Sam tried all manner of bribes, but was refused every time. George was pleased to have the upper hand and to be envied by so many. His job was valuable, bringing riches he had rarely known before in his life.

George, and several of his friends, who had also been taken on as crew, decided they would have a last night drink before the morning departure. They usually frequented a number of the many pubs in the area and on their last night ashore, had no intention of leaving any out.

It was a night of alcohol and smoking. Dirty jokes and swearing, and there was a time when George and his pals almost got into a fight. It was around 1am when they were thrown out of the last pub. They staggered away and George's pals pushed him in through his front door, and he tumbled noisily into his bedroom, thumping down on the bed in a heap. Sam was awoken by the noise and swore at him. Soon the room was quiet again and all were asleep.

Sam awoke at about 7am, and after dressing, looked down at the sorrowful mess that was George. On the floor, by his bed, was George's pay book. 'He'll have no use for that today' thought Sam and he went downstairs.

After a slice of dried bread and mug of tea for breakfast, Sam returned to the bedroom. 'Hmm I've got a good place for this,' he said, 'he won't see the world today' and he tucked the pay book into his back pocket.

He grabbed a few pieces of clothing, and quickly rammed them into a small bag. Sam went down and looked into the scullery. "Mum? I'm going out," he said.

"Where?" She enquired.

"George won't make the ship today, he's out cold," he tried to convince her.

"You've taken his book! He'll be mad when he gets hold of you, he'll break your neck!" Sam smiled in disbelief, "He'll have to catch me first, tell him...." he thought for a moment, "tell him I'll buy him a drink when I get back, a big drink for the big ship."

"I'll give him your message," she said, "and then your life won't be worth living."

Sam left the house and made for the docks.

There was still an hour before crew were due on the big ship, so he called in to the pub on the dockside to quench his thirst for the last time before boarding the ship. The pub was bustling with other crewmen who had the same idea.

There would be no chance of any good beer once on board, so he bought a small bottle of rum and slipped it into his bag.

The streets were packed with people moving in all directions. Children playing games and running under people's feet. On the dockside a band was playing loud triumphant music,

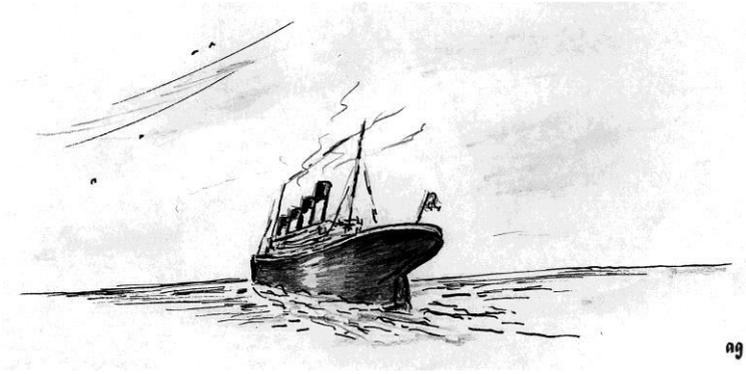
people were dancing and laughing, and merriment was everywhere. Streamers cascaded from the sides of the steamer.

The ship sailed on the morning tide, with Sam working in the engine room.

Several days later, George was sat on his door step, throwing stones into the gutter and watching the world go by. Rays from an early April sun were threading themselves through the gathering shower clouds. George had been in a wretched mood for days and was determined to give his brother a good hiding the next time he saw him. He heard someone shouting his name. He looked up and saw one of his pals rushing down the street.

"Hey George," he yelled, "Have you seen this?" He held out a newspaper that flapped in the breeze as he ran.

"What is it?" George asked, but really he couldn't care what it was.



"The ship, it's sunk," said his pal, "would you believe it? It got almost all the way across to the USA and then she struck an iceberg, and about 15 hundred people have been drowned." George got to his feet hurriedly and wrenched the newspaper from his pal's hands.

He tried, with difficulty, to focus his eyes on the print. His blood ran cold, and his legs became unsteady at the realisation of the facts.

"Sam's on that!" said George, "he took my book, and went in my place, the poor lad."

How would he tell his mother? George combed his fingers through his hair and wondered, "Oh dear, ma will be..... she'll be....."

He didn't finish his sentence. He just turned and went into the house slamming the door behind him.

## The Fairy God Mother's revenge

Why should that Cinderella, always get the Prince? Right, next time she wants to use me, and then discard me, she'll get a very big surprise.

OK, so maybe it's been that way for years, but next time I shall re-write the story books, I shall change history, I shall cause a revolution, just you wait and see. This Fairy God mother will turn Cinderella into the third ugly sister, and I shall transform myself into the beautiful Cinderella.

It's the same every pantomime season. Once I've done my party piece, I'm forgotten and sent home to this house full of fairy kids. The Fairy Godfather was stupid enough to take his title to heart, and he went off with a sailor years ago, leaving me here with this snotty nosed rabble!

"Johnny, don't do that."

Used by Cinderella, used by these fairy kids, used by their fairy Godfather, when is it going to be my turn for the good life?

Now, I'd best work this out in advance. Next time I'm summoned and there's a flash of fairy dust and a whoosh, I shall take my fairy wand, which I already would have doctored to reverse the story in my favour. After a quick wave, the Prince will whisk me off to the ball. There will be a banquet and lots of bubbly champagne, and then dancing, to a good disco. But wait a minute, if he thinks he's going to get me back to his four poster to show me his magic wand, he's got another think coming. I want to get away from this kitchen sink, and to be pampered, in a life of luxury, and to be waited on hand and foot by butlers, footmen and maids, to have lots of beautiful new clothes and to forget this stupid diet! At the very 'dong' of twelve midnight, the real Cinderella, that is to say, the new ugly sister, will be transported back here, to

look after these lovely little.....'brats.' "Johnny, I've told you once already, don't do that!"



There will be a national holiday as the Prince and I are married..... hmmm? Right, firstly I'll have to wave my wand, and magic up a quickie divorce..... and the Prince will treat me like royalty, and I will live happily ever after. As for the in-laws, I'm sure I can twist that old King around my finger, no sweat, but as for the old Queen?, I'll have to see if I can tempt her into a room in the castle tower, lock the door and lose the key, that should do it. One other thought, if that Prince thinks I'm going to give him a son and heir, then he's very much mistaken. I'm not going through all that messy palaver, ever again, not even if he is charming.

"Johnny, I told you not to do that, now look what you've done, you've broken my only decent, working magic wand, OK, so now I shall have to resort to;

'Plan B.'..... cyanide in her tea!"

## Crazy world

The air in the room was buzzing with human electricity. A stifling mixture of cigarette smoke, body odour and expectation was filling the already stuffy atmosphere.

At the pre-arranged time, just as the clock on the wall behind him proclaimed ten a.m., the chairman got to his feet. He raised his hands and the room became hushed. He cleared his throat noisily as he fingered his tie.

"Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for being here this morning. For those who don't know, I am Ian McGreggor, the Chairman of Celtic Football Club, and we are here today to announce the latest signing, that the club has made. The Gentleman I am about to introduce to you is an International footballer, in fact, he has played 48 full international games for Israel, he's a fine goal keeper with an impeccable record and still only 28 years old. He is known to many as 'The Cat', and we are very pleased to have secured his services for the new season. Please will you welcome, Abe 'The Cat' Cohen."

There was a loud murmur of approval from the banks of reporters and cameramen. Several of them broke into a ripple of applause. The TV cameras panned in formation as Abe walked in. A row of radio station microphones were spread across the table and Abe sat down behind them.

"Thank you" the Chairman continued, "Thank you, As Mr Cohen does not speak good English, he will not be taking any questions, but, if any of the media here have any questions, I will be pleased to answer them, If I can?" he laughed nervously.

There was a moment of silence before one reporter stood up. "Mr. Chairman, I am Robbie Robertson, chief football writer for the Glasgow Evening Mail. Could you tell us please, is Mr. Cohen, er.... Abe," he nodded in Abe's direction, and Abe smiled back.

"Is Abe, is he Catholic or Protestant?"

The Chairman's face instantly turned red with panic. There was sniggering amongst the gathered media.

The Chairman took a deep breath, "But, ah Mr Cohen is a....., Jewish."

The chairman smiled sheepishly.

"Oh! I see," There was a moment of hesitation, then the reporter continued, "Well then, could you tell us is he a Jewish Catholic or a Jewish Protestant?"

Suddenly there was uproar, and shouting and laughter from the floor.

Again the Chairman attempted to regain control, "Please, er Gentlemen, this is becoming ridiculous."

He struggled in vain for several minutes, and eventually began to calm the audience and bring some order. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed Abe, who had sat quietly throughout, slowly raising his hand. Their eyes met and they nodded to each other.

The chairman realised Abe wanted to speak after all.

"Gentlemen, please let, um ah Mr. Cohen speak, he wishes to speak."

The chairman held out his hand in the direction of Abe as he got to his feet. He began hesitantly at first. "Please, forgive English bad."

Everyone present was hanging on each of his slowly delivered words.

He continued "In the very darkest of nights, all cats are grey."

He sat down again, and there was silence.



## If Walls Had Eyes and Ears

The row of twenty red brick houses had stood for over eighty years. Homes built by craftsmen, with years of experience between them. They thought the houses would be there forever. Babies had been born in these houses, weddings celebrated, and lives lived and lives expired in them. Every brick in each house had soaked up years of laughter and tears, happiness and tragedy. Every brick was a multi-coloured palette of every inhabitant's life.

The flies on their walls could have told volumes of stories. But, as the only constant thing in life is change, the powers that be decided the houses had served their purpose and now they should go. Despite a rigorous campaign by the residents, the houses were demolished, and new prefabricated short life-span structures were built on the site. Sadly the new properties showed no craftsman's hand. No skills or refinement, only modern technology.

"Hey, what's happened?"

"Shut up Charlie," she said, "Keep your noise down, there might be people about."

"Where are we Kath?" he asked as they both looked around at the inside of the building.

"It's what they call a supermarket..... I think," replied Kath.

"Hey, what's happened to my arms and legs, and all of me?"

"I told you, be quiet, you don't have a body, now. You're a spirit, just like me."

"A spirit, Kath? Why?" he questioned.

"Someone moved the bricks and we were released. The houses we lived in are gone, but we haven't, and in the place of our house they've built this..... this..... thing?" She held out her hands and turned a full circle as she did.

"Spirit? you mean..... we're dead?"

"Of course we are, stupid," she growled at him.

"Oh yes, I remember," said Charlie.

"There's one thing in life that you can be sure of, and that is death, at least now we won't have to pay taxes!"

Charlie didn't quite realise what she meant. In life he had been a timid small framed being. He never made plans, and

rarely looked beyond the day he was living. In his life, Kath was the 'she who had to be obeyed.' She was a larger figure than him, in both mind and body. Never educated in her schooldays, but life had broadened her mind and her beam.

Charlie began gliding down an aisle, "What's in these little boxes?..... hmmm that tastes nice."

"Stop it Charlie, don't eat that, you don't have a body, and all that stuff is just going to float around in mid-air.... it could get very messy."

They walked around the store looking at the shelves and couldn't help but marvel at some of the strange things they saw. "Look," said Charlie, "They have bed linen here but I can't see any beds anywhere, where are we going to sleep?" "You don't need sleep! Come on Charlie, can't you see what's happened, we are not alive, we are spirits, just floating where ever we want to."

Gradually, Charlie began to understand.

"Are we the only..... spirits?"

"We are in here," added Kath, "Outside, there are spirits everywhere, but only other spirits can see them"

"Oh!" said Charlie.

They passed by the fish monger's counter, where three cats were sat, sniffing. Charlie looked at them and decided, 'They must be cat spirits'

"Hey Kath."

"Yes Charlie?" she was beginning to get irritated by his questions.

"Why aren't we in heaven? Or somewhere else?"

"I don't know, Charlie"

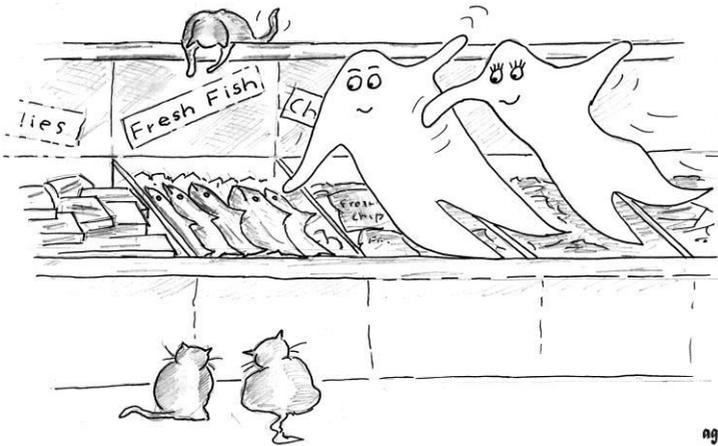
"Are we still married?" he puzzled.

"I suppose we are," but she was not so sure.

"I'm glad about that Kath, are you?"

"I couldn't be happier Charlie, well perhaps I could if we were alive again. Only thing is, there's no point in looking back, is there? We can't take what has gone with us, so we really should look forward" she tried to sound reassuring.

"To what Kath?" he asked.



"I don't know Charlie, I really don't know why we are still here. I would have thought we'd have moved on by now. Where do you want to go Charlie?"

He thought for a moment, "Are we going to be spirits forever, Kath?"

"Could be Charlie, could be," she replied.

"Well, Kath, wherever we go, I want us to go together." He reached out to hold her hand, but there was no sensation of touching.

She turned and looked at him.

"Me too Charlie" she said, "Let's find forever, together."

May 2002

## The interview

The office door opened, "Come in," he said and she followed him back into the office. He slumped down heavily in a leather chair that had seen better days, and picked up her application form from the desk. She perched herself, uncertain but stiffly upright, on the edge of a chair facing him. Small beads of perspiration rolled down her back. The room was dark, dingy, except for a thin shaft of sunlight through the small window, and was uncomfortably warm and sticky for late October. Dust covered every surface in the room, and the ash tray on his desk was full of cigarette butts and the room was full of their odour. As he looked at her, he lit another cigarette, and took a long, deep drag.

"Right," he started, as he blew the smoke across to the window. It billowed into the sunlight and slowly disappeared, and he continued. "You are the last of my interviewees, it's been a long day," He paused, wiped the sweat from his forehead and threw the application form he was reading on to the desk, and looked up at her. His eyes scanned her face and then moved down to her firm, smartly dressed body. "Hmmm....." There was a glint in his eye. "Have you read through the job description sheet I gave you earlier?" he asked.

"Yes, I have," she replied politely, but awkwardly. He continued, "It's a 24 -7 job as my personal assistant, and means you'll be with me at all times, except when I'm sleeping, and I don't sleep much. I travel the world, but most of my work is centred in and around New York City. Ever been there?"

"No," she answered abruptly.

"You'll need to be very efficient, always well dressed, hair and make-up perfect, and on call at all times."

There was an uneasy moment as they looked at each other.

"What business are you in, exactly?" she asked.

"Me?, I'm in....." he thought and stroked his chin, "I'm in commodities!" he said and smiled at her.

She sighed, and began to wonder if this really was a job she wanted. She noticed his dirty collar and creased shirt, his tousled unkempt hair, and dirty shoes, and wished she was somewhere else, anywhere else. His fingers were stained with nicotine, his teeth discoloured and his face, craggy, with deep lines. He had dark, yet hypnotic and somehow, deceitful eyes.

"Do you have any ties, any family?" he looked again at the application form as he asked the question.

"Well, yes a husband and two children," she replied.

He looked up quickly, "Oh children?, hmmm." He thought for a long moment.

"Tell me.....If you had to choose between the job and your children, what would you decide?"

She was about to get to her feet realising that this, very definitely was not the job she wanted when the office door was flung open wide.

A woman full of fury, rushed in, menacingly. "So here you are, at long last I have found you," She spoke through gritted teeth, "Have you forgotten me? I am you wife, have you forgotten your children? It seems you have." The air was electric with tension. The woman's face was flushed with anger. The interviewee was motionless and speechless. Her eyes blinked nervously in their sockets.

The woman fumbled with her handbag and pulled out a brightly shining chromium plated revolver, and pointed it at him.

"This is for you, and for eighteen years of an awful marriage, and four of the most grotesque and spoilt children that you never see."

She started firing bullets rhythmically into his body, which jumped and wriggled as the bullets entered. The interviewee's mouth fell open. She could not believe what she had just seen. Blood spurted from the many wounds, and his body fell lifeless and limp, heavily back into the chair. There was complete silence after the loud gun shots. No one moved.

Only five bullets had been fired. The woman turned to the interviewee, whose face became white with terror as blood drained towards her feet. Didn't this mad woman realise that 'she' was an innocent party?

After what seemed a lifetime, the woman turned back to her husband. She fired the final bullet into his dead body, and then burst on to tears. "Cut! well done everyone, that's a wrap for lunch, be back in an hour, that's 1.30pm sharp and not a minute later," shouted the director. Another scene was successfully captured on the Hollywood television conveyor belt.  
May 2002



## Captain Ben

The little fishing village, slept on through the mid-day sun. At the Anchor Inn, Ted, the landlord, waited patiently, as the Captain drained the last drop of rum from his glass and thumped it down onto the counter. Wiping his lips with the back of his hand, he grabbed his pipe and 'baccy' and slipped them into his pocket. "See ya Ted," he said, and set off out, and down to the harbour.

Captain Ben Trethowen had spent his whole life on the oceans of the world and now he had settled back to his roots for the 'quiet life' and a small boat of his own, intent on ending his days in the South West. He had drunk almost too much, and wandered and sometimes staggered down the flag-stoned slope to his boat 'The Saucy Lady.' Villagers shouted to him as he went. He nodded and smiled through an alcoholic haze. Seagulls ducked and dived and teased above him but he didn't notice them. Despite his condition, his mind was elsewhere.

The tide was right, and his mission, lay before him. He could hear someone, on a nearby boat, playing a hornpipe on a concertina. His toes wanted to dance and the melody filtered its way into his ears and down to his heart, but there was work to be done. He untied fore and aft and in the early afternoon sunshine, set a course out of the harbour into the channel. Further out, the sea was choppy, but his trip would be a short one. The forecast of a heavy squall coming in from the South towards dusk wouldn't bother him.

Just after five o'clock, the Captain and his boat were re-entering the harbour past the lighthouse. Usually, the harbour was full of small boats bobbing and pottering around, but today there were very few. All the fishing boats were out but due back soon. He didn't notice the launch that followed him back, and he certainly didn't see the bright orange flashes along its side. He did, however, become anxious as soon as he saw it's flashing blue light. "Hmmm," he thought, "This must be that heavy squall the weather boys were on about."

He realised there was no way of getting out of the harbour past the launch so he decided to quickly tie up and make for the Anchor Inn.

Sadly his speedy days were long gone, and the horsepower of the launch and the fitness of three young police constables was too much for him. He was collared on the quayside, and hand cuffs were easily slipped onto his wrists.

The Police Inspector came back up from below decks of the Captain's boat, and turned to his sergeant. "It's full of it down there, get a list of what's there, and then get it all out and up to the station. He's got enough down there to fill half a dozen distilleries." He raised his eye brows and blew out his cheeks at the thought of all that contraband, and then realised he might be in for some kind of commendation. The Inspector smiled contentedly to himself as the buttons on his uniform sparkled even brighter. "That's another one caught in the act," he thought proudly, and the Inspector set off for the Anchor Inn.

At the Inn, the news of the Captain's predicament had quickly found Ted's ears, and he made an announcement to his customers. "Until the Captain returns, his regular seat will not be used. I will place his glass on it and it will remain there until he is released and home again." A cheer went up from everyone.

As the Inspector entered, the lively hum of conversation in the public bar was suddenly hushed. The Inspector looked around hesitantly, and then, regardless, made his way to the bar. Ted acknowledged him with an uncomfortable smile. The Inspector ignored him, and turned to look at the Inn's customers, and smiled slyly. Slowly and defiantly, he pushed the glass off of the chair and it bounced several times on the floor. He then sat where the Captain always sat. As he did, there was a sharp intake of breath from all corners of the public bar, but the glass did not break. He blew a whistle and made an announcement, "Captain Trethowen is behind bars, the 'Saucy Lady' has been impounded, and a search is now being made of other boats in the harbour." Several Captains scrambled to their feet, in an effort to get to their vessels. "Sit down," said the Inspector, and they obeyed, slowly.

"The Inn is surrounded by the constabulary; no one is to leave the building." There was silence, and suddenly every light in the building went out. No one moved in the dusky gloom, except for the Inspector, who got to his feet and moved carefully, feeling his way to the door. As he left, an over-zealous constable, mistaking him for an escaping crewman, whacked him across the back of the head with his truncheon, and he fell to the ground. He was out for the count. The constable looked in disbelief as soon as he rolled the Inspector over, and realised what he had done. Ted had lit a few candles so that the customers were able to rush to the door and when the constable saw them, he turned quickly and ran into the gloom, never to be seen again. The Inn emptied very quickly. They saw the Inspector's unconscious body. Four of them lifted him onto their shoulders. "What shall we do with him?" asked one.

"Tonight," said another, "he can sleep with the mermaids! Though he smells very sweet, perhaps he might prefer the mermen."

"No, let's just throw him in from Scally's cliff, and he can swim home," said a sensible voice. The mob carried him down to the quay.

Two young constables had been ordered to remove the contraband from Captain Ben's boat and take it back to the small Police station for storage, and await the outcome of any court proceedings. As they struggled with the hand cart they had found, loaded to the brim with bottles, crates and barrels, they suddenly saw the mob rushing down towards them. Before they could do anything, they were surrounded. The mob began ripping the uniforms from the young novice policemen, and once they were down to their underwear, they were allowed to run into the night, to a chorus of laughter and merriment from the mob. One of them had found a folder containing all the relevant documents to the case on one of the constables. Every sheet in the folder was torn into the smallest of pieces and thrown into the wind, accompanied by more laughter. The mob continued, with the now becoming conscious and protesting Inspector, down to the harbour.

The Captain sat quietly on his cell bunk, lonely and cold, when he heard a voice.

"Captain?"

Yes! Who's that?" he asked.

"It's Sam Tallack, take this rope and wrap it around the bars on the window."

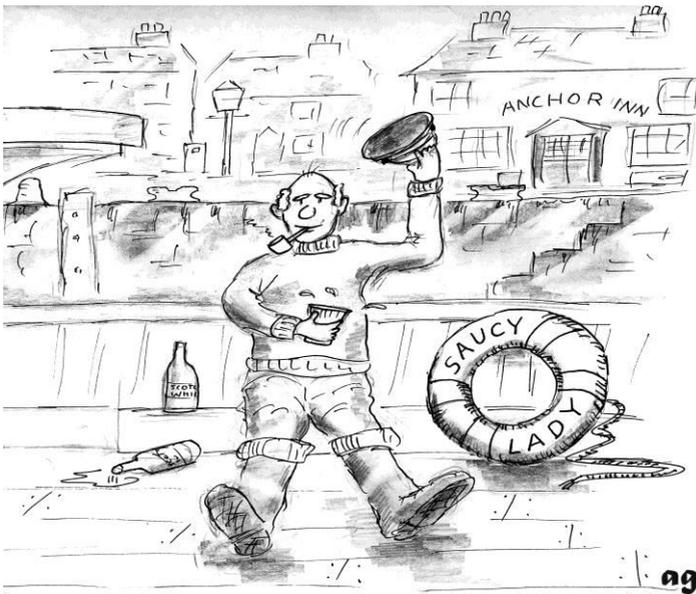
The Captain did as he was requested. There was a roar of a combustion engine and then the bars, keeping him inside the cell, disappeared. Quickly, he stepped on the bunk and eased himself out of the window. Once outside they started running. "Where can we go?" asked the Captain, who was quickly out of breath.

"Down to the caves on the Hoe," suggested Sam.

"No," said the Captain, "Wait a minute, we must get back to the Anchor."

The Inn was humming with the excitement of the night's work. Drink was quickly consumed and all were gathered there once again.

Captain Ben walked in, slowly and proudly. His glass had been replaced on his seat. He lifted it and thumped it on to



the counter, "Fill it Ted," he ordered. He turned back to the waiting crowd and smiled. There was a loud cheer, and almost without prompting, they burst into a chant, "Captain Ben, Captain Ben, Captain Ben, is back again, for his yo ho ho and a bottle of rum."

The Captain held up his hands for silence, and the room was hushed.

"Let it be known, that Captain Ben, IS back again!" he announced loudly. There were more cheers, laughter, drinking and some debauchery.

As the sun rose, the Inn's customers were still asleep on tables, under tables, on stairs, in fact anywhere and everywhere in the Anchor, as the landlord Ted, tried to wipe and clean glasses and jugs. To this day, the police, or customs have never returned to that little fishing village. It slept on through the mid-day sun. The only exception was Captain Ben, who as usual, staggered slowly down to the quay.

14/5/2002

## 10 Green Bottles

The car slowed and stopped with a jolt, and he pulled the hand brake on. Clive took a deep breath and then exhaled slowly and every muscle in his body became limp. His mind was bursting. If only he could get on top of the problem, if he could sort out all the confusion, he could get his life back. He reached under the seat and grabbed a bottle. He pushed the car door open and unscrewed the bottle top. Somewhat symbolically, he poured the contents of the bottle onto the road. The liquid splashed and spread out on the tarmac. It ran away down the slope of the road, under the car. When it was empty, he threw it, and the bottle top, into the back seat and slammed the car door. There was relief in his mind and he took another deep breath and exhaled again. It seemed to give him some reassurance. He was determined, that was an end to it. Without thinking, he licked a few drops of the liquid that had splashed on his fingers, and in his mind, said, that would be the very last drop. He felt better, stronger, and already, could see the clouds in his head, clearing.

Time to plan the rest of his life, he would go home, take a shower, get a change of clothes, and then find Alice. Just as he thought about replacing the key in the ignition, he was blinded by the blue light as the motor cycle policeman pulled into the curb in front of his car. Panic raced through his frame. He dropped his keys onto the floor. He fumbled around the pedals hurriedly, but could not find the wretched keys.

"Good evening Sir, on your way home?"

"Well, yes I am actually, just dropped my keys, they're here somewhere."

He fumbled again on the floor. It was then that the policeman smelt a whiff of his breath.

"Have you been drinking, Sir?"

He looked up to the policeman, as the blood drained from his face.

The policeman glanced over behind him and saw several green bottles spread across the back seat.

"Not today," he tried to convince the policeman. Then the policeman's eyes returned to the bottles on the back seat.

"Are they gin bottles?" he enquired.

"Oh no," insisted Clive, "they are bottles from my lab."

The policeman noticed steam, escaping from the neck of one of them. At the same time, wisps of steam drifted up before his eyes and he looked down at the roadway. Where the liquid had been poured, the tarmac seemed to be bubbling. "Hey!" exclaimed the policeman, "What's going on here?"

Clive looked down at the road way and saw what was happening, and feared the worst.

"That must be pretty strong alcohol!" added the policeman.

"No," said Clive, "it's not alcohol, it's my....." he hesitated, "It's my potion"

The look on the policeman's face was one of total confusion.

"OK" said Clive, "Let me explain, I work up on the hill, at the research development establishment, and we have been working on a new potion, it's a," again he hesitated. "It's a love potion!" The policeman chuckled aloud in disbelief. "No, I'm not joking," continued Clive, "I thought I had found the perfect concoction, and tried it on my assistant, Alice. She went crazy, got very aggressive and started smashing the place up. The very last kind of reaction I had expected."

"So it's not alcohol?" questioned the policeman, still unable to fully grasp the situation.

"No" insisted Clive. The road had stopped bubbling and the steam had gone.

The policeman, assessing the whole incident, and considering that no harm had been done, decided he'd best let Clive go on his way. Driving on, somewhat relieved, but still confused, Clive was still determined that he should find Alice.

It was eight days later, and Clive tried to relax at home, happy in thinking that the problem with Alice was now history. By the time he had found her, the effects of his potion had worn off, and thankfully, Alice had not suffered any side effects. To Clive's relief, she had also agreed to continue working at the lab.

There was a knock at the front door. Clive opened it to a smartly dressed man with a briefcase.

"Hello, would you be Clive Williams?"

Clive nodded in acknowledgement.

The smartly dressed man continued, "My name is John Hudson, I am the chief engineer at the City Engineers Department."

"Oh" said Clive, unimpressed.

"I believe you work at the LPE building on the hill, and were involved in an incident with police constable Smithers in Campbell Road last week?"

"Yes, that's right," said Clive.

"You poured a liquid onto the tarmac?"

"Yes that's right, but I will pay for any damage," As soon as he had said the words, he regretted them. Hundreds would be painful, Thousands unthinkable, and millions?

"Well the thing is, we have been testing that stretch of the carriageway, and, not just the area where you poured your a.... potion, but the whole stretch of roadway has toughened considerably, it's amazing, and we can't explain it. We would expect new tarmac to last for about fifteen years or so, but our tests seem to suggest that the tarmac is now completely, and utterly indestructible"

Clive's mouth fell open, and there were moments of stunned silence, that seemed to last for ever, as Clive's head assessed the whole episode. The expense of hundreds, or even thousands, now appeared to be millions, but this time, income!

John Hudson continued, "We'd like to speak to you about your formula and make an offer to license the er.... potion, for use on our future road rebuilding developments."

"But of course" insisted Clive, "Do come in, I'm forgetting my manners. Would you like a cup of potion, oops sorry, I mean a cup of tea!"

## Briefs Encounter

The rain had stopped when Steve turned the key, and pulled it from the ignition. As he did, the radio went dead. His hand moved to the door handle, but then he paused. He quickly looked at his watch. "No! It's too early" he said aloud, feeling as if he needed a toilet, then added "Oh what the hell!"

He slid his ample stomach past the steering wheel and stepped out, and was oblivious of the puddle surrounding his foot. The evening was already dark as he made his way to the agreed rendezvous. 'What am I doing here?' he wondered as he walked. His brother Simon had arranged the date, with what Simon called a 'little corker', but Steve was sure that the photo he had, only briefly, seen had been cut from a magazine. As for meeting under the clock, by the town hall, Steve was convinced that Simon had added that touch of melodrama as a wind up. 'What was that film called?' he wondered, 'I suppose he thought it sounded romantic or something. That's it, "Brief encounter," but I don't expect I shall have an encounter with her briefs, well, not on the first date anyway.' He continued the conversation in his head. 'Would you believe it, I haven't even met her yet, and already I've got her into bed. I suppose, next, I'll be planning the family.' He tried to clear his mind, failed and continued. 'But what if she wants to get into my briefs?' he decided to argue it from a different angle, 'surely not on the first date, well who knows? naah don't be stupid!, time to wake up!'

The town hall square was quiet. Most of the office workers had long since gone home. In a far corner, a sit upon street sweeper began whirring noisily in to the distance. The lamp light reflected brightly in the wet paving stones and a train screeched to a halt in the railway station across the square.

He felt alone, and he was. He waited and wished he hadn't given up smoking he would kill for a drag right now.

'How can I get under the clock?' he quizzed himself, 'it's at the top of a tower, and there are at least a dozen or more steps in front of the building.' Steve decided to wait, slightly out of view, in a doorway to one side of the steps. He

pulled further back into the dimness of the doorway as a police car drove silently by.

The town hall clock struck eight times to herald the arranged hour for the meeting. He moved out of the doorway and along the steps, trying hard to look around without appearing obvious. There was no one. He started climbing the steps, and once he got to the top, he turned and walked down again, bored and now slightly out of breath. He looked at his watch again and it showed 8.06. 'She's late!' he decided. A cold wind had sprung from nowhere, and it was penetrating his top coat and threaded itself through his ribs. He began to rationalise the situation. 'OK, if she's not here by.....half past, I'm off home then, he agreed with himself. He looked around, this time, not bothering if he was noticed or not. Again nothing. Then he had a strange feeling that he was being watched but he could not see a soul. His head dropped as he scuffed his feet along the edge of the lowest step. He heard footsteps behind him, and as he turned, two children rushed by, and only just managed to avoid bumping into him. They ran off into the darkness.

He took in a deep intake of breath, and it started raining again. His spirits were now lower than ever, and he resigned himself to a take away and an early night.

8.30 chimed loud above him and he took another look at his watch for confirmation. "OK, it's back to the car, and, a Chinese I think," he said aloud.

He had only taken two steps when he heard a voice, "Hello darlin', want some company?" Steve turned to see a female in a tight red sprayed on skirt that only just came down to the top of her black stockinged legs. A low cut top, almost exposed a full cleavage, but the face was in shadows. "What? Oh! Certainly not," said Steve as he turned to hurry away, and then paused, and slowly, he turned back to her. She was moving away as he said, "err Excuse me Miss?" "Ere! Who you calling Miss?"

Steve decided against the takeaway, and drove straight home. He found a few morsels of food in the fridge

and watched the end of the Gerry Springer show. He never knew what made him look up at the calendar, but there it was, plain as the day, April 1st.

## Jeremy

Jeremy had had all he could take of the rat race. The daily grind of the early train into the City, jostling with commuters, then stuck at a desk for eight hours, followed by the jostling home again.

He had been to Bali several times in his youth, but now, in his sixtieth year, finally made the break, sold all his worldly goods and was living in a shack on the outskirts of the town.

He spent his days fishing, and became known to all the locals. He looked ordinary enough, and had fitted in with the local life, but there was something about Jeremy that the locals did not know.

The scar on his face, from his ear to the point of his chin, was there for all to see and the cause of it was something he wanted to forget.

It was the reason that he finally decided to withdraw from mainstream life.

It had happened one evening when he had worked late, and was in the underground tube station waiting for his train. A group of three or four youths were milling around looking for something. They then began giving him lip, looking at the laptop bag hanging on his shoulder.....

He felt fear and, without hesitation, ran and got to the top of the escalator more or less unable to breathe.

He didn't turn around, just leaned against the wall for support.

The place was deserted. He had to catch his breath and get away. Losing his laptop would be worse than losing his job.

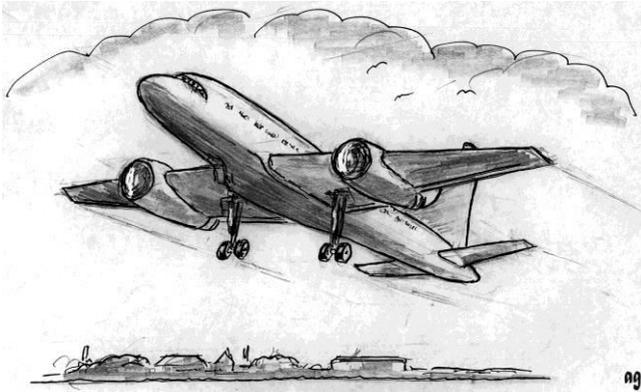
Jeremy had been in financial services for years and all his straight and crooked transactions were on this laptop.

Fortunately, nearly all of the money was out of the country, in Bali, waiting for him, but he needed just a couple of weeks to finish things.

The pressure was building at work, he would be found out soon. Feeling that his breath had come back, he turned to

walk towards the exit, but was stopped at knife point by the youths who had terrorised him earlier. He clutched his laptop, to no avail. The largest lad reached over and pulled the laptop from his grasp as one of the others slashed him across the face. He fell to the floor. The lads ran away leaving him bleeding. Jeremy fumbled in his pocket and finding a large hankie, held it over the gash.

Pulling himself to his feet, he felt for his wallet, which was still there and walked, bleeding out into the night. He jumped in a taxi and said, "Heathrow Airport please."



At one of the meetings, a lady said she could never write an erotic sex scene story, so the homework that was set was to write an erotic sex scene story! This is very naughty, you have been warned!

## The Best Man

She sat upright, with the crossword page of the Times, opened and neatly balanced on her lap. A pen was tightly gripped between her teeth and she was deep in thought. The puzzle was almost complete.

She took a final drag, and then squeezed her cigarette into the ashtray. Fragments of ash, dropped onto her pin striped trousers. She brushed it away quickly, and regretted not changing, since getting home from the surgery.

The last clue was not helping, so she reached for the TV remote control. "There's probably a few overs left, of the England game," she mused.

A sudden loud noise came from the hallway. "Alec?" she queried.

"It's all right Beverley, I just twisted my ankle on the stairs," he replied.

Her eyes, and her mind, drifted back to her puzzle.

There were more muffled sounds from the hall, but she ignored them.

"How do I look in this dear?" enquired Alec.

She slowly looked around and up to him. Alec had draped himself around the inside of the door frame, just as Marlene Dietrich would have done in an old 1930's black and white movie.

He tried to look seductive, but didn't really know what 'seductive' was.

"Well?" he questioned, as he bent down and struggled to straighten the seam of his stocking.

"Well!" he demanded.

"That is ....." she left the sentence unfinished. He moved towards her and paraded around the room, still struggling to walk in his high heels.

A burgundy red, body hugging, pencil skirt, that was split to the thigh fitted him, like a skin. The shoulder of his white bolero top, slipped down his arm, revealing a black bra strap. He tried to adjust his wig, but there was no obvious improvement.

"Magnificent!" she finished her sentence. Her mouth dropped open and for a few moments she could find no more words to say.

"Mag-nif-i-cent!" she repeated slowly. She stared, glared, and deep inside became uncomfortable, and then excited. She stood, and moved towards him, and lifted the dropped blouse back onto his shoulder.

Her hands slid down the outside of his arms, then across, and squeezed his breasts. She looked at him with a quizzical expression.

"Socks!" he said, "I need two in each to fill your bra!"

Her hands moved down and caressed his genitals.

Another quizzical look.

"That's me!" he protested and pulled away from her.

"My my!" she exclaimed, and began circling him, eyeing him, up, then down, and added, "I think we should go to bed!"

"What?" said Alec sharply, "Don't be silly, Steve will be here soon, it's nearly eight!"

"Well! When you told me you were going to be Steve's best man, and that you were all going on his stag night, dressed as characters from the Rocky Horror Show, I thought you were mad, but now I see you, I think you are very, desirable. Let's go to bed," she said impatiently.

Despite his attempts to resist, she pulled him into the hall.

"Stop! Beverley, we haven't got time!" he protested.

"Oh - yes - we - have," she said seductively.

Despite his pleas, they were slowly moving up the stairs.

"Stop! Please stop," he begged as they reached the top step.

"If we do, it'll probably, smudge my make-up, or might snag my stockings, they are my only pair!"

She smiled and pulled him towards her, and squeezed his crotch, tightly. There was a moment of stillness, and indecision as they gazed at each other. She lifted one eyebrow and tilted her head, and the doorbell rang loudly and echoed up the stairs.

He looked down to the door, and then at her. She pulled him down onto the stairs and lay on top of him.

"Oh!" he whinnied helplessly.

She reached up his skirt, and aggressively dragged his knickers down.

They caught on the clasp of his suspenders. The doorbell rang again.

With the weight of her body pinning him down, she undid her trousers, and slid them, and her pants, down past her knees. The lounge clock struck eight times.

She gripped his now, excited penis. "Come here, big boy," she said as she eased him into her body.

"Oh my back" he winced.

"Now you really know what it's like to be a woman!" she defended, as she thrust hard down on him. The thick pile of the stair carpet helped to cushion his pain, but it's pattern was beginning to make an imprint onto his bare rump.

Steve rang the doorbell twice. He had become understandably, impatient and thumped the door with his fist. Alec could hear his name being called from outside.

He looked up at Beverley, busy above him.

He grinned to himself, when he noticed small wisps of steam rising from her head.

There were gurgling noises from his belly, and he wished he hadn't eaten so much of the Weight Watchers Spaghetti Bolognese.

She continued.

A yawn began deep inside, but he managed to disguise it, with a groan.

He noticed her eyes had glazed over, and she wriggled and jerked, and was panting heavily.

Re-focussing his eyes up behind her, he saw it hanging, from the stairwell ceiling.

"Beverley?" he broke her concentration.

"What!" she snapped, but didn't stop.

"Did you know" he enquired politely, "hanging up there, is a great big cobweb?"

"Shut up!" she demanded, "I'll clean it tomorrow!"

As she continued, a bead of her sweat, dropped, onto his cheek, and ran down his chin.

Under the arch of her armpit, he could just see part of their reflection, in the mirror on the wall at the foot of the stairs. He hadn't realised until then, that one of his high heels had dropped off. He could also see Beverley's white bum, crescenting, at the end of it's downward thrust. He slid his hands around the cheeks of her taught rear, assisting her movement and laid back to enjoy it.



There were just a few more moments of frenzied action on the stairs, before he became limp.

"Have you? You have! Haven't you?" she exclaimed with disgust.

"Alec, it's a marathon, not a sprint!" she pronounced, with venom.

She stood and pulled her pants up to her bottom, and easily slid her foot into her trousers, and then went down and opened the door.

Steve stood there, looking just a little dishevelled, smiling awkwardly.

A blond wig was plonked on his head, but had slipped over to the left. Only his ear prevented the action of the laws of gravity.

His black bodice rode up, over his wide manly hips, and it's untied laces hung over his gut and dangled between his knees.

A pair of red fishnet tights, descended, into muddy trainers. With her finger to her lips, she hushed Steve before he could speak, and motioned him in, and up the stairs.

They both gazed down at the helpless, spread-eagled and now snoring, Alec, who was dripping onto the carpet.

Instantly, Steve knew exactly, what had been happening.

"Yeah!" acknowledged Steve, "as soon as I put these clothes on, my other half did exactly the same to me."

Beverley looked down at Alec, "The best man, Huh!" she said with a mocking tone, and then she returned to the lounge and her crossword.

Written Altea Spain January 2004

## To Cook or Not to Cook

I had been waiting for the milkman for several hours, having used the last of the milk with my first cup of coffee, but it seems he is determined to wait until the milk has gone off, before he delivers it. I really don't care if it's homogenized, pasteurised, immunised, privatized or even exorcized, but I would like it before 9am. However, I do draw the line at circumcised.

I had again, read through yesterday's evening paper from first to last word, not forgetting to double check the deaths column just to make sure my name hadn't mysteriously appeared there overnight.

Breakfast was a long distant memory and I began feeling pangs of hunger. I looked at the clock and decided to fill the next half hour or so, trying to create something magnificent for my mid-day meal. I always did enjoy a challenge, and for longer than I care to remember, I had survived, reasonably, on a diet of boil in the bag delicacies from the ornithological optician, known to all as Captain Bird's Eye. So I began searching and exploring the deeper recesses of the cupboard, high on the wall in my kitchen.

In times gone by, I was quite nifty with some tasty Italian dishes. As I cooked, spicy fragrances would escape through the kitchen window to a small throng waiting outside. I think that's why the people on our estate named me 'The Cannelloni Kid.'

I found several small jars of 'solid' herbs, but I was sure with a little encouragement, I could de-solidify them back into some kind of usable consistency. I gathered them all together. The jars on parade included thyme, mixed herbs, ground cinnamon, nutmeg, and a small box of Bisto. I also found a couple of Oxo cubes that had been hiding in a plastic screw top jar on a top shelf. I can't remember ever going there before. I made a mental note, sometime when I had nothing

better to do, I must gather together my jodhpurs, pith helmet and a machete, and explore up there again.

I removed some of the foil and squeezed one of the cubes between my thumb and fore finger. I expected the cube to break into crumbs, but at first it wouldn't budge. I was determined, and soon I was victorious. It was several more moments before the painful dents, left on my digits, disappeared. Without me realising, the bottom of the cube had become gooey with age, and I had to wash the residue from my hand. Strangely it was without any smell.

I had kept a small, poor excuse for a piece of steak, in the fridge for a couple of days, and decided to use this before it was too late. I dropped it into a dish I had found and poured on some oil. I peeled, and readied a few potatoes for the micro wave. What could I have with them? I was undecided. I also found a small jar of steak seasoning, and after opening it, and sniffing it, decided to discard it. The mixed herbs smelt strong and so I sprinkled a little over the solitary onion I had found and sliced into a frying pan. As it sizzled on the cooker the aromas got even stronger.

The potatoes were merrily spinning in the microwave and the kitchen smells aroused my body through my nostrils and my belly started banging against my ribs, or that's how it felt.

Suddenly my mind was miles away. The smells had triggered memories of family meals of long ago, Christmas dinners with everyone together for turkey, stuffing and roast potatoes, followed by plum pudding. The kids making a mess with their toys, all over the floor, and of grand-dad asleep in the armchair. They were good days. Now, all the kids are grown, and have gone to the four corners of the earth, and have their own families and their own Christmas dinners.

I was startled back to reality as the oil in the pan burst into flame, and my first thought was to panic. At that inappropriate moment the doorbell rang, and I heard a muffled voice, "Milko." There was a clanking of glass bottles. I grabbed a tea

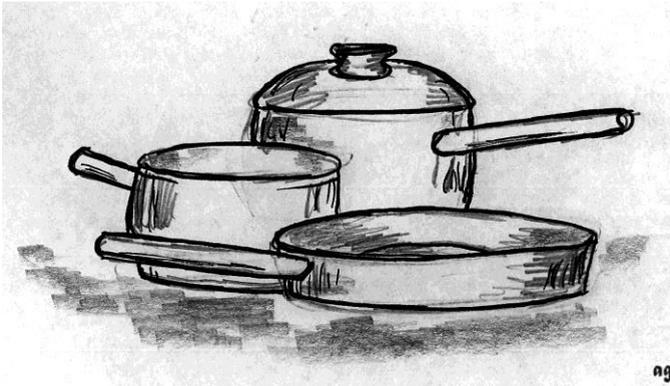
towel and dashed it under the cold tap, attempting to soak it. After throwing it over the flaming pan, the tea towel caught alight, but, fortunately the flames did not take hold and soon lowered, and then there was steam everywhere. The doorbell rang again. As the tea towel was no longer available, I brushed my hands over the front of my jumper to remove the dampness and headed for the front door. I might have known it, there was the milkman, and his milk float, disappearing down the slope of the road.

I returned to the kitchen with a single bottle, where the usual order was for two pints, and began assessing the damage.

I opened the freezer and pulled out a drawer. I was not inspired by what I saw. Even the Captain's brightly coloured packets did not enthuse me.

"OK!" I thought aloud. "Seems like it's time for a pie and a pint down at the Red Lion, and I don't mean milk."

I left the mess and the smoke, slammed the front door behind me and headed out, filling my lungs with the fresh air of the day. The thought of a liquid lunch and a dry crusty pie, and a little indigestion, seemed like a challenge, I just might win.



## Mini Sagas

### ***A beginning, middle and end in 50 words.***

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#### **First attempt**

I needed my dentist to cure a tooth ache,  
 I made an urgent, 'today please' appointment.  
 In my mouth, he drilled, and I groaned.  
 He asked, "Good news or bad?"  
 I said, "Good,"  
 He said, "Teeth can stay"  
 I questioned, "Bad?"  
 He declared, "But the gums have got to come out"

#### **Lawn mower blues**

The lawn mower blew up, I had to buy a new machine.  
 In my head I set a price limit. I viewed the mowers in the  
 store, then noticed the smiling salesman.  
 He listed the selling points and the price,  
 I spent all my cash.  
 The lawn is beautiful now.

#### **Move over Cole Porter**

How do I write the words to a song?,  
 If I use my head, I cannot go wrong,  
 With pen in hand and thesaurus close by,  
 A dictionary that rhymes and a humour that's rye.  
 A clever rhyming ditty that isn't a mess,  
 Look here, I've written a hit, success!

**Boys will be boys**

Everyday it's the same, the paperboy never pushes my newspaper right in my letterbox. Robbers can see I'm not home, the paper gets wet when it rains. If I've asked him once, It's a million times.

One day soon he'll get it right,  
When it's time for a new paperboy.

**The Family Tree**

The family tree is old and gnarled, and I've traced back to sixteen something or other.

So many years, so many lives, so many loves and so many wives.

There's Thomas then Edward then Edward, then Thomas. Next is Henry and James and Frederick, then me, the tree ends here.

**Another Mini Saga**

The car broke down again, on my way to London. I called the AA, and they came, eventually. He tinkered with my carburettor, whilst I sat inside the car, and ate my sandwiches, soon, the engine roared, I said, "Thanks." "Goodbye," and drove on, ending another saga in my Mini.



**Short life on Mars**

Deep in a Martian forest, the Cyrabyan nation lived happily, until humans arrived in a rocket. The human males found Cyrabyan women irresistible. There were weddings, then births from their unities. The Cyrabyan custom was for the females, once mated, to eat their males. That's how the human race ended.

**The learning curve or cul de sac?**

They say life is a learning curve, one never stops adding information to the brain's computer. Through three score years and ten, we accumulate, and gather, and collect, as we grow and slow, and then, at the end, we cannot download that wealth to younger heads. That's God's little joke.

**Rising costs**

Motor insurance prices went up again. I decided to sell the car. My advertisement resulted in calls, haggling, and then a handshake. My walking shoes wore out but there are no cows now, plastic shoes, made from oil, cost too much. Tomorrow I leave for Cannes, to become a nudist.

**Taking a pop at the yops**

In my youth I rushed home on Thursdays to worship my heroes on 'Top of the Pops.' In the seventies I bought a video, recorded and stored away each edition. In the eighties and nineties I seemed to lose interest. Today I prefer watching it with the sound turned down.

**That was life**

He woke up early, feeling hungry. He started climbing and found a suitable place to spin his web. He worked hard. Several flies paid him a visit and hunger was gone. Late in the afternoon, he was sunbathing and sadly didn't notice the starling arrive. Then it was too late.

**If it's only a game, why do we keep score?**

The whistle blew and he started running, the ball was passed, quickly he got rid of it, still running. He could see the goal getting closer. Within six yards of it, he waited, and moved slowly backward, confusing the defender. He received the ball, pirouetted and scored, no kisses, Please!

**The chore**

The water? hot! The soap? Foamy. The bristles and sharp blade ready. Scrape one side. "Ouch!" a nick. The other side? Another nick. "Damn it!" Under the chin? OK. The upper lip? A nick, "Sod it!" A splash of cold water, a massage of balm, Ahhh! as a baby's bottom!

**Time traveller**

We began knocking the building down yesterday. Today I found a box in the foundations, inside was a container of powder marked 'eat me.' I did, and another liquid container marked 'drink me.' And I did. I slowly began to fade, then disappear. The box was inscribed 'the year 2974.'

**Hannah's heart**

Hannah's heart was failing, and could never be mended, a transplant was her only option.

One false alarm, followed a second false alarm, but the third time she was lucky.

The operation was long and worrying, but in the end, all was well. Now she's biking and swimming and normal.

**Momentary millionaire**

Last year I won seven million on the lottery. My family and friends helped me celebrate. I bought a house, car, yacht and some clothes, went on a cruise. I became bored and unhappy so I gave away the house, car and yacht,

now my friends don't come around anymore.

## Families

The bell rang loudly. A young man stood waiting with an expectant but nervous look on his blotchy face. The door opened. "Hello, I'm John Sullivan, from Wessex Radio, come to interview Mr. Rogers."

"Yes come in, you mean Roy, well we all call him Roy, something to do with an old cowboy, he is expecting you. I'm Sarah, one of the care assistants. I'll take you to his room." They walked down a long corridor and she tapped gently on a door. "Yes?" came the reply, and they entered.

"Hello Roy, this man's from the local radio and wants to talk with you."

"Yes, I know, I was waiting for him."

John sat down in a chair near Roy.

"You're late!"

"Yes, I know, sorry about that, the traffic out there is murder today!" said John.

"So, what do you want to know?" asked Roy.

"Well Mr Rogers, I.."

"Call me Roy, it's not my real name, that's Arthur, but everyone calls me Roy."

"OK.....er Roy. I have been told it's your 97th birthday tomorrow, is that right?"

"Yes, and no" said Roy, "The people here think its tomorrow, but it's today really! They can't get anything right here."

Suddenly there was a loud banging in the wall. "What's that?" asked John somewhat surprised.

"Don't worry about it" said Roy.

After a moment John continued hesitantly.

"So will you have family here? Do you have children?"

"Yes, I have seven children, three of each and one undecided. As well as grand children and great grandchildren. I expect most of them will be here."

"Right," said John. "So, another three years and you'll be getting your birthday card from the queen then?"

"I suppose so, let's hope she gets the date right. And I expect it will be the same card that everybody gets, with her wearing that same yellow dress."

"So what do you attribute to your very long life?"

"D'you mean how did I get so old? It's clean living! Nothing but clean living."

"Really?"

"Yep, that's it, early to bed, early to rise, no smoking, no alcohol, a virgin until I got married at age 23, never bet money, never a lender nor a borrower, always paid my dues on the knob!"

"Really? That's amazing!"

"Yep, that's it, and reading the good book, every day!"

Suddenly loud music blared at them through the wall. After several minutes it stopped and there were loud voices arguing, then there was silence.

John looked at Roy, who shook his head and said nothing. His eyes scanned the room. There were photographs over the bed, presumably family. There was a bookcase with a single book on it, a badly scratched bedside table, a large wardrobe, but little else of any interest. John searched his mind for the next question. It took some time.

"I'll bet you have had a very interesting life? Tell me some of the things you did as a youngster. Were you in the services?"

"Oh yes, I served my King and Country." Roy became rigid to attention in his seat for a moment.

"Where did you serve?"

"Catterick!"

"Oh, Catterick? Where is that?"

"It's in Outer West Mongolia, just beyond the Mendip Mountains!"

"Oh, that's wonderful, and what did you do for a living, what job did you do?"

"I was an undertaker!"

"Oh, really, and what did you do there?"

"I beamed then up," replied Roy.

A prickly ice cold heat slid down the entire length of John's back bone.

The word undertaker had taken him completely by surprise,

and drained every thought from his head. Why wasn't I told about this before today, he wondered.

"Really..... really really, beamed???? Really, well, there will always be a market for that won't there, really?"

John struggled with a strangled laugh, Roy just sat and stared at him.

There was a tap on the door, and Sarah entered. "Are you ready for the party now Roy? Everybody's here, and we're all waiting in the lounge."

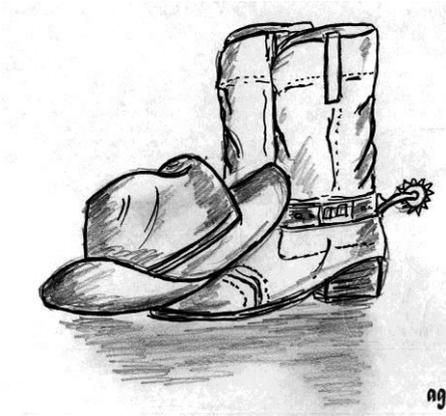
"OK, I'll be there shortly, this gentleman is just leaving," he grinned at John.

"You see, they haven't forgotten you after all, they have got the date right."

Roy grunted.

"Well er..... thank you Roy, I think I've got all I want?" he sounded very unsure.

"Right then, so you'll be on your way now will you?" suggested Roy



"Err..... yes, thank you."

"Well young man let me tell you something before you go," John moved close. Roy beckoned him closer with an index finger. John moved again even closer and their faces were only inches apart.

"You're no Michael Parkinson! Are you?"

said Roy.

Again there was banging on the wall, and this time it sounded as though a hammer was beating the wall down.

"What is that?" asked John.

"Oh dear," said Roy, "It's my dad, he lives in the room next door. It sounds as though he's drunk again." 21/10/2011

## Lost Things

The elderly hippy lady ushered me into her collectables and curios shop.

"I need a present for my aunt," I said, "She's got a 70th birthday coming next week and I'm sure there must be something that I could get her from here that would be just right"

She moved to a wall that was covered with small drawer openings. Each front panel had a label on it.

"What would you like?" she asked. "Something to remind her of the old days?"

She pointed to a drawer marked 'family.'

"No," I said, "Something pretty, something special."

She opened a drawer marked 'faith.'

"No, No!" I was getting heated.

She suggested a drawer marked 'temper.'

I turned to walk out, but she called me back.

She pulled me towards a drawer marked 'confidence.'

It was then I noticed a label that said 'virginity', she'd love that I thought, yes, wouldn't we all.

"No, you have to be more reasonable," I said.

She pointed to 'reason.'

It was then I noticed the labels on other drawers.

I saw 'lost souls', and 'lost hope' and then I found 'lost sense of humour.'

I realised I was in the wrong shop when she pointed to 'direction.'

So I left, having lost my sense of purpose and my rag.

19-8-2011

## Childhood and Life

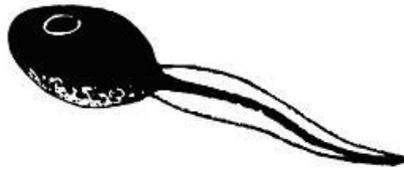
We are often told that,  
Childhood is the best part of our lives,  
and of course,  
different people will have different opinions of that saying.  
Other people will quote the saying,  
'Childhood is wasted on the young.'  
Certainly, the moment we are born we need and want food  
and gasp for life and are pleased to be born.  
At the first school, hesitantly, we take our first steps into a  
new world,  
but uncertainty is soon replaced with joy, and new friends.  
Through those school days of happiness and tears, the  
learning curve of life wanders like a rattle snake on quicksand  
and is enjoyed and loathed in varying amounts.  
At the final school, we can't wait to get out into the real world,  
and then suddenly, we are free.  
Free to experience all manner of new and exciting and  
sometimes frightening days.  
Free of parents, free of school rules, a new life seems perfect.  
It's then we realise we have to learn new rules, and not step  
outside the law, and then there's something called, morals.  
Some people sail through life, enjoying every moment,  
while others wish they could have their childhood back.  
However, we soon learn that once it's gone, childhood is gone  
forever.  
Later life sometimes includes the introduction of new children,  
often bringing new life into older hearts and bodies.  
On the other hand, there is a train of thought that life should  
start in old age and gradually get younger.  
This would mean that for the first 20 or 30 years of your life,  
you are paid to stay home, quiet and forgotten and out of the  
way. Then you enter the workplace with a mindful of  
experiences, that gradually slip away, and you become dafter  
and more stupid. The teenage years, are the strange years,

when the older children, or is it younger parents, don't understand anything you say or do. Then you have to learn to use a toilet, and then potty train, and then get messy with something called a nappy.

Very young life does have its compensation, for boys in particular, and that's the sucking of warm soft things to get free and continuous nourishment.

Then suddenly you slip into a warm place, and what better way to end a life, and a childhood, than with an orgasm.

15<sup>th</sup> July 2011



## Home Sweet Home (?????)

---

Thank you! Thank you, thank you! And about time too!  
 It was awful in there,  
 phew! Dark, scary and not very nice. I like nice things, only  
 nice things.

And that was not it!

I thought that was going to be my coffin, and a cheap  
 cardboard one at that!,  
 and there's not enough room in there to swing a dead  
 sparrow!

(stretch)

OK, Oooooohhhh, now let me stretch my legs, that's nice. It  
 was so cramped in there!

Ah, That's better, Hmmm, yes.

So, tell me, where am I now?

OK, let me have a look around.

Hmmm, looks nice, looks very nice. What is this place? This  
 could be a kitchen.

Now, what is that? It smells very strange. Ah yes, I think this  
 is where I leave food that I've eaten, that I don't want  
 anymore. Good, I must remember where this is.

Oh, another smell, and it's nice whatever it is, very nice. Wait,  
 Ouch, that's hot, keep away from there, but it's where the nice  
 smell is coming from, a very nice smell.

Oh yes, that reminds me, I'm Hungry, I said HUNGARY. Can't  
 you hear me, I said I'm hungry!!!! Hear me, hear me-ow I'm  
 Hungry.

Oh, thank you, that's very kind of you. Ooooooh this tastes  
 nice, very nice!

Hmmm, could do with a drink now, what's that? oh yes, that'll  
 do the job! Ohhh now I am full up.

So let's find out more about this, new place.

Another door, and..... there's a box in the corner with a little  
 man in it, talking .

I wonder if he'll ever get out of there, I wonder why he's in there?

Now there's a very nice scratching pole, but it looks a bit worn. It smells like???,.... Cats

Is there another cat here? Where, where, let me at him! or her!

Claws get ready. What if there's more than one? Cripes.

Ah, there it is, fast asleep by the fire. Doesn't he know the fire's not on, and he's wearing a fur coat anyway! Huh!

Well if he doesn't bother me, that's fine, but I'll be ready for it whenever it wants a fight, and if it sleeps all the time, yeah!

Then that's OK.

Nice carpet, very soft, and look at those curtains. Right! I shall have my claws out later and be up there, right to the top!

Looks like fun!

I'm feeling rather sleepy, gosh was that a yawn? And me with a full belly too. I must find a comfy place to have forty winks.

There are plenty of chairs here, but which one is best?

Yes, this is the one, this'll do nicely, very nicely. Time for a stretch again, anytime is always the right time for a stretch!

Oh that feels so good.

Hey!!!! Wait a minute, I don't want to be picked up, She's squeezing me too tight, against her,..... soft things.

Meeeoohhhhh OK, it's not so bad after all. Oops, hey again!

Now she's in my chair. That's the chair I wanted. Come on now, if you want me to stay here, then I want a decent chair.

If she doesn't let me go, I'll sink my claws into her lap! That'll show her who's the boss around here!

Although,.... maybe not, her lap is very warm, and very nice.

Ok

OK

I think I'll get some shut eye, time for a cat nap.

One mouse

Two mice

Three meeces

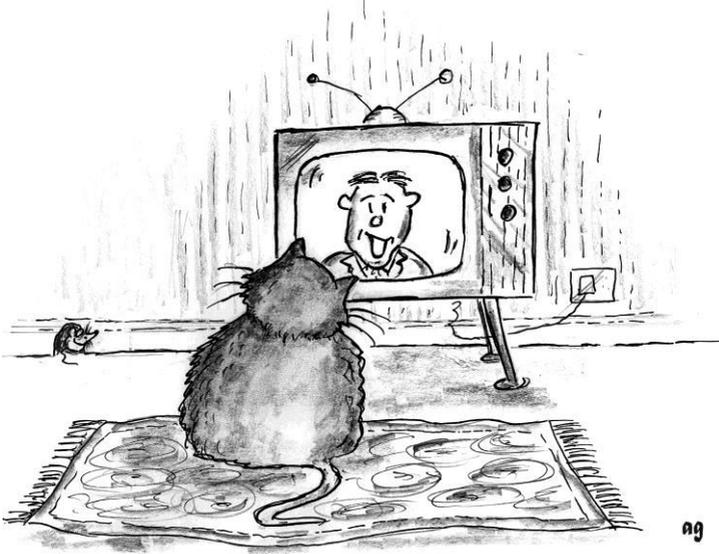
Four micei

Five mooses

Six ???oohhhhh now what comes next?

Ohhhh, damn it, I've lost my place now!

They keep talking, and keeping me awake!  
 What are they talking about? What's that? They keep saying  
 Tom, and looking at me.  
 OOOHH, are they talking about a name?  
 Now then, let me see, Oscar, I want to be called Oscar!  
 Hmmm? What did he say?  
 Oh OK then, Tom, it is, OK, it's nearly as nice as Oscar.  
 Tom Tom Tom Tom Tom  
 Tom ti Tom ti Tom Tom ti Tom ti Tom.  
 OK, I like that, I'll be Tom.  
 Tom's a boy's name isn't it?  
 I'm a boy! I'm Tom and I'm a boy, a boy cat, no a man cat!  
 What's that? Powders? What's powders?



Chip? Is that food? I'm not hungry now.  
 Tablets? Ah, I know what they are, and no I don't need tables,  
 what did he say? Doctor? I don't need a doctor either,  
 I'm a healthy Tom male cat. Hah ha  
 Doctor? oh Doctored! What does that mean?  
 ME-OWHHHHHH !!!!! Does it? NO I certainly don't want that.

OK Tom, time to pack your bags again, but, I don't remember seeing a cat flap anywhere. Hmmmm.

Oooohhhh nnnnoooo! ---- But I don't want to be doctored, I want to procreate, you know family trees and all that stuff. I wanted to enliven the species with my DNA, whatever that is. My family is famous. My granddaddy, was in some kind of racket, but he is still famous!

So what are you going to do now then Tom?, if that is your real name!

I suppose, after I've seen the Doctor, they'll have to change my name to, Tomasina?

It's very comfy here on her lap, I think I'll take 20 winks, and keep one eye open, just in case they are serious about doctors.

I quite like it here, it's nice. I think I'll stretch again, much better than that rescue sanctuary. Maybe I will stay, it's very nice here, maybe I will, after all. 6-5-2011

## Forever Love

She said it was a forever love. Eleanor said our love would last, forever, but it didn't.

Eleanor is such a beautiful name.

I believed every word she said, I trusted her, but now, I am lost.

She said the world belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.

One man all by himself is nothing. Two people who belong together make a world.

Love is composed of a single soul inhabiting two bodies. I believed her.

We were very close, did everything together, walk, talking, films, everything. There were times when we couldn't have been closer and just being with her was all I ever wanted.

I said I loved her! I did! I remember it very clearly,....

I think,....

Now she is gone, I am empty, a vacuum. Life seems pointless.

I don't know how I will go on.

She had a pretty face, beautiful hair, wonderful eyes and those very kissable lips.

It won't be me without her.

Eleanor moved to the Grammar School today. There's another girl sitting in her seat. Her name's Abigail. Abigail is such a beautiful name.

## Old Charlie

Velma rinsed the bottles under the tap, shook out the unwanted drops of water, and walked to her front door. She opened it wide and greeted the bright and sunny spring day.

As she took a deep breath, she noticed a cat was hidden amongst the shrubs, watching blackbirds scooting across her lawn.

She stood there for some time looking up and down the street, just taking the day in.

A car drove up and parked in front of number nine, the next door house. A man climbed out of the vehicle and made his way into the front garden. He stood there taking photographs of the building.

Velma dropped the empty bottles into the box by her door step and picked up two full bottles of milk.

She watched him for a moment, wondering exactly who he was. Is he from the estate agents, she wondered.

"Hello," she ventured a word to him.

"Good morning," he replied and smiled.

"Are you from the estate agents?..... or the council?" she asked.

"No madam," he placed the camera into a brief case, "I'm from the Department of the Environment"

"Oh?, what's that?" For a moment she was lost for words, and then she noticed the identity tag hanging around his neck.

He reached into his pocket and handed her a card which read 'John Sullivan, Area Surveyor for English Heritage, and Department of the Environment.

He moved to the building and started measuring the distance from the window to the front door and the height from the ground to the top of the door.

"So, what are you doing? Are they selling number nine? There's no one in you know, old Charlie died a few months back."

"Yes I know," he said" I'm measuring up for a Bluey..... "

She interrupted him, "A what?"

"Oh, sorry, I mean a blue plaque."

She looked puzzled and he continued.

"The gentleman who lived he was a famous author and so there will be a blue plaque up there on that wall with his name on it, Sir Charles Smithson."

"What?" she gasped, "What..... old Charlie?, no, you can't be right, he was nobody, wasn't he?,... wasn't heeee???"

"On the contrary, he was a great writer, he wrote nearly a hundred books."

"Phew," she was amazed. "You mean, he was a real Sir?" He looked at her quizzically.

"Yes!" he said, "Didn't you ever speak to him?"

"Oh yes,.... Sometimes," she said vacantly.

"You mean he was actually knighted by the Queen?" she

queried in disbelief.

"That's right," he added as he wrote onto a clipboard.

"Hello Velma," said a voice from the garden of number thirteen, on the far side.

"Oh, morning Maisie."

"What does he want?" asked Maisie.

"This man is talking about putting up a blue plaque on the wall for old Charlie. Apparently he was a writer, wrote stories and things."

"I bet they were dirty stories!" said Maisie.

The Heritage man looked back and said, "No, he wrote some very good mind stretching, wondrous and adventurous books, he was a great man!"

"What did he say? I can't hear," said Maisie.

"He wrote mind stretching books Maisie, he was an author, who would have guessed he was one of those?" said Velma.

"What," said Maisie, "Did you say he was one of those? Was he gay then? I always thought he was one of those peadeatricophiles!"

They ignored her, and he continued.

"In a day or so, there will be some men installing the plaque up there," he pointed to the wall," and then in about a week, there will be a ceremony here, with probably the Lord Mayor, and a couple of other celebrities, and a few of Sir Charles' family, and then they'll all have a few nibbles down at the town hall afterwards."

"Velma," shouted Maisie, "What's that?"

"He said there's going to be a ceremony here next week."

"Oh," said Maise sounding confused.



"And then," he continued, "they'll probably drink a toast to him!"

"What's that Velma, what did he say?"

"They're going to toast Charlie," Velma sounded annoyed.

"Oh that's nice," said Maisie, "What down at the Crem? But they can't do that, they buried him three weeks ago."

Velma and the Heritage man looked at each other, smiled and shrugged their shoulders.

"It's alright," said Velma, "We always call her Hazy Maisie!"

He wrote more figures onto his clipboard and turned to leave, but stopped.

"It seems that he was born here," he pointed to the door of number nine. "Lived all his 79 years here, wrote all his books here, brought a wife here, brought up his kids here, and died here. He was quite a wealthy man, but he still chose to stay here where his roots were, in this!, A two up. two down, back scullery and outside lavi!.....Some people are very strange."

"He was married then? Well who would have believed that?" she said.

He wished them a good morning. The gate closed behind him, as he left.

Velma and Maisie stood and watched, saying nothing as his

car disappeared along the road.

Velma took a deep breath and sighed. "Sir Charles, that sounds so funny, so strange, so odd so,....."

"Well, I'm off to the shops," said Maisie, "are you going down the bingo this afternoon?"

"I expect so but I've got some chores to do this morning, maybe I'll see you down there later, after lunch, and after I've watched 'Neighbours.'

7<sup>th</sup> January 2011

## The Quandry

Sometimes, life is strange. Other people tend to judge you on your actions, and appearance. So the little things in life can sometimes paint you black in another person's eyes.

Fortunately, most of the time, I am in charge of my actions, and I am content that I live a reasonably good, and fair life.

So, when the actions of others throw a spanner in your works, it tends to unbalance a normally straight forward existence.

The alternative, especially if you keep a diary, is to embellish the facts. However, this time, dear reader, I will be honest, honest!

I have a laptop and when I use it, I find that laying it flat on a table is somehow, awkward. So I decided I needed a laptop stand. This would lift the backup, making typing much easier, and more importantly, accurate!

A quick look on Ebay and I found what looked like the right thing at a 'buy now' bargain price of £3.75. The decider was the line, "postage included."

My credit card had recently been updated, and sadly I had not informed the Paypal system. After a number of attempts to make the transaction, I began to lose 'balance' and gave up and 'ticked' the 'pay by other means option.' I printed off the details and added my name and address, and posted it off with my cheque.

About ten days later, the cheque would have cleared by then, the plastic stand arrived. I eagerly opened the parcel and it was perfect. Then I noticed another package, in my porch, that the postman had left. How I hadn't seen it before was a mystery to me.

The packing was identical to the first one so I knew exactly what it was.

That was my quandary. What to do now? I could phone them, but that would be at my expense, and surely they would say 'send it back', again at my expense. Almost the price of the

item. I could give it to someone as a present? Christmas isn't too far away. No..... perhaps not.

I could take it with me when I do a boot sale? But, as I have never done a boot sale, that's probably not a good idea.

I could take it over to the tip with a list of other things that I have ready to go.

Or, perhaps the best bet would be to drop it into a charity shop, that way the shop benefits, the new owner benefits, and I don't.

Do I want to? Should I? Perhaps you'll say I shouldn't?

But my quandry remains. I am in a difficult perplexing situation. My dilemma is real, but, keeping it all in perspective, It should be easy to remedy the matter.

At this time, I still have the parcel un-opened. It sits there, looking at me, collecting dust. I do flick at it with a yellow duster now and then. I have thought of taking it out for a drive in the car. You know, give it some fresh air? Take it into town, show it the sights?

At that moment the doorbell rang and woke me up. I rubbed my eyes and opened the front door. It was the postman. He was holding two identical packages.

October 2010

## The re-union

He sat down, and looked all around. There was a couple sat on the far side of the coffee shop, and a waitress and another who could be the owner, behind the counter, otherwise the place was empty.

He settled into a chair and loosened his top coat.

Moments later the waitress placed a coffee mug on the table in front of him.

“Thanks,” he said, but, when he looked up, she had gone.

He was pleased to have found the shop with nearly 15 minutes to spare, but, it had been tricky with so much traffic on the motorway. She had said 3pm, and thankfully he had time to compose himself.

He wriggled his tie, but it was still untidy.

Then he brushed his jacket collar, “Can’t have dandruff” he thought to himself.

A sudden whiff of his body odour hit his nostrils, he hoped that the café smells would soon cover it.

He took a sip of the coffee, it was hot and comforting, and he warmed his fingers around the mug, as he tried to script his first words to her.

‘Hello, how are you?’ That’s stupid, you’ve got to be more imaginative than that!

‘Fancy seeing you here!’ stupid again.

‘D’you come here often?’ Another juvenile comment he decided, but he was still unsure what he would say. He gazed out of the window wondering exactly what he would say to her, as he felt his skin moisten and butterflies staging world championship wrestling in his belly.

“Hello Steve” she said, he hadn’t notice her walk in through the door behind him.

“Hello,” there were moments of hesitation, “ah,... it’s so good to see you, again Linda!”

“You too, Steve” she added.

He tried to hug her and kiss her cheek, but she pulled away before he had time, and sat in the seat opposite him.

"I suppose sex is out of the question?" he smiled at her, oddly. "What?" she gasped loudly, "Good God, you haven't changed a bit. You're still a randy git, but now you're a randy old git!"

"No, No, I was only joking!" he tried to reassure her, but she wanted none of it.

Linda nearly got to her feet, but he grabbed her arm. "No, I really was joking, honest!" She looked at him, motionless, and then sat down again.

There were moments of uneasiness, and a long silence which he broke.

"Well, let me look at you, you still look good! It's been a long time! Too long"

"It has been a very long time," she agreed.

"Forty years," he prompted.

"No, it's 37 years!"

"Ah yes, 37 long years," he added.

He turned towards the waitress, and asked for two more coffees.

"How are you?" she asked.

"Me? I'm fine, couldn't be finer, I always say it's the others, not me!"

She grinned, but ignored his poor attempt at humour.

They both felt uneasy and his seat suddenly became very uncomfortable.

Who would break another silence?

"Well," she continued, "So what are you up to now?"

"Oh, now I am fully retired, I'm doing as little as possible."

"Do you still see any of the old gang? Jerry and Pete? And what was Pete's wife's name?"

"Sandy," he confirmed, and continued, "but what about your family?"

"Oh, they are all grown up now," she said, "Amanda is married with two little ones."

"Oh, you're a granny now then? Granny Lin!"

"A nanny," she corrected him.

He sensed the wide distance between them, a distance that wasn't there the last time they met. Well it had been so many

years, it was stupid to think they would continue where they left off. They were good years, passionate years, and painful too! But now they were history, his and hers, and they would never return.

"But of course," he agreed with the correction, "Nanny!"

"And Christopher," she continued, "he is a big shot in the City of London, a good job, married to Louise, and they have three children."

"Phew, your kids have been busy!"

"Yes," she smiled, "they are beautiful children and grandchildren."

"I'm very happy for you. How is George?"

He tried not to make a big thing of mentioning 'her' George, but as he said it, their eyes met, and he felt embarrassed.

"Yes, he's still with us, it has been touch a go a few times, but he's a survivor."

Steve didn't want to hear her say that, but he half suspected it.

"He is totally blind now, it's been getting worse over many years, but now...." she hesitated, "It's coming up to our 47th wedding anniversary, next month!"

"That's nice," he lied.

Two coffees arrived.

There was another long silence, when neither of them could think of what to say next.

He looked at her. His eyes scanned her shape. Her hair is still her crowning glory, he mused, even if it has had some chemical help, it's still very tidy. Her face and eyes? Ok we've both got wrinkles. Her body still looks very trim, and very nice too.

Yes, she looks good for her age. I wonder what she's thinking of me? I'll bet she's thinking I'm gay, just because I'm not shackled up with some female! Well I'll have to put her straight, I'm not gay, my husband is, but not me! Huh! Eventually, Steve broke the silence.

"We had some good times, didn't we? Some beautiful days and some magnificent nights."

"They were," she agreed, "but that was....." she thought.

"Forty years?" queried Steve.

"Thirty seven, coming up to thirty eight," she corrected him again

"Did he ever realise, did he know?"

"No, I don't think so. I covered my tracks pretty well in those days," said Linda

"Where are you living these days? I phoned your sister, because your old number wasn't ringing anymore. She said you'd moved out of Kent, but wouldn't tell me where you were. Said she'd tell you I phoned, and you'd only phone me if you wanted to. I waited, and, five months later you phoned. You kept me sweating, and when you said meet me in Swansea, well! I thought, what the hell is she, or they, doing in Wales of all places. Why are you living here?" he asked.

Linda laughed.

"We bought a B&B here about 8 years ago, up on the Gower coast. It's wonderful there, the beaches are spectacular, and the air is Champagne air. We get a good turn over each year. Holiday makers, walkers, climbers, and a few weekenders." His eyes widened and he smiled.

"No! Not that kind of weekend," she added.

"Of course not, how could I think such a thing."

She looked at him and smiled. He smiled back.

"So, what are you doing with your time these days?" she enquired.

"Oh! This and that, you know, trying to keep out of mischief."

"Now that isn't telling me anything! Is it?" she said in an angry school mistress tone.

He swallowed hard, and took a deep breath.

"I had some health problems a few years back, but I don't have to visit the hospital very much these days."

"Oh???" she made sure to catch his gaze.

"About three years ago I had a prostate problem and had some radio therapy, but they tell me I'm in remission now, so I'm cured! It's a miracle! I'm a medical wonder," he said in a boastful and self-mocking way, and she just looked at him, saying nothing.

She wanted to hug and comfort him, but the table was between them. She stood up and pulled him to her. They hugged tightly for some time. It might have been minutes, or

even hours, but they lost track of the time. He remembered all the many previous hugs like this. She needed a cigarette, and then remembered she had given them up.

"I used to be quite the lady's man, didn't I?, but now,.... I'm no good to man woman or beast! Of course, not that I was ever into men or beasts! but."

They said nothing, moments later, he continued, "yes, I'm fine, got a roof over my head, food in the fridge, and money in the bank, I need for nothing. A little company would be nice, and love? No chance, not now. All I have now are memories and fantasies! What is it they say, 'A man without love is like a garden without flowers? Well in my garden the flowers have all died!"

His eyes started to fill with tears, but he was determined not to let her see him cry.

He took a deep breath.

She decided to take control. "Don't say that, you're alive aren't you? That's stupid!"

"What stupid being alive?" he joked.

"You know what I mean. There are millions of people all over this world with nothing! No food, no roof, nothing and you do have them."

"I'm sorry, yes you're right, I didn't mean to go on like this."

"That's OK," she said, "you 'go on' if you want to."

They both sat down again, still holding hands across the table.

"So life has been tough for you over the last few years, but life does go on!"

Three people sat at the next table, one of them set up a laptop and they were quiet.

She looked at him. He was wider than she remembered, maybe two stones wider, and in those days, she could never imagine him wearing a cardigan. She smiled to herself as she wondered if he was in the habit of wearing thermals. He looks rough for his age, and she chastised herself with the thought of him holding a mug of Horlicks, his body covered in emollient cream as he slides into his PJ's. Behave yourself Linda, she said, almost out loud, and she stirred a smile into

her coffee. For a split second another wicked thought crossed her mind. She tried to get a better look at his eyes. 'Is he wearing eyeliner? Make-up' she wondered? No! don't be silly, of course not.

"Penny for your thoughts" he prompted.

"Oh! No! Nothing." She swallowed.

He was puzzled by her grin as she added, "No, it was nothing."

"So Steve," she said, "What's the idea of this, here, today then?"

"Oh, you know, just catching up. Wondered how you were, what you been doing after all these years, and so on, and that's it!"

"Well now you know, we are all fine!" she stated.

They both turned to look out of the window at the traffic, but the window had misted, and he wiped it with his hand.

She asked, "What do you do with you time?"

He thought for a moment, not knowing whether to open himself up to her again.

"Well," he hesitated.

"Yes?" she questioned, wondering what he was about to say, and thinking would she be shocked.

"I," he paused, "I joined an art club," he confessed.

"That's good," she said, trying to sound encouraging. "Tell me more."

"Well, it's once a week at the church hall for a couple of hours, you know, chuck some paint on a canvas, a cup of tea and a biscuit and a prayer from the vicar, half a dozen hail Mary's and 20 verses of Jesus want's me for a sunbeam," she smiled, he continued, "a few trips out to paint on sunny days, it's nothing special, but it's all very civilised."

"Great! What do you paint?" she ignored his irony.

"Walls, floors, doors" He stopped as he saw her scowling at him. "No! I mean on canvas, old and new buildings, cityscapes, I seem to like the shapes and lines and colours and," he stopped.

"Good," she repeated. "Are there any young ladies there that catch your eye?" she asked.

"Young? You must be joking!, There's no one under 80 years old! If I cough too loud they'll all be pushing up daisies next week!"

She smiled again.

"But, if I'm honest, I do enjoy it, so I'll keep going, for now."

"Talking of going, I must fly," she looked at her watch, gathered her coat and bag and stood up.

"Oh," she anticipated his disappointment, and interrupted.

"Now," she buttoned her coat, "I have some calls to make here, a little shopping to do, then home. One thing you must promise, you will NOT follow me!" she stated firmly.

"What?" he took a lungful of air, "Well can we meet again sometime? You know same time, same place next year? Like in that film," he begged.

"No, don't be silly" she said strongly." That's not a good idea. You've caught up, we've caught up, and there it must end."

He began to realise she would not budge, and accepted the reality that their friendship was now well and truly, in the past.

Linda tenderly kissed his forehead, and went. The door slammed behind her, he was numb again. He sat there for almost an hour then decided to order some food but ate very little, then started the journey back. On the way home, Steve thought of all the things he wanted to say and hadn't. He did consider turning up again, same time, same place, next year, but thought maybe not, what's the point, she won't be there. He decided that catching up hadn't been such a good idea after all.

2010

## Brought to Book

Audrey opened the main door just as the numbers of the digital clock on the wall glowed 10am.

A small queue of early customers funnelled politely in, some stopping at the returned books counter, others making for the various parts of the building, computers, CD's and DVD's, Local History, new additions and the rest.

Once she was back behind the counter, she started date stamping several returned books. She knew it was going to be a long day but now, after three years, she was used to the hours, and was happy to accept, and stay with the position. Her life was uneventful, with just a few evenings out at social events, and Monday at the Creative Writing group and Thursdays for Yoga.

Her love life had been non-existent for many years.

She had known the warmth and companionship of a man occasionally, but now it all seemed so long ago, and she was fully aware that her body clock was running out of time.

There were nights when she longed for the company of a man, the warmth of affection, of sharing and caring, and then, quite recently fate took a hand.

Another customer thrust two books in her direction. She took them, opened one, and as she stamped it, she looked up, ....it was him.

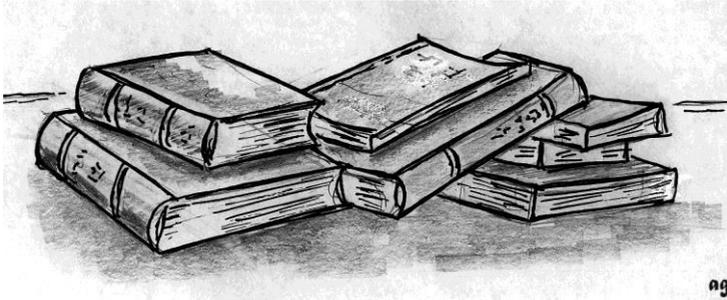
He had visited the library several times over recent months and she always made a point of looking him straight in the eyes, over the top of her half-moon spectacles, and smiling. She was pleased that she had put on some of her favourite and most expensive perfume that morning. She didn't usually buy perfume in Boots, but the sales girl said it would get her any man, and it was called, "Yes please, NOW whhooooo." She noticed his nostrils quivering, and hoped the aroma was meandering in a sensual manner through his nasal passages, to his brain, and his heart and other important parts.

His library reference card, which she had checked numerous

times, said his name was Harry Dickens.

She sat at home most nights with her cup of cocoa, wanting Harry to be with her. She wanted him in her bed beside her and desired to cuddle into his warm naked torso.

"Good morning sir," she said, "and took two books and a DVD from him. She noticed that the title was, "Free Willy 2" which made her shudder. She stamped his books and his 'Free Willy 2' too, and said, "Thank you sir," and he moved away.



Several weeks later it happened. They started talking and he asked to meet her for a drink after yoga. A full on love affair started, and abandon was thrown to the wind. They would spend every spare evening together listening to the radio. They never missed 'Book at bedtime' and then straight after the epilogue they drained their cocoa cups and went to bed and did it. And did it, and did it, until the next morning when the sun's rays streaked through her Laura Ashley curtains. Harry was an Olympian in the horizontal pleasures event, and she was in marathon heaven and made his bread taste like buttered toast! Audrey had easily fallen for his charms and other things. She loved the sparkle in his eyes, the curl of his lips, the sound of his voice, his wit, and his wobbly bits. She had starting reading *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, to see if she could pick up any tips, and had used some to an earth moving effect. For the next few months, she always arrived for work each morning, looking dishevelled, feeling quite exhausted and appeared totally, f-f-flustered.

More weeks passed, and suddenly and without reason, Harry didn't call at her home or the library anymore. She wondered why. Perhaps he was taking his books to another library? Or worse, maybe he was getting his reading from a charity shop? Perish the thought. Or worse still, at the 5p a book on the Friday morning market stall. She was horrified at the thought.

Regardless, life continued, she stamped another book called "Great Expectations" and wondered if Harry was a descendant of Charles Dickens.

She checked his library file card again and noted that his books were three weeks overdue, exactly the same as her.

25/2/2011

## A letter to Deidre

Dear Deidre, I am not in the habit of writing to magazines, except for entering the occasional competition, so writing to someone who is an agony aunt is the very last thing I would ever consider or have need for, but my troubled situation is such that I desperately crave your help.

My husband and I have been married for nearly 16 years. We were childhood friends, and became even more friendly in our teens and we married when I was 22 years old. We have a beautiful home and we lived a wonderful life until recently. Over the last year, maybe more, my husband has become very odd and sexually very active. In fact, he won't stop making love to me.

Every morning, as soon as I wake he wants me. I manage to get some breakfast, then he wants it again and again and he doesn't stop until he needs coffee, usually about 11am. Then, he's at it again until we stop for lunch.

Again, all through the afternoon, and he just won't leave me alone. After an evening meal, we usually sit and watch a film. Last night it was, "Some like it hot!" and then he dragged me up to the bedroom again.

I do manage to get some sleep at night but I always have to sleep with one eye open.

It really has become an amazing obsession. Perhaps he has suddenly realised he is getting older, and he's trying to make up for lost time?

I do enjoy 'that sort of thing' but 2 or 3 times a week is more than enough for me.

Unfortunately, in recent years he has put on weight and is now nearly eighteen stone. When he lays on me it's as though a very large wardrobe has fallen on me, with the key still in the lock!

I have asked a few close friends for advice in confidence, but

no one can suggest a remedy. However, I think one of them may have betrayed me, as just this morning I had a phone call from Hello Magazine. They wanted to come round and take photographs! Of course I said no straight away, and anyway, the money they were offering was peanuts!

However, we do have to stop sometimes, as I need to go to the shops for food and other things. I have to use the washing machine for the laundry, but he insists that I set it on 'fast cycle.' I also have housework to do, again he insists I wear as little as possible, just bra and knickers, a nurses hat and rubber gloves and I have to use a feather duster, while he just sits there and watches me. In one hand he's clutching a can of aerosol cream, reduced fat of course, and in the other hand he's feverishly fingering a tube of smarties. You'd have thought he might have been just a little more imaginative and original, wouldn't you? And what's more, it is the height of embarrassment when I have to take the rubbish out to the dust bin men.

But my husband's sexual thirst seems unquenchable.

Thinking about it now, I don't really know why I married him. The night we met he told me he was the director of a full time professional cleaning company, and it was only after we married that I found out he was a window cleaner.

He said he had money in the bank, but then I found out it was the bank he owed the money too. It's not that he's an oil painting, to be honest in his case, it's more like painting by numbers. I also remember on that night, he complimented me saying that I had such beautiful small hands.

Of course, in my naivety, I had to ask, "Oh, why do you say that?" and he added that he liked a girl with small hands, because it made it look bigger.

However, there must have been something about him that I liked, but for the love of me, I can't put my finger on it right now.

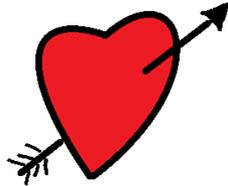
However, it all came to a head on Saturday last at about 12 noon. Suddenly, and without any provocation, he wanted sex,

and had me, there and then, over the frozen chicken. It was so embarrassing, and straight away, we were thrown out of Tesco's.

Police arrived and took us both to the police station. We have to appear in court in three week's time.

So please dear Deidre, can you help? Please suggest a cure for my husband's endless and insatiable passions and desires.

I look forward to acting on your advice. I don't want to tell you my really name  
so I will use a nom de plume, and sign off as, 'Tender Brenda'



PS

He has just given me a pile of DVD films and said for me to choose one.

They include, "Cat on a hot tin roof" Does he think I'm a gymnast?

"A man called Horse" Some hopes! Then another one called "Bikini girls on ice."

I wonder what that's all about? As if I didn't know. Also, "The day the earth stood still" really?! And lastly, "The dirty dozen," ....Dozen?

I didn't know what to do or which one to choose. So now he's found another and says tonight's film is (Gulp!), "Close Encounters of the Third Kind,"

and Oh Deidre,..... I am terrified!

PPS Please excuse shaky handwriting.

11<sup>th</sup> February 2011

## Shut Up, You Fool

Late?, I'm not late! It's a quarter past and that was the time on my..... that clock must be wrong, my watch clearly says.....  
 Oh damn, it's stopped, typical. Well she didn't need to be so..... so correct. She's a little Hitler, a little Adolph. Adophus, Adolphietta, Adolpharoma, oh shut up you fool.  
 Perhaps, as I'm late, I'll get in quicker, oh no, (tut) there's a crowd waiting! (sigh)  
 A sweet old lady, a squinnying brat and it's learner of a mother, and,..... those two!  
 What a noisy little child! Isn't she going to stop it making that noise?

**\*\*\*\*\*Mumps, measles and rubella, Inoculations are vital to stamp out this easily remedied minor problem, yeah yeah yeah!**

No, It's a lovely little child, I was one once!  
 And as for the mother???? Hmmm, very nice, yes! Quite a sweetie! OK sweetie, get your coat you've p,.....  
 Oh dear, now she's picking her nose! ..... YUK!  
 When will you get the 'Bottle from the label' thing sorted?  
 And for that matter the kettle and the pot and the black and the white, or,... however the saying goes!

And as for those two, look at her!, all done up like a dogs dinner at quarter past, well quarter to, OK, it's nearly ten in the morning!  
 I wonder what sort of fish she gets with that bait.

And look at that pelmet! You can't call that a skirt! If she crosses her legs we'll all be frightened to death!..... I wonder if she will?

She looks odd. All sort of..... lop sided? Strange.  
 Ah I see! The strap of her shoulder bag is pressing against her..... they're implants! Yes! They are implants, ha ha.  
 Didn't anybody tell her, more than a handful's a waste!

**\*\*\*\*\*STD's and Chlamydia are the most common sexually transmitted..... yeah yeah yeah.**

It's pushing her Charlies over to one side. Ooohhhh, don't stare don't stare. But I want to.

Is she a man? No! .... No stubble, but what's that under her arm? Oh it's shadow.

Could be one of those cross dressers, more like a cross sideboard. Certainly not a Chippendale cross sideboard! More a lump of cross,... driftwood! Something a French sailor used, abused and threw overboard! No, probably rejected and threw overboard. It's funny what you can do with a piece of driftwood. I mean, you can carve it, sculpt it and all that sort of thing, then sell it for lots of money! Modern art! Huh! Oh! Shut up you fool.

And look at the size of him. Oh, he's with her! I should have guessed!

With that bait she gets a whale! I'm not going to argue with him! Don't stare, don't stare.

Phew! Talk about Jimmy Fivebellies!

**\*\*\*\*\*And in the blue corner coming in at a little over 3 million tons it's..... Sid the Sumo! Yea yea yea!!!!**

Hey, if that fat were muscle, we'd all be in trouble.

Nope! I'd be in trouble, he's looking at me!

Don't stare! Don't stare!

It is a man isn't it? Perhaps they're a drag double act?

Who'd pay to see that? Phew, Oh shut up you fool.

**\*\*\*\*\*Your blood is needed! Give blood at the Community Centre on Tuesday, and Thurs..... yeah yeah yeah.**

**I need it too! Thank you very much.**

What's that odd smell? Oh! It's that child!

And, look at that sweet old lady, just a touch of pink in her hair, probably got a bingo card in her pocket, along with her pension book,.... Ah! She's got to be a hundred if she's a day! Well,.... nearly. There's nothing of her, I'll bet if she goes out in a breeze, she'll get blown away! Eat a corn flake and they think she's pregnant! Huh! What's the name of that book in her basket? Oh! "More joys of sex."  
Shut up you fool!

NEXT

24<sup>th</sup> September 2010

## I want to tell you a story

(A red herring swim through history)

Somewhere in the distant mists of time, in a land called Switzerland, there was a country girl named Astoria Brookes. She met and married a local carpenter named Lemuel Tell. Within the year she gave birth to their first born, William. The boy weighed 8lbs 4oz at birth, and in oncoming years she bore more sons and a daughter at their home in the village of Burglen.

William's childhood was uneventful. The usual squabbles and occasional fist fights with the school bully, and he achieved moderate success with his learning. As a teenager, he took an interest in local politics and became aware of injustices amongst the poor of his village. His later history and expertise with a crossbow is now, very well-known and documented, but one aspect of young William's life is not widely known. He was a keen sportsman, and tried all the sports available in his locality. However, the one sport in which he excelled was bowls.

He joined his local club and soon became very expert, and won trophies for himself and for his team against other local teams. Soon the area bowls talent scout came searching and tried to persuade him to join one of the major clubs.

In time, he joined the Zurich team, who were well respected, and again he excelled. His father had to add several shelves to the wall in the house for the many trophies teenage William had amassed.

His choice was bowls on the green, but crown green bowls was also tried, and again he did well. Often, at the town hostelry, he would take on all comers at the nine pin skittles and he rarely lost.

There was one evening when he tried the modern new-fangled variation called ten pin, but his didn't like this. He

thought there was too much technology, and realised he preferred the traditional, old fashioned green grass under his feet.

He was admired by many of the local females but his eye was taken by one called Nova who he had first met in his schooldays. They married and children came.

Their oldest son Neverkin, later became a world famous clairvoyant and their oldest daughter, Kaye, achieved great success in athletics and broke many records.

Their only other son, whose name nobody seems to remember, went a bit crazy and spent his whole life trying to catch and weigh hemmings. He died when he fell over a cliff. The one person that none of the family will talk about is their youngest daughter Cleon. It appears she turned out to be the black sheep of the family when she took up a very dubious night time occupation in a rather shady sector of Zurich.

Nova tried her hand at bowls, but sadly she could not grasp the idea and lacked the skill. She had revealed to William that she had been a fan of his for many years and that she had kept details of his entire bowling career in a note book. Very detailed statistics of every game he'd ever played. Soon he was called into the Switzerland National bowls team and became a national hero. More trophies came into the house and Pa Tell had to devote several rooms to the spoils of son William's sporting endeavours, and still Nova kept adding to the many books and volumes of statistics that listed all the games he played, his own teams scores, and his opponents team scores, the championships and cups played and won, nothing was omitted.

The day came when his team had to visit Berne to play the team, equivalent to Manchester United. His team were the underdogs and expected to get thrashed, but William was in particularly fine form and they won easily.

The Berne team wanted him to join them but he declined and stated that he preferred to stay with his local team.

When they got back to Burglen, they were shocked to find that their home had caught fire and burnt to the ground.

Fortunately, his parents, that's Pa Tell and Ma Tell, and all the pets were safe, but the house was raised to the ground! Not a thing inside could be saved. It seems that an oil lamp had been left burning and one of the pets must have knocked it over. All the trophies William had won were gone and lost forever. As they searched through the ashes and dust they found blobs of metal that were once well-earned cups and shields.

Also gone were all the many notebooks, journals and volumes that Nova had kept and updated without fail after every game. Lost forever, every detail of his illustrious sporting career.

Lost forever, every record of his triumphs.

Lost forever, everything of the sporting life he had known and loved.

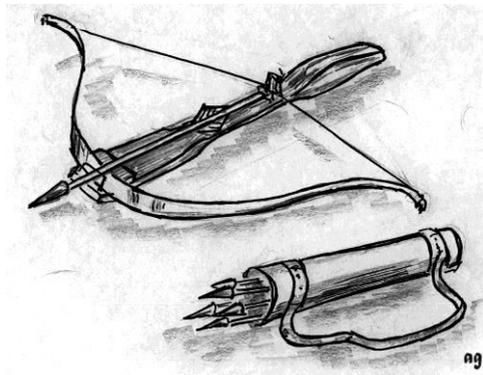
The Tells were heartbroken.

The town, and the country, were distressed at their loss.

William and his children were hastily found accommodation and did continue playing bowls, but never again with the same fervour and desire and interest.

So there you have it. A sad story but a true story, and sadly, now nobody will ever know, for whom the TELLS bowled.

3/12/2010



## The Prince

(A fairy story for 21<sup>st</sup> century adults.)

He opened the door and walked into the room. There were cobwebs and dust everywhere. The room was dark except for a single candle that was lit, and placed on the bedside table. The four poster was enormous. Covered in fur and velvet drapes, tall posts coloured gold and black satin sheets on the bed. These sheets are available at only 22 grotes from any leading High Street store, including Allderus, Agosius, and Nulookus and at half that price at Sue Riderus, but don't forget on Wednesday, they have half day closing.....

And then he saw her.

"Ah, yes, she is just as they said, beautiful and sleeping."

He smiled to himself as he heard a quiet snore.

"Gorgeous hair," he observed, "and such a pretty face, a shapely body, and two very desirable PROSSAB's. The Prince had a passion for large PROSSAB's.

All seems to be in the right place," he confirmed as he ticked the checklist in his mind.

Here, dear reader and listener, I feel I must explain about the Prince's problem with words, which is much better than it has been. An explanation for PROSSAB's is needed, it means as follows, pointed, round, outward sticking, squeezable, ample, bumps... PROSSAB's

The Prince has informed me, that he is fully aware of the fact that, more than a handful is a waste.

The question of the day,.....is this an acronym or an initialism?

Please write your answer on the back of a ten grote note and give it to me.

Who let that jester in?

To be serious, we have consulted the greatest educated minds in our historic and magnificent realm of Geronamania, and our most learned and academic pedagogues are unable to find the correct word for such an ism.

However, in the meantime I have consulted with His Royal Highness regarding this quandry. Our esteemed and noble leader has decreed and proclaimed that henceforth such a quandary is to be known as, and here I quote, "His Grand Majesty Prince Geronimo, supreme leader of the entire world and all other worlds ism."

But,... he did add, "as that is quite a mouthful,..... just call it a Ronism, for now."

The Prince continued.

"Now, all I have to do is plant one of my special kissaroonies on her ruby reds, and the future will be history!" he assured himself.

He bent down over her face, the snores got louder, so he placed a finger in each of his ears, and then kissed her. Nothing happened.

"Hmmm? I'll try again," he did, and again, and again, in fact, he lost count of the agains, but all with the same result,..... nothing! And she continued sleeping.

He began to consider the situation, and realised that all this kissing and thinking was tiring him out.

"I think," he pondered rubbing his chin with his thumb and fore finger, "Yes, I'll just lie down beside her for a while to regain my strength and freshness, and then I'll let her have it again later!"

He moved closer to her but she felt cold beside him. Very soon he had slipped into a deep slumber.

What seemed like, just a moment later, she stirred and woke. Sitting up, she turned and saw the stranger beside her. She called loudly for her maid. This woke him and he quickly got to his feet as the maid walked into the room.

"Ah Ha, I am the pransone hince," he declared. Despite lifelong therapy at the Playboy Club, he still had problems with Spoonerisms, but it is getting better!

He continued, "I will kiss you and you will be mine forever."

"What?" She demanded!

"I am Prince Geronimo, and with a kiss I shall claim you as my wife," he repeated.

Then she noticed the bruises on his neck and wondered if they were self-inflicted love bites.

"Your name is Geronimo?" she questioned.

"Yes!" he said proudly.

She chuckled, "Huh! Your parents had a sense of humour then!"

At this moment he could feel himself becoming an ambivert.

Here again, dear reader I think I should interject to explain the word ambivert. Such a person is one who is neither an extrovert or an introvert. It's a word not often used, but it's worth remembering as you never know when it may be useful. It's a particularly handy word, as it will gain you a glorious one hundred and ten points when playing Scrabble.

However, excuse my diversification, we must return to the story.

The Prince took a deep breath, filled his lungs and regained his true height.

"You are mine," he stated.

"Like hell I am," she screamed and grabbed and cuddled her maid.

This confused him. "Oh, what's this?" he said in a loud dramatic voice, as he stepped backwards.

"This is my maid, Angeline, and she is mine. We certainly don't need a pransome hince, I mean a prince, handsome or not. We have each other and any number of interesting mechanical items in the castle dungeon to keep us happy, we don't need a man!" she said emphatically.

A confident grin slowly slipped off of the prince's face, down his doublet, and his left leg, onto the floor. The beauty continued, "Hmmm, I did say we don't need a man but," her eyes scanned his muscular body and the bulge in his skin tight ballet dancer's hose, "We may have something down there in the dungeon to interest you. What are your own personal secret pleasures?" She winked a coy and seductive wink at him, as she said the word pleasures.

A cold shiver shot up and down his backbone. He said

nothing.

She thought for a moment, and asked, "Or perhaps you'd like to meet my sister?"

After a micro second of hesitation, he decided that, as there was no other obvious escape route, this might be a reasonable alternative.

"In fact," she continued, "I have two..... Esmeralda, Griselda" she yelled at the top of her voice.

The door opened and two females walked into the room. He could not believe his eyes. He suddenly felt very sick, and realised the woman in the bed was not..... who he thought she was, but she was someone else, and that's another story.

The cogs in his head were churning into action for the first time in ages.

Sisters, ugly, and her! I bet she must spell her name S I N,... He did not finish his thoughts. His next move became very clear, very quickly. There was a sudden rush of air and cloud of dust and a crunching and splintering of wood as he turned and, at Olympic speed, raced out of the room. Unfortunately, the one thing he didn't do was to open the door first.

Fragments of wood and hinge were 'slow motion floating' in mid-air and others fell hap-hazardly to the floor. The whoosh of air drew the drapes of the bed into a horizontal position, as the door key spun through the air and plopped into an un-emptied chamber pot.

He had whizzed out, and down the stairs, across the drawbridge, and had disappeared into the distant undergrowth in 9.85 seconds, which has now been confirmed as a Guinness,..... Mead World Record.

The last that anyone heard about him was when Bo Peep said that she had seen him, still whizzing, and walking along a yellow brick road with three very oddly shaped, "char-actors." He was asking them if they had ever heard of someone called, Dorothy.

19-11-2010

## Urchins

The two girls sat with their feet in the gutter. They had watched people hurrying and scurrying by all day, as they did the final shopping just three days before Christmas. The fair on the Governor's Green had finished hours ago, and most of the traders had gone.

"Sal, I'm cold," Josie whined, "and I'm hungry."

The smell of human waste and horse dung was making her feel sick.

The flesh on their bones had little resistance to the winter winds.

Sal took off her own coat and draped it around her young sister's shoulders.

"Thanks Sal," said Josie.

The coat had seen better days but Josie felt the warmth of Sal's love through the coat. Now Sal began to shiver and the chill easily penetrated her pale dirty skin.

They could hear the sounds of revelers from the Dolphin hotel across the road. Occasionally people would fall out of the door and stagger away. The evening light was disappearing, but the girls had nowhere to go.

A cruel breeze blew down the street off of the wide harbour and caused fallen leaves to whirl around in a shop doorway. Some of the shops in the street had Christmas decorations in their windows, along with gifts and toys that Sal and Josie could never think of being given.

The hotel door slammed and a Gent in a tall silk hat, and a fine long coat staggered to a halt but swayed back leaning against the door. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and attempted to blow his nose. Sal noticed that, as he did, something fell to the ground. The gent waved his hand in the air and a hansom cab parked on the far corner moved and drew up. The gent got in, and the carriage drove off into the dark swirling misty distance.

Sal got to her feet, and looked over to the hotel entrance, curious about what had been dropped.

“Stay there Josie, I’ll be right back,” she said, and wandered slowly across to the door. A wagon drove by, but she noticed and avoided it with only inches to spare. She looked around the pavement, and then saw a pouch. She picked it up and looked inside. Sal took in a sharp gasp of breath as she saw many gold coins, and then rushed back to show Josie.

“That’s wonderful Sal, is it a miracle from heaven?” she enquired.

“No Josie, That man who got into that cab just now, dropped it, we should give it back. We’ll never find him now, he must be long ways away.”

“What will happen when he gets to where he’s going?” asked Josie

“Yes,” agreed Sal, “I’d love to be there to hear what he says. But I’m sure he’ll have money in his house to pay his fare.” The girls looked at the treasure in the pouch.

“I know,” said Sal, “we’ll take it to John, he’ll know what should be done.”

The girls got to their feet and made their way to John Pound’s shop.

As they walked up to his door, snowflakes were beginning to fall. The door was never locked, they walked in and there was John, in front of a dying fire, asleep, in his favourite chair, with his cat on his lap.

The door slammed behind them and John woke slowly.

They told him the story, and he wondered what was best to do.

“We should keep it until it’s claimed” he said, “or take it to the constables, or,” he thought for a moment. “Well... I don’t know! We should give it back, but who do we give it back to?” “Is it a gift from heaven?” asked Josie.

“No Jo,” said Sal, “We should give it back to that man who dropped it.”

Josie’s smile turned to sadness, “oh dear,” she cried quietly.

"I know," said John, "first thing in the morning, we will go to the butcher, and the green grocer, and the apothecary and buy supplies of all kinds and hand them out to the street urchins to take home so that we all have a merry Christmas, and all thanks to that stranger, the kind Gent."

"Ooooh good," said Josie, "then everyone will have a gift from heaven."

Sal looked at John and they both smiled, and said, "Yes Josie, everyone will get a gift from heaven."

The girls hugged, as John gave them each a slice of bread, and some still warm soup. He put some wood on the fire and sat back in his chair. The cat jumped back onto his lap and snuggled it's nose into the crook of John's elbow. The two girls sat on the floor and warmed themselves as the fire burst back into life.

"Sal," said Josie

"Yes Jo," said Sal

"Was it a gift from the angels?"

"Yes Jo, it was a gift from the angels." 10<sup>th</sup> December 2010

**Disclaimer;-**

**All characters appearing in this story are totally and purely fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead is totally and purely, absolutely, completely, globally and universally coincidental. All names have been changed to protect the innocent, and prevent litigation and my annihilation.**

## *Writers Blocked*

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The Solent Writers Club met on the same morning of each week, at the Village Hall. Individuals would read out their little masterpiece of between six to eight hundred words. Epics that they fully believed would go down in classical literature history.

Felicity was the group leader, confident, in control, unflappable and very upper class

Ted was known to all as 'the old fart,' sat with his hand in his pocket so that he could re-arrange his manhood inside his Teflon trousers, or at least that's what he said he was doing, but nobody believed him.

Lucy, was known to all as Lucy Lastic, and always wore a short skirt and tight jumper, just to rile Ted, and everyone knew, she topped up her income with private arrangements at the back of the Tesco car park.

Ada and Will were the old married couple, who never had a bad word to say about anyone, and who looked like extras from 'Waiting for God.'

Reg Forsythe, everyone called him the Admiral, but he had failed the medical for the navy, and was drummed out of the

Salvation Army.

Arthur was Mr Invisible, but he was always there, read his story, and said nothing else. He smelt of body odour, emulsion paint and motor oil.

Sarah, the voluminous librarian, would chip in now and then with a few polite words, but made little or no impression.

Audrey, who worked four days a week for CAB, came to the club for therapy and to get away from all those horrible people at work.

Anthony was just a little bit 'that way', but he was liked by all, except Ted.

Jim, the rocker, smoked like a chimney, swore like a trooper, and sniffed continually.

So there you have it, a merry bunch of misfits and weirdos.

Felicity began, "I thought what we would do today, is start a new project, one that we can all get involved with, as a group. We are each going to write a chapter of a story. Perhaps Lucy can start and write the first one, and then she can give it to Ted."

Ted smiled and said, "I should be so lucky!"

She continued, "and then to Ada and Will, and..."

"Me next, me next," said Anthony as he wriggled about on his seat.

"OK, then Anthony."

"Oooh goody goody," said Anthony. He was always way over the top, and everybody knew that was his favourite position.

Ada pushed a Nutall's Minto wrapper off the table onto the floor and left it there.

"So each one of you will write a part of it and I will add the final bit, to finish it off."

"What shall we write about," asked Jim, "let's write a story

about a brothel.”

“No,” interjected Felicity, “we are going to write a detective story. Someone gets murdered and we each have to build the story until I get it in the end,…”

“Oh yeah?????” said Ted, “It’s always you that gets it! Ain’t it?” She continued, “and I will solve the mystery of who killed who, and why, and what for.”

“I don’t like that idea,” said Arthur, as he dropped a coffee mug onto the table, spilling a little.

“Let’s write one about killing the Hun! Yea! Let’s give it to the Hun!” said Reg as he eased his chair back, scraping the floor.

“No it’s going to be a detective story,” Felicity said, firmly.

Jim sniffed, coughed and tried to spit into his hankie, but he missed and it fell to the floor.

Discussion followed which soon became argument, and very quickly got louder and louder.

People were shouting and standing and waving their arms to demonstrate their point of view.

“Now sit down, people, and be nice! If you’re nice to the world then the world will be nice to you!” Felicity’s words of wisdom were lost to all as Reg jostled with Will.

“Ere, don’t you ‘urt my little Willie, you great big bully!” remonstrated Ada.

“No! Come along people, settle down,” pleaded Felicity, but again her words went un-headed.

In the midst of the chaos, Ted suddenly lunged across and grabbed Lucy’s breast. In retaliation, she lashed out slapping him so hard across his face that the moulded seat he was sitting on, snapped from its frame. He recoiled in a backward somersault and crashed to the floor like a limp rag doll.

All resemblance of order had dis-integrated, as a coffee mug flew through the air and hit Jim. The language from his mouth was truly from the gutter.

Chairs were kicked over and more mugs were thrown, one breaking a window. Cold coffee was sprayed across the table tops. Quite without reason, or prior indication, Arthur leapt, like an Olympic athlete, onto Jim and began throttling him, as

chocolate biscuit wrappers floated in the air and fell to the floor like wrinkled leaves in autumn cast from a tree by the wind.

Even the kids in the cupboard were screaming and fighting. There was total uproar, but Felicity sat, and clasping her hands, she quietly said, "Come on now, settle down," and was yet again, totally ignored by all.

Sarah sat quietly and said nothing.

At that very moment, and oblivious to all, the doors of the room were slammed open wide and automatic gunfire sprayed, ripped and flashed continually around the room. The noise was un-bearable, the smoke was suffocating, the



screams were ear shattering, and the yelling was heart breaking. Splinters of wood cascaded through the air, and slithers of glass and china mug filled the room and fell to the floor. Bodies slumped forward, fell from their chairs and sprawled across the floor. Blood oozed and squirted out of bodies onto the shiny laminate.

Every single member of the Solent Writers Club lay dead and completely lifeless.

Behind the Kalashnikov AK47 automatic repeating rifle, there stood a 67 year old woman. Over her cleaner's tabard, she wore a khaki vest and camouflage trousers, a head band and leather waistcoat with a bandelero full of bullets strapped across her chest. Sweat rolled down her face and neck onto her bandana and two lines of black grease marked each cheek. She had a bingo pen lodged behind her left ear and her grey hair had just a hint of a purple rinse remaining. Within minutes, the smoke had cleared and silence reigned. Peace and tranquillity had returned to the room.

She stood there, rigid and defiant and fulfilled!

And Rambolina uttered the words

"There! That'll teach you dirty, filthy, lousy bastards to mess up my hall!"            12-8-11

## An Old Christmas

"Come along now children. Dinner is ready. Sit yourselves up to the table."

The children did as they were told, eventually.

There was excitement as they were about to have a Christmas dinner, like none they'd ever eaten before.

Mother carried the sizzling turkey into the room and placed it on the table in front of Cratchitt. He undid several buttons on his waistcoat in anticipation.

"Oh, mother that looks so good," he said.

"Let's hope it tastes good too," she smiled at him.

"I'm sure it will," he replied.

Tim stood up and said, "God Bless Us, ----Every One!" and sat down again.

Father ignored him and picked up the carving knife. "My employer has truly done us proud. Now, it's ladies first," he turned to his daughter,

"Martha, hold out your plate, and I will carve you a succulent slice of this fine bird."

He placed the blade on the flesh of the turkey and began carving, but the skin on the body did not submit to his intentions.

He examined the blade's edge with his index finger and found it was very sharp. He then tried again, and with some persuasion, slices were prised from the carcass and the first plate was filled.

"There, now you all have a whole potato each," said father as he carved, "and a half of turnip as well, and the cabbage came out of our own garden!"

"Is it really cabbage, daddy?" asked Martha.

He looked at Mrs. Cratchitt, who could see he was about to compound the lie.

"Oh yes," said Cratchitt, "Now you eat every piece of food on your plate."

Slices of meat were added to another plate, and then Cratchitt's knife hit something hard. He tried again and eventually the obstacle gave way.

"What can it be?" said dad aloud.

"Perhaps it's a new baby inside there?" Said Tim, "After all, Christmas is the time of year for new babies."

"I hope not," Said mum, "We've got enough mouths to feed as it is!"

Tim stood up and said, "God Bless Us, ----Every One!"

"Sit down Tim!" instructed his mother.

Dad reached into the bird's body with his fingers and pulled out what appeared to be a bundle of sacking. Further exploration revealed odd pieces of meat inside it.

"Oh!" Said Mother, "It's the giblets"

"What's giblets?" asked Martha.

"The butcher has included all of the innards of the bird, you know the heart, and intestines and so on. That's good!" mother enthused.

"Oh, Right then." said a confused Cratchitt, "I'll leave them on this plate, and you can throw them out after dinner"

"No! No!" interjected mother, "no, we can use them. What's left of the turkey, we have cold tomorrow, then I will make stew with the turkey bones and the giblets, which will last for several days. And then Soup, for the rest of the week."

"That is wonderful, Mrs. Cratchitt, you are truly a good housewife!"

"And mother too! Don't forget mother!" she added strongly.

"Absolutely so, my dear Mrs Cratchitt!" he swiftly confirmed.

Mother took the small sack and it's contents away and Cratchitt continued carving and serving the turkey.

Carol singers could be heard in a distant street. The meal was almost eaten when Martha asked, "Is there any Christmas pudding, Mum?"

The question took her parents by surprise.

"Oh, now that's something we didn't think of, and nor did your esteemed employer, Mr. Scrooge," said mother.

"Now, now, mother, don't be mean to Mr. Scrooge, after all, he did send us the wonderful turkey."

"Yes, you are right!" she had to admit, "How about if you each have a piece of bread, with some gooseberry jam on it?"

The children again became excited at the thought.

Tim stood up and said, "God Bless Us, ---- Every One!!, truly Christmas is a wonderful time for all mankind."

"OK now, clear your plates and I will bring the pudding" said mum, and she disappeared into the scullery.

Soon after they had eaten, mother spoke.

"It's a shame you esteemed employer didn't think to send us something to wash this turkey down!"

"Now, now, mother, we mustn't be unkind to the kind gentlemen who provided our Christmas meal! Remember, at Christmas time, its good will to all men!"

"And women too!" she added.

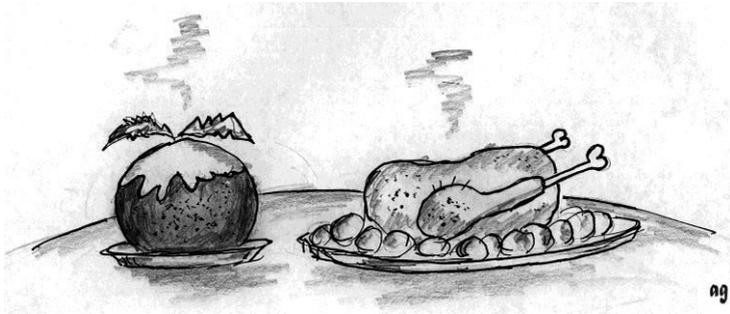
Cratchitt, sat thinking, and then spoke, "Mother give Martha the stone tankard from under the scullery sink, and Martha, go down to the Bottle and Jug at the Red Lion, and bring it back, full of ale. Here's tuppence, that should be enough, and don't forget to bring me back some change too!"

Martha took the tankard and went on her mission.

She returned ten minutes later, with tears streaming down her face and her clothes sopping wet.

"My dear child, what on earth has happened," asked Cratchitt.

"Those boys," she mumbled, "They pushed me, tried to grab the tankard, and I spilt it, then dropped it." She fell sobbing to the floor."



Mother lifted her up and consoled her with a hug.

Cratchitt, thinking quickly, " Oh dear, oh dear, what shall we do now? I know, Mother can you make some mint tea? Do we have any mint left in our larder?"

"I think so, Mr. Cratchitt."

In time the whole family were sat sipping mother's mint tea.

"Martha," said Cratchitt, "put that last piece of wood on the fire, let's end our Christmas day with a little more heat."

She did as she was told.

Mother sat on the small stool by the hearth, and watched as the kettle on the hob simmered. Cratchitt reclined in a creaking wooden chair picking his teeth with his finger nail, for food remains, and reading the newspaper that the turkey had been delivered in. Martha sat sewing the sampler she had been sewing for several years.

Tim stood up and said, "God Bless Us, ---- Everyone!!!"

The rest of the family looked at him and, in chorus and in unison, said,

"Sit down Tiny Tim, and shut up!"

2011

## Lovedean

The girls felt as though they had walked for ages, but it was only half an hour.

"I think we'll try one more house, and then, it's getting dark and I'm getting cold, we'd best be going home" said Sally. They looked into the shopping bag at the treasures they had acquired, an Aero bar, some Spangles, Polo mints, Blackjacks, a Fry's Five Boys Chocolate bar, a sherbert fountain, three sugar mice, and many other items. Sally had already decided which were hers, but she hadn't told Rosie. They walked on until they stood at a gate, and looked in at a house.

"This is that house, isn't it Sal?"

"Yes it is!"

"The house where those witches live."

"No, they're not witches."

"But those two old women live here, everyone says they're witches."

"No Rosie, there's no such thing as witches."

Rosie was hurt, and disappointed.

Sal pushed the gate open and it screamed, a fingernails down the blackboard squeal.

Slowly they walked up to the front door and waited.

"Well, go on then," said Rosie as she nudged her.

Sal swallowed hard and then rattled the knocker.

It was loud, "Shhhh not so loud" said Rosie

"It's got to be loud or they won't hear us!"

They giggled.

As they waited, they looked around at the overgrown front

garden, and the overhanging trees.

"Try again!" instructed Rosie in a whisper.

"Wait a minute, there's a light on, there must be someone in there."

Several minutes later Sal knocked again, and again nobody came to answer them.

"Right then," said Sal, "if there's no treat, then there has to be a trick."

Without speaking, they looked around and started picking up sticks and small branches, and placed them on the step by the door.

"We need more," said Sally. Again they searched and found more.

From the shopping bag, she pulled a paper wrapper and tore it into small pieces and then threaded them into the pile of sticks. Soon a large bonfire was ready for ignition.

Out of nowhere, Sally produced a box of matches.

"Where did you get those?" asked Rosie, but Sally just smiled at her. She knelt down, struck a match and tried to start the fire. Flames flickered into life but soon they died leaving only glowing embers.

"Quick Rosie, blow on it, and make it flame again."

Their efforts were in vain.

"Right then, we must hold hands and concentrate. Think very hard and make the fire burn!"

They held hands and closed their eyes. Sal looked at the fire, but there was still no action.

"Come on Rosie, think harder, we must make the fire burn!"

Suddenly, flames burst from the bundle of sticks. The breeze caught them and the flames grew higher. Very soon, the paint began to bubble and fizz as the flames roared up the face of the door.

The girls stood back, smiled and watched silently. A small smoky cloud of mist appeared from the heart of the flames and momentarily, hovered over the girls. It gradually, descended and enveloped them, and then entered their young, vulnerable bodies. Instantly, they both burst into howls of evil spine chilling laughter that echoed and reverberated down every lane and alleyway in Lovedean.

The fire reflected on their reddened cheeks and the flames sparkled in their young demon eyes. They turned and slowly walked away. At the gate they looked back to watch, as the entire front of the house seemed to be alight.

They made their way home, giggling and laughing and sharing the spoils of the treats in their bag.

Any evening as dusk falls on Lovedean Lane, the girl's giggles and laughter can still be heard rattling into the chilled night air.

The burnt out building and garden stood derelict for many years. People would pass by without a thought of who had lived there, or what had happened.

After more years, the whole plot was bought by the local community and then, several years after that, on that very same piece of land, they erected the village hall.

Some people say that all the local witches still meet there from time to time and their weird and eerie incantations are chanted by each of them in turn in strange, un-earthly voices. Their laughter and cackling resounds around the helpless neighbourhood.

It seems that all the witches love the village of Lovedean.

2011

## The Traveller

I had business reasons to travel to a southern city, but when I got to the hotel, there was a note saying the people I had to see on the first day, would not be available. This gave me the whole day to amuse myself. I decided to look around this city, but I didn't want to travel to usual tourist venues. I thought I might venture out into the urban areas and see how the 'ordinary people' live.

So I left HMS Victory and the D Day museum behind and drove to an area they called Cos-ham, or is it Cosh-um. Now there we have our first conundrum. Just about 15 miles along the south coast road is a town called Bosh-um, but some of the classier residents call it Bos – ham, or even Bossom, but never bosom. So we are none the wiser. I thought I might ask one of the locals, if they were friendly.

The main road through Cos-ham runs north to South, and is imaginatively called High Street. The road actually runs uphill, so technically, one end is high, and the other end is low. At the southern end are the railway gates and station, a little down trodden, but busy in the rush hour. It's best to ignore the beggars. Strangely, next door is the job centre. Maybe they are are hoping for an input of aliens from the next express.

A little further north is what looks like a bomb site, but no, it's where the Railway Hotel once stood and is now reduced to rubble. Let me hasten to add, this is not as a result of a very merry Saturday night in the pub. It has recently been demolished, intentionally. To add further to the confusion, directly across the road is another demolition site that was once a cinema. The last silver screen image of a forgotten matinee idol and film goddess from a bygone age has long since 'left the building.'

Next, there is a row of independent shops, nestled amongst them are the obligatory half dozen or so charity shops, where items can be donated free and sold at ridiculous prices in the name of some unknown fifth or sixth world need.

A few more steps and there are a number of well-known High Street banks, fortunately, cuddled close to the charity shops. It is common knowledge that banks need our charity at regular intervals.

Half way up the Street is the cross road. On the East side is Albert Road leading to the care home and the masonic hall. Of course visitors can be excused for mistaking one for the other.

On the opposite side is Wayte Street, on the corner of which we find the White Swan pub. It's not a good idea to linger too long outside, as often, drunken bodies are hurtled from the building into the street. Conveniently situated a few doors down is the police station, which in turn is opposite the fire station. This, again, is very useful just in case any of the locals decide to torch the police station.

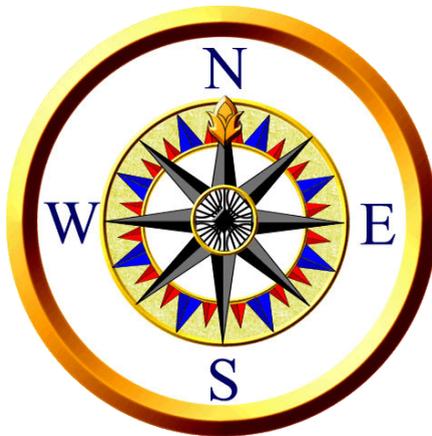
Also we find the Cos-ham Social Club, which at one time was called the Trades and Labour Club. It would appear there are no trades or labour in Cos-ham anymore.

Continuing up the High Street's top half, we find it has become a pedestrian precinct. One must not relax here, as there must be a nest of mobility scooters hidden along in a dark alley, and they continually buzz back a forth. If you don't keep your eyes open, they have a nasty bite. More charity shops and banks, and now we have the 21st century obligatory pound shop. No street is complete without one,... or two,..... or three.

The one overpowering memory of the area is the undulating pavements, purposely designed to trip visitors. I hope there's a European law against it, if not, maybe there should be.

At the very top, is the only other hostelry that Cos-ham, or is it Cosh - um, can boast. The Red Lion, stands proud and strong and offers Sky TV to all patrons. The road continues under a different name, and there in the distance we see the hospital, where the dying and wounded, the alcoholic and drug addict, the mugged and the geriatric are brought to, in a time of need. Babies are also born there occasionally, which gives us some hope for the future.

Here my little venture to the suburbs of this fine City must end, or at least it should have done. I have just realised that my car has been clamped and I must now visit the car pound to retrieve it, after I have paid the exorbitant ransom. I never did get to check with a resident about the pronunciation of the name of the town, and what I thought was a sleepy old part of this historic City has turned out to be an unforgettable adventure, and now perhaps I wish I'd stayed home.  
2/9/11



## Nine minutes of fame



Ryan was a good footballer. As a nine year old lad at school, he was spotted by a scout from the local League club, and after a short trial, was signed to the club. He played for his school team, and towards the end of his schooldays, trained more and more with the club. He had signed schoolboy forms and featured

in the club's under15 and under18 teams as the years passed. He had just become 17 and had played many times in the reserve team, but today he was picked as substitute for a league game for the first time.

He was elated, his parents were so proud, and his whole family were pleased that he had done so well.

He sat on the bench with the other reserves as the game started. At half time the score was 0-0, neither team could gain the advantage on the other. After ten minutes into the second half, the manager turned to look at the trainer, nodded and smiled, then turned to Ryan, "Warm up lad" and before he had said the last word, Ryan was on the running track, stretching and loosening, knowing and hoping he would be substituted soon. The opposition striker was beginning to have an effect and several attacks went very close, but still no score. "Right lad, you're on!" said the manager, and Ryan ran on to the pitch after shaking hands with the player he replaced. Fortunately it was a case of defender replacing defender. Five minutes later he felt thoroughly warmed up and ready for anything.

Their striker was now playing too well. There were several passes in front of Ryan which then brought the striker in front of him.

Ryan was determined to rob the striker of the ball and he made his play. It was over in a split second. Ryan lunged forward heavily, but the wily older player had passed the ball early, and it was yards away by the time Ryan's boot studs ripped into the flesh of the striker's knee. He fell to the ground and rolled screaming in agony. Trainers were called on and Ryan got to his feet and realised that he himself was uninjured. As he looked down at the injured man, he knew he had gone in too hard and fully expect a card, and with a yellow card, he knew he would have to go carefully for the rest of the game.

The referee made sure the striker was dealt with, and several minutes later he hobbled off of the pitch. The ref turned and walked to Ryan. "That was a bit too much, son," he said as he fumbled in his back pocket and pulled out a card, it was red. Ryan was instantly deflated and feeling very sick. He didn't even think of arguing. He turned and walked off of the pitch. There were jeers and cheers from the crowd. One of his team mates slapped him on the back as he passed in consolation.

The manager said nothing as he passed and walked straight in through the player's tunnel to the dressing room. Ryan never again played for the first team, although he did have three games in the reserves later that season. His contract was not renewed and he sometimes played for a local non-league team, but his heart was no longer in it. The dream he had as a boy of fame and fortune was gone. For the rest of his working life he worked for a double glazing company, and eventually bought the firm. He married and they had children, and he ended his days, having retired to a property in Sussex. Someone once said that everyone is entitled to fifteen minutes of fame, Ryan had nine.

May 2012

## The fox

That fox was a nuisance. It came into my garden most nights and dug holes in my beautiful lawn whenever it felt like it. I know it's only looking for food, but it's my lawn and I like *my lawn* as it is, without holes. There's nothing more pleasing than to see Mr Blackbird scooting across my new mown lawn on a nice, happy sunny day. He's looking for food too, but he doesn't do my beautiful lawn any damage.

I had previously gone to the trouble of phoning my council office help line, and the stupid man there said that foxes are now considered to be domestic animals as they occupy the urban areas, and they cannot be taken back to the countryside.

So I asked him, "You say they are domestic animals? You mean like a dog?"

"Yes," he said.

"So I suppose the council will be decreeing that all foxes have to be licensed now, is that it?" I demanded.

He didn't answer and I slammed the phone down.

I decided to take the matter into my own hands. I scanned the internet and found the answer.

I bought a catapult.

Then, I found a supply of good size stones, and waited for him. For several days the damn creature did not show its muzzle in my garden. Do foxes have ESP or something, did it know I was waiting for it? That only served to annoy me even more.

Then, last night at about 8 o'clock, just as the dusk was creeping over the neighbourhood, he popped over the fence into my garden, and started his usual sniffing around the lawn, *my lawn*. I opened my window as quietly as I could but it creaked as I opened it. He turned and looked at me, staring defiantly. He was about 14 yards from me, and for that

moment I didn't move, then quietly and slowly I slipped a stone into the catapult sling.

I pulled it back as far as I could, aimed, and then let it go. The stone twisted and spun as it travelled silently through the thin evening air, and hit the fox squarely between its eyes.

I was amazed at how accurate I had been. I had done some practising with it, but I always seemed to miss the target. The fox staggered and fell to its front knees, and then crumpled to the ground in a warm, motionless heap of meat. I hurried out into the garden and looked down at the fox. It never moved again. I didn't mean to kill it, that was the last thing I wanted, damn it! I just wanted it to keep out of my garden, off of my lawn. So now I still have a problem, and that is how to dispose of the body of a dead fox. I am at a complete loss, and now feeling very remorseful that I had taken its life. But, on the plus side, it has given me a title for my next book, "Ten interesting things to do with a dead fox!"

Only then did I hear the yelping of its cubs.

April 2012

## The grapes of Health

I told him it was flu, but he smiled and said it was probably, man flu!

I sneezed, and he still didn't believe me. As I was feeling like death warmed up, he had offered to get me supplies from the supermarket, and I was very grateful. I tried to remember some of the things I usually get, but just for the sake of it their names were avoiding me. He scribbled down a few things onto a slip of paper and then disappeared. 50 minutes later, he returned with two hands full of bulging plastic bags. He stood at my front door and held them at arms-length, and said 15 quid should cover it. I looked into the first bag.

"I didn't ask for grapes," I said, but he just smiled and added with a grin. "You always get grapes for the infirmed, and incontinent and those who are not completely with it." I gave a quizzical look, smiled and thanked him.

Several days later my germs had vacated my system, and the grapes too, had vanished, *into* my system.

I don't quite know what it was but the taste of those grapes gave me a longing, so now every time I go to the supermarket I always buy a small bag of white seedless grapes and consume some after each evening meal. The flu has never returned to this day, perhaps there was something in the grapes that did that? Who knows? Perhaps the warm sun in some distant sandy vineyard had percolated into me and chased out all the nasty bugs. Maybe the hands of some pure young French maiden, with a skin, lightly bronzed from the sweet breeze from the azure sea, wearing a loose fitting pastel coloured shift dress, and shoeless, had lovingly plucked each bunch from the vine, and carefully placed them into a wooden crate and sent them with her Mediterranean love in a 42 ton truck all the way to soothe my troubled respiratory system. Maybe the warmth of the sun and her undying love has entered my body through my toes and is gradually creeping up my legs and will then circulate around

my welcoming torso, or maybe I have got my feet too near the gas fire.

Maybe she'll be there smiling at me as I pass through the checkout cash desk at the supermarket, or maybe it will be that same woman who never smiles and always says, "If it ain't on the shelves, we ain't got any!"

Maybe I'll go back and get some of the white wine they are selling for 99p a bottle. If I drink enough of it, I'm sure I could imagine myself on some hot beach with a host of hot beach babes. Or maybe, maybe I've gone off the taste of those grapes after all? I'm feeling hot again, my forehead is a bit warm, and my pulse? I can't find it. Think I need a holiday, could I be the first male Shirley Valentine, without changing sex? No, I'd probably end up in Southend on Sea anyway. I think I'll go back to bed.

2012

## The Lady Who Ate Rudolph

She had never been to Helsinki before, but her son and his son had lived there for some years, so it was nice to catch up with them again. They knew the best places to go and the best and cheapest places to eat. Of course the very cheapest was to eat at home, which they did most of the time. On this day the boys had decided to take Sally out for a slap-up meal at one of the better restaurants in the city.

They sat and the boys ordered the meals. She noticed that the windows were triple glazed, and that there were double doors everywhere. It was 10 degrees below outside, but the inside was very warm. Sally was hungry and was enjoying the meal but she asked, "What meat is this? It is very nice."

"It's reindeer." said one of the boys. Sally suddenly felt very unhappy, her tummy began to hurt. "Oh no, It's not is it?" The waiter standing nearby overheard her and added, "Yes, it's Rudolph!" He smiled at the boys and nodded in affirmation to Sally. She put her knife and fork down on the plate and didn't eat any more. The next few days soon passed and Sally found it difficult to enjoy the time. Several days later, she got back to her own home late in the evening, and went straight to bed.

In the morning, when looking in the bathroom mirror, she noticed that her nose was quite pink, and small bumps had appeared on each side of her head. Two days and the pink nose had turned red, and the bumps were now small stick like protrusions. Her toes had begun to crunch up. Soon she found walking difficult but walking on all fours seemed quite natural and much easier. She decided to visit her doctor. "Hello doctor," she said, "I wasn't quite sure whether or not to come and see you, or go to a vet. You see I have a problem." The doctor glanced at her, and then circled around her,

"I hope you are going to clean that mess up before you leave," he said.

"Oh yes of course," she said.

The doctor turned and referred to a large book on his desk, and then looked at Sally.

"Yes, you seem to have a very nasty problem there! What you will have to do to correct it, is to go down into the New Forest, and find the tallest fir tree that you can, climb to the very top and hold on to the very highest branch and not let go, then you have to sing three verses of Jingle Bell Rock."

Sally looked at him in disbelief.

"Really?" she queried.

The doctor assured her with a nod.

Sally was uncertain, "and that will cure me?" She asked.

"If it doesn't you come back and see me again, and we'll try something else."

"Right, OK," she said slowly and deliberately. Sally stood, and shovelled up the mess and slid it into his waste bin. He didn't notice as he was playing with his computer.

That same day, she headed for the vast open plains of the New Forest, and that was the trouble, the vast open plains! Where would she find a fir tree? She did manage to find a tree and did as she was told. She sang four verses, which was more than was needed, but she wanted to be sure, and as she slid down the tree she was covered in fir needles.

The next morning, she woke and grabbed a small hand mirror. Her nose was normal again, her antlers had disappeared. She jumped out of bed and saw that her feet were human again. She jumped back into her warm bed, smiling. "Oh, this National Health Service is wonderful!" Then she thought she could hear a voice, she listened carefully, but all she could hear was someone laughing, "Ho! Ho! Ho!"

July 2012, for Joan.



## Where The Frying Pan Lives

It had been a busy day, but Sylvia had managed to leave work early and get home before dark. There were a few household chores to deal with, then a shower and change of clothes. Next, was a bite to eat and then to settled down quietly and comfortably in front of the TV. She hoped there would be something worth watching, but knew she also had some shows recorded as stand by. True to form most of the programmes were either repeats, and of no real interest. Regardless, she watched a few of the news headlines.

Her cat curled up on the hearth rug, turned its head and saw what it thought was a more comfortable place to sleep. Almost instantly, it was clawing her lap and settling down to sleep again.

After a while, she decided to play the latest recorded edition of Downton Abbey and then go to bed. The titles started and she was captured into the long gone world of the great house and its inhabitants. She was completely taken in by the characters and the story, and even imagined herself there with them, and was enjoying every moment of the well written story.

The front door slammed shut, "Hi mum!" Sylvia was abruptly startled back into the 21st century, and stood up quickly. The Radio Times fell to the floor and the cat was projected off her knee, somersaulting across the top of the coffee table.

It slid along knocking a bowl of fruit, spinning away into outer space. The cat's legs were a haze of rotary motion in a furry ball of confusion.

It slipped over the end, and down to the floor like a wet towel. As soon as it righted itself, it raced off scowling into the kitchen, to hide.

Her son was standing at the foot of the stairs. "What are you doing here? Why aren't you at Uni?" she quizzed. "Oh mum, I've dropped out!" he said blankly.

"What?" she shrieked aloud and then took a deep breath, "How stupid is that, so tell me why?"  
He looked at her sheepishly, "Nah, I'll tell you in the morning, I'm going to bed!"

Sylvia was left speechless and confused. Why had her misguided son given up a place at University and the chance of a good career?

He said no more, turned and went upstairs. Sylvia sat back down in the lounge, but her TV programme had continued regardless.

Then John stuck his head into the room, "Mum, can I have some dinner?"

"What? No, it's gone 10 o'clock, I'm not cooking at this hour."

"Oh go on mum, I'm starved!" he begged.

"OK I'll, ... I'll make you a sandwich." she conceded.

"No mum, Can I have a fry up? You know, bacon, eggs beans and the rest, you know."

"And YOU know where the frying pan lives!" she said in a loud dictatorial voice. There were a few moments before anyone spoke. He looked at her, and she began to melt.

She tutted loudly, and added with a growl, "Oh very well."

Sylvia turned the TV off and rushed into the kitchen, and the cat scampered out.

John disappeared back upstairs.

Sylvia took a tray of food and a mug of tea up to his room. As she passed the bathroom, the usual calming aroma of Yardley's Primrose Summer that filtered through the house, was replaced by a vile odour. He was already in bed, sitting up and waiting. She gave him the tray and turned to leave.

"Mum, can you wash those for me?"

He pointed to a large bulging plastic bag on the floor.

"I'll see if I can find time tomorrow!" she surrendered.

As she left he said, "Thanks ma!"

The evening had not ended in the peaceful way Sylvia had intended. She decided she would need some of her sleeping

tablets. In the kitchen, she guzzled down two pills very quickly.

The next morning, she woke up unrested, but quickly washed and dressed, made some tea and had a piece of toast. The morning was already planned. From 9am until 12 noon, she would sit down and type the final chapter of her novel. It's was her greatest thrill to write stories and she was certain this one would be quickly snapped up by some very lucky publisher. She switched the laptop on and found the last page. Sylvia made herself comfortable and began to dream the next few paragraphs.

"Mum!" John was yelling at the top of his voice from the bedroom.

"Oh no, thats just what I didn't want!" she groaned. Sylvia pushed her chair away and it fell over backwards. She hurried to the foot of the stairs. "What?" she demanded.

"Can I have some tea?"

"You stay right there, I'll bring it up!" she said sarcastically.

"And some toast?? I can smell you've been making some."

"Yes. OK, and some toast!" she repeated his order.

Sylvia thickly buttered a door step of bread and then as the kettle boiled again, she filled a mug, and placed them onto a tray. But then she stopped. She was motionless for a few seconds. A very evil thought eased its way through her head and then her eyes dropped down to the worktop and the small bottle of pills.

She had always been a sound sleeper, but in her son's teenage years, she needed something extra to relax her at the end of the stressful days. When he was accepted for the University, she had no further need for the pills, but had never got round to disposing of them.

She heard a voice in her head say, 'Go on, do it!' and then another voice saying, 'No you must not!' She wondered could she? Would she?

But most of all, should she?

Sylvia began biting her top lip and without another thought, picked up the bottle, unscrewed the top and emptied two

tablets into the palm of her hand, and then slid them silently into the mug on the tray.

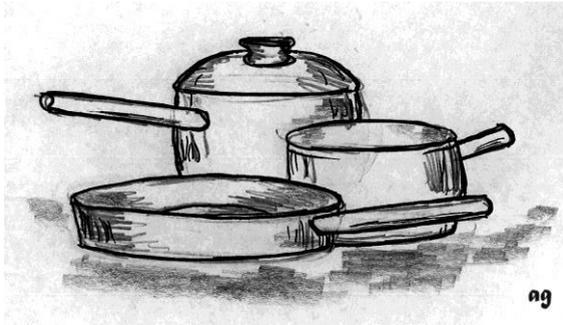
She was about to take the food up, but stopped and took another tablet from the bottle and it joined its family in the mug.

John, took the tray and grabbed the tea. He emptied it in almost one swallow and handed the mug back to his mother as he chewed off a chunk of the toast. "Can I have some more tea, please mum?"

"Oh," his mother said in surprise, "Well as you said please, how can I refuse?"

She turned to leave, "And mum, can you take the bag with you?" There was a silence, then he added, "Please?"

She grabbed the bag, which was heavier than expected, and then hurried back down stairs.



Sylvia stood in the kitchen, looking out the window at the garden. She could hear birds twittering. The sun began to shine and the day seemed to brighten up. Peace seemed to settle on the neighbourhood, and in the house, once again. Sylvia sat at her laptop and continued with the final chapter. Two hours later she had finished. She saved her work and turned off the laptop, deciding to leave it for a few days before re-reading it. There was only one thing left to do. Sylvia sat down in her comfortable chair with a cup of coffee and

watched Downton Abbey.  
15/2/2013

## The new television

Hello, is that Mr. Sky, oops sorry, no, I mean, is that Sky?  
Oh good.

This is Mrs. Luscombe, Edith, oh yes it's 27 Victoria Road, just across the road from the Co-op, next to the chemist you know.

Your nice young man came this morning and brought my new television. It's very nice, such pretty colours too.

No, No everything is fine, but, I'm watching it now. There are lots of people running around on a lawn and kicking a little white something or other. Oh, it's a ball, a football, ah yes. So they are doing football? Ah yes, playing football.

Well, I can hear this man talking and saying names as each person gets their turn to kick the, whatsit, yes football. At the same time there's lots of people watching, and they are all shouting and making a lot of noise. I have to make the TV louder to hear what the man is saying, but my neighbour keeps banging my wall, saying that it's too loud. So, I was wondering, is it possible you could ask those people watching not to shout quite so loud? Oh that's very kind of you, thank you. Hello, are you there?

Oh good you're still with me then.

And there was one other thing, those people running around and kicking their footballs. When they fall to the lawn, the what? Oh, the pitch, when they fall on their pitch, they sometimes dig holes in the lawn with their big shoes, I mean the pitch, with their big shoes, oh right, their boots, foot-ball-boots, yes I see. Well I just thought I'd mention it but I'm sure the gardener will be very unhappy when he sees that.

Perhaps you could suggest to them that they should be a little more careful when they fall and lay on the the..... pitch. They seem to be digging their big feet into the grass as they fall.

And there was one other thing, several of them have a very bad habit, it's really very dirty, and not at all nice at all. Could

you ask them to stop doing it? yes! They're spitting onto the pitch, there you see, I got it right that time.

And there was just one more thing, hello? Are you are still there?

When they get their little white ball into that big net, was it a fishing net? Oh it's a goal-net, yes of course. I should have known that. Oh they score a goal when they get the ball in the net, Ah right, I've got it now. Well when they score a goal, they kiss each other and then go sliding over the pitch in all that spit. Now that can't be very hygienic, can it? Lots of germs on that pitch you know. They will need to wash properly when they finish their football. You will tell them won't you? Oh thank you, you are very kind. Password? No, I don't have a password, do I? Not any more, I had one during the war, but I've forgotten it now. Sorry I didn't get your name, Hello, hello are you there, oh he's gone, he seemed like a very nice young man.

2012

## Early Morning

I woke up suddenly, and realised my neck was hurting. I must have slept awkwardly, and so I tried stretching and rotating it and it helped a little. I felt cold and it took me several minutes to realise that the bed clothes had slipped off of me during the night. Yesterday, being so warm, I had left my window open, but overnight, the temperature must have dropped. I eased myself up and sat on the edge of the bed. It was difficult to focus my eyes at first, and I tried to rub away the night.

I stood up intending to close the window, but as I got there I stubbed my big toe on the skirting board, and that certainly woke me up. I looked out of the open window and took in the sweet smells of a new morning. It was just light and a strange, seductive earthy perfume from mother earth hit my nostrils. I leaned further out and took a deep breath, it was heavenly.

I have a large garden, mainly lawn, and as the house is at the corner of our Close, there are a number of other gardens backing onto mine.

Directly behind is the brown tin house. There's an elderly lady living there who once told me that her name was Betty and that she used to work with my mother, at the old Canda factory. She's always tending the plants in her garden, which, in the summer, really looks a chocolate box cover picture.

Next to her house, there's a young couple and a small lad, living in a house that always seems to be having work done on it. Their garden has palm trees and just about everything else in it that you can think of, and it reminds me of South Fork.

Next to that is the old house that hasn't been touched for years, or so it appears. A new family have recently moved in there, and the guy has been cutting back brambles and overgrown bushes and shrubs, and seems to be clearing the garden totally. I wonder what plans he has for it? I have

noticed often that the whole family of 8 or 10 often sit out at the cleared end, around a garden table eating, drinking and chatting into the dusk, just like families used to do. That Idea will never catch on again.

On the far side to the right of Betty, is another overgrown garden. It has two very large trees that dominate the row of tin houses.

To be honest, they are now much too big for the garden and dwarf the house, and really need a hefty cut back or even removal. I expect by now they have a preservation order on them, and no doubt they will be there long after I have gone. Their house has had the outside cladded, which I presume and hope must make them great savings on heating. I listen to a few birds chirping. It's not exactly a dawn chorus,



more a dawn duet. There's a family of squirrels living around here somewhere, probably up in one of those giant trees. They are always scooting about looking for food, and trying to

keep clear of the foxes, that also reside in the neighbourhood, but this morning, there's none in sight.

Blue sky was endeavouring to squeeze through the high layer of cloud, and winning.

Shafts of bright sunlight began to beam across my lawn highlighting the sparkling drops of early morning dew. There was very little sound and the vista before my eyes was a sight to behold. The greens, yellows and browns of the shrubbery and lawns, the variety of shapes of the sheds, greenhouses and fences and the manmade outlines of the windows, doors and houses.

I take a few more lungs full of the air of the new day, and wonder, who put this beautiful sight in front of me. The lady opposite walks into her garden and starts to inspect her plants.

A distant church bell starts to chime.

So, what will I do with this day? A wash, get dressed and some breakfast. That's my usual routine, and maybe this morning I won't switch my television on. It's normally oozing bad news, so perhaps today will be a quiet day?

And maybe, I just might, sit down, and write something.

3/8/2012

## Last Man Standing

John's car ground to a halt in the empty car park of the pub. The place appeared to be deserted. He looked around for any signs of life but there were none.

He stepped out of the car and took the final drag on his cigarette, dropped it and squashed it with his foot.

John noticed the hall along-side the pub, was boarded up. There was a padlock on the door, and several slates missing from the roof. He thought for a moment, and remembered many happy hours spent in there, now so many years ago. "What a shame," he thought, "Didn't we have some good nights in there. They ought to have put a blue plaque on that wall: 'Ricky Raven and the Rock-a-teens began life here in 1961,' but no, I expect they have all forgotten us by now."

The letter 'B' in the pub name was missing, so it appeared to be called the Lack Dog. "Yeah.... there will be some more old, lack dogs in there again, very soon," he smiled to himself.

Another car drew up and stopped by his, John turned to see two smiling faces beaming at him through the glass. It took only a few seconds to realise it was Davy and Dennis, formerly drums and keyboard. Once they were out of their vehicle, they shook hands, hugged and exchanged high fives. "Well!" said John, "I spoke to you both on the phone, and you don't sound any different, but now I've seen you, wow, I would have passed right by you in the street without knowing you!" "You always were a stuck up sod!" joked, the tall willowy figure that was Dennis, and they stood there smiling and looking at each other for a time.

"These last 40 years have not been kind to any of us, I don't suppose!" said Davy. His small muscular form over-filled his t-shirt.

"More like 50!" added Dennis.

"You still look very fit Davy, and you too Dennis, and me?

Well! I'm just a few stones heavier," admitted John.

"That must be all that good living! Eh? Have you heard from Charlie?" enquired Dennis.

"Oh yes," said John, "It was difficult tracking him down, but he said he would be here for the re-union."

"Is he still living around here?" asked Davy.

"No, he moved to Ireland about 30 years ago, but he's still got some family here, so wants to see them while he's here."

"What's he doing in Ireland then? I bet the leprechauns got him," joked Dennis with a smile!

"Nooo, I believe he married an Irish girl who was a well-known country singer over there. They are now singing and playing together, making good money, got a big house and a stud farm! The lad's done well!"

The pub door opened and a woman put an A board out onto the forecourt.

"It looks like we're just in time, I think the pub is open now," said John, "but after 50 years, I can't remember, whose round it is! Must be yours Davy!"

They all laughed and started chatting and walking to the door.

A large camper van roared into the car park entrance, and a voice from its window yelled, "Hey you bums, Is there any chance of getting a drink in this hell hole?"

They turned to see Charlie behind the wheel and driving towards them at speed, faster and faster, and breaking just a few feet in front of them. He clambered out, laughing at the frightened looks on their faces.

He stood there resplendent in his red white and blue tasselled, stars and stripes shirt and the largest Stetson ever made.

"Hey, have any of you vagrants got a few bob to buy an old friend a drink!" again there were embarrassed hugs and handshakes, and they ambled into the pub. "OK!" said Charlie, "I'll get these, what'll you lads be drinking then?" An Irish brogue was threading its way into his loud English voice. He always was a noisy person, and his bass was always too loud.

Once they found a table, and there were plenty to choose from, Charlie and John brought the drinks to the others. "Sorry for the delay chaps, but our friendly barmaid, er.... friendly ageing barmaid, had to change a barrel, the beer was too frothy, or something."

"I hear you made it big in Ireland!" probed Davy.

"Yea, we've been doin' alright, me and Roisin, that's the wife, got a place across near Wexford, a little farm, about 30 acres. Life's pretty good! What about you guys?"

"I retired two years ago, got a good pension off the civil service, so now my times my own," said John.

"Are you guys not playing music anymore?"

"Oh yes," added Dennis, "Me and Davy are still playing around the local clubs and pubs, keyboard, drums and vocals. We make a few quid just enough to live on."

"Well I hope you're not trying to trick the taxman!" Charlie said as he looked at them quizzically through his eyebrows, smiling.

There was a sudden silence at the mention of the grim reaper's name.

Davy looked around and asked, "Where's the bog?"

"Don't you remember?" said Charlie, "it's through that door there, the one that's cleverly marked 'GENTS.'"

Davy hurried through the door, and they all made that same journey several times during the evening.

"Hey wait a darn tootin' minute you guys, aren't we missing the star of the show. Where is our golden voiced singer, Mr Ricky Raven? What a stupid name that was, but I suppose if we'd called ourselves Eric Wiggins and the Rock-a-teens, everybody would have laughed at us, even louder!"

"Oh, he said he was working late today, but that he would be here by about 7," John informed them.

"Still working?" queried Dennis with some disbelief.

"Yes, he said he works for an undertaker," added John.

There were bouts of laughter and glasses were emptied and then refilled.

The saloon door open and a well-dressed man, wearing a collar and tie, and dark suit walked in. He stood, staring at them. At first, he was not noticed; he seemed to fade into the

surroundings. Then Charlie saw him, "Hey Ricky, come on in, what are you drinking old chap?" he said.

"Um, its Eric these days, I'm afraid my days as Ricky are well in the past now." Somehow a strange gloom was suddenly cast over the group.

Eric continued, "And I'll have a small lemonade, please."

"Oh, come on," said Charlie, "What do you want? You drink whiskey, don't you?"

"No, not any more, my wife doesn't like it."

Davy chirped in, "Then don't give her any!" and started giggling.

"Oh Davy, the old ones are the best, but you are the exception," said Charlie, "Ricky, er.... I mean Eric, you always used to drink whiskey, bottles of the stuff."

"No thank you," said Eric, "that was in the old days, and now the old days are long gone."

"Well, anyway, come on in, sit yourself down, come on you guys, get him a chair." Charlie shook his hand, "My, your hands are cold."

"Yes," stuttered Eric, "I have just been to a funeral, I work for an undertaker in Talchester."

"Really," marvelled Davy, "Do you have to embalm the bodies too?"

"Oh shut up," said Dennis, "Just like you to want to know all the gory details. Leave the man alone, he's finished work for the day. Somebody, for God's sake, get him a drink."

"I'll get this round," said Davy, and within a few minutes he returned, "Hey, can any of you guys lend me a fiver? A round of drinks is nearly fifteen quid!"

"You won't get 1960's prices here mate, not anymore," said Charlie. He handed Davy a ten pound note.

Slowly Eric warmed up. He was persuaded to drink beer, and with a few inside him, he got louder and louder, and looser and looser.

"OK, so what have you guys got?" asked Charlie.

"What do you mean?" questioned Dennis.

"Well," continued Charlie, "I had my knee done three years ago when some pony kicked me, and I'm diabetic, have to

have daily shot of insulin, or I keel over. What bits of you guys have gone wrong?"

"I had a triple by-pass about ten years back!" said John.

"So how old are you now then?"

"70 next year!" said John.

"Bloody hell, you're bloody pre-historic!"

"Well, we must all be in our late sixties!" defended John.

"Yea! I suppose you're right, bloody right," said Charlie,

"We're all dinosaurs now!"

"Davy?"

"Oh me? I've got arthritis in my hands and fingers, I keep dropping my sticks."

"Dennis?" they turned to look at him.

"Me? Oh I've got a split ear drum, can't hear a thing through my left ear."

"What about you Eric?" asked Charlie.

"No, nothing, I've been lucky," he said.

There was a minute or so, of silent reflection until Charlie belched.

"Hey Eric, what happened to that old bag you used to go around with, what was her name Sylvia, wasn't it?" asked Dennis.

"I married Sylvia," said Eric

"Oh sorry I didn't mean,..." Dennis did not finish his sentence.

"No, it's OK, I must admit she was no oil painting, but you don't have to look at the mantelpiece do you? She gave me seven children!"

"Seven?" they almost all shouted in unison.

"Didn't anyone ever tell you to get off before the harbour station Ricky?"

There was laughter and dirty giggles and pushing and shoving and more drinking.

"Seven kids" repeated Davy, "That Ricky never did know when to stop. Always to handy with his John Thomas, was our Ricky."

"He's never had a problem with his prostate, that's for sure!" said Charlie.

"I didn't need to be handy!" There were sniggers, "I could have, and had any woman I wanted, in those days," added Eric, "but now I'm happily married, well, married anyway." Glasses were emptied, there were more belches and another round of drinks was ordered.

"Hey, do you lads remember that gig we did at, where was it now, it was Guildford, when Ricky had that redhead in the dressing room, as we were playing the opening numbers," recalled Davy, "and he came on the stage with his flies still open!"

"I think he came before he got on stage," smirked Charlie. "Yes!" said John, thoughtfully, "I remember it well. I was just about to introduce our superstar singer, when I heard a voice from the wings, "Play another instrumental, I'm busy, she won't let me go until I've finished!" They all laughed. "Then as I was turning to rush on stage, she said 'is that all I get?' I found some green stamps in my pocket, so I gave them to her."

A few of the pub's customers turned to look at them in disapproval, as their verbal volume increased.

"I do remember another night I wanted to get this bird into the van, and you guys were all in there with a load of birds having some kind of orgy, So that bird and me, we ended up in the church yard, it was a bloody cold that night too. I don't know how I managed it but I had her on a large flat gravestone. Now I suppose I'll never get to 'eaven!" slurred Eric. Several hours later, the drinking had slowed down. Eric's collar was loosened and his tie dangling in his glass. Occasionally, there were childish giggles and finger pointing as strange smells and obnoxious aromas lifted and circulated. No one owned up, but Davy sat quietly, tight lipped, with a cherry red smirk on his face. Other people in the bar looked round at the noisy smelly group, in disgust.

"Charlie," said Davy, "You're not going to drive your camper thing home are you, you've had much too much to drink."

“You just watch me! And If I can’t then,” he breathed heavily, “I’ll just kip in the back in the car park!” Charlie grinned at them.

A young barmaid placed a tray on their table and started collecting empty glasses. Several were pushed in her direction.

Eric stood up and hugged her. She couldn’t move.

“Hello sweetie, do you realise that under all these clothes I’m wearing, I am completely stark naked?”

Suddenly and violently, she kneed him in his groin, and he recoiled backwards grimacing in pain, onto Davy’s lap. The group, and it seemed the entire pub, took the roof off with laughter. Eric scrambled back to his seat, a wounded man. The barmaid walked away smiling triumphantly. Eric began massaging his pained appendages, and soon appeared to be enjoying it.

“Hey Eric,” yelled Davy, “Don’t rub ‘em, count ‘em!”

There was more laughter, and Eric uttered in a falsetto voice, “I suppose you think that was funny!”

Charlie shouted, “Eric, it’s your round!”

John looked up and asked, “Did you notice the old hall is still out there, it’s in a hell of a state, very dilapidated, windows boarded and, almost falling down, by the looks of it.”

“We had some good nights there didn’t we? We played some good gigs in there. Shame we couldn’t do it again.” said Dennis.

“And why can’t we?” ask Charlie, “I still have my bass, we have a drummer and keyboard player here. Do you still have a guitar John?”

John had almost nodded off in the corner, just a little worse for the alcohol. “What?” he asked looking up at them.

“Let’s play again, in the hall, next door. Some sort of charity gig,” enthused Charlie.

“That’s not funny, I’m sure you remember what happened in there.” John slumped back into the corner. Alcohol always did make him sleepy and miserable.

“Yes but that was years ago, 40, no 50 and more years, everybody’s forgotten about that by now,” persuaded Dennis. John looked up again, and at each of them, slowly in turn.

“OK,” he took a deep breath, “OK, let’s do it. I suppose with a little rehearsal, we could get back up there on stage and perform. Question is, could our super star of a singer get up there again?”

Eric leaned over and drew them to him with his index finger, “I can still get up there, and if I can’t, then I can use a little embalming oil!”

The bar had begun to fill with customers. The barmaids had been joined by the landlord, who was getting concerned at the noise that the group were making. He wandered over, “Soon be closing time lads, last orders!”

Davy was beginning to lose focus. Then he thought he saw Eric’s hair drop over his ear. He refocused, and blurted out, “He’s got a syrup on, and Irish jig,” he burst into song, “Wiggin’s got a wig on, Wiggins got a wig on.” It was tuneless, but everyone’s attention turned to Eric’s head. He re-adjusted his hair, and they all laughed.

“It’s been a great night,” said Charlie, “Good to see you old fossils again. How about if we meet here again next year, same day, same time, same place? Just to see who lasts that long, a PDR.”

“What the bloody hell is that?” demanded Davy.

“A PDR, it’s a pre death reunion, we’ll have one every year and see who’s the last man standing!”

Again there was laughter, and most of them agreed to his suggestion. Slowly they got to their feet.

“What about this gig then?” wondered Dennis.

“OK,” said John, “If you’re all up for it, leave it to me. I’ll check to see if that hall is usable, you know, up to modern health and safety standards, and viable. I’ve got all of your phone numbers; I’ll be in touch with each of you.”

“Bloody health and safety, just a load of political gobbledegook and clap trap,” groaned Eric.

“So it seems that Ricky Raven and the Rock-a-teens are going to rock again sometime very soon,” They cheered loudly at Charlie’s prediction, “Catch us if you can, we’re going back, and that only goes to prove one thing, don’t it?”

“What’s that?” asked a sleepy Davy.

“Rock and Roll is here to stay!” proclaimed Charlie, and they all cheered in agreement.

They began their goodbyes with a round of hand shaking and boy hugs. “Hey Eric, ain’t you forgot something?” Charlie pointed back to the table. They all saw a small mound of hair. Eric picked it up quickly and fitted on to his head.

Charlie was the last leaving and pulled the door closed behind him.

They all said their goodbyes yet again in the car park. There were a few small tears in a few eyes, but none of them would own up to it. One by one they drove away. John walked to his car, and then turned to look back at the hall. “Yep, we’re going back.” Then he thought he could hear music, and strangely, it appeared to be coming from the hall. He listened and realised it was the song they always used to start their first set with.

John sighed, smiled, and climbed into his car, and disappeared into the night.

16/8/2012



Ricky Raven and the Rock-a-teens were;-  
Eric Wiggins (aka RR) vocals, John Andrews guitar/vocals,  
Charlie Wallace bass/vocal, Dennis Morgan organ, Davy Tully  
drums.

## Black boots

The old boots were just about hanging off of my feet and I finally decided they needed to be replaced. I trawled the internet shoe shops but there was little there that excited me. All of the cobbler's shops here are in the centre of the City, where I could go but parking costs the earth, and that's if you can find a space. But I do recall seeing a store in an old cinema building and decided to make time and pay it a visit.

As a kid, I had seen many old classic films here, but now the building looked sad. The outside front of the building was covered in sales posters in a rainbow of gaudy fluorescent colours. Gone were the doormen and ticket ladies. No more front of house photograph panels either side of the main door. No smell of hot popcorn or display of ice cream in the sales kiosks.

Once inside I was greeted with numerous racks of shoes of all colours and all kinds. The old seats used to run from side to side, but these rows now were lined up in the opposite direction from the 'way in' to the far end, where the screen used to be. This was obviously a psychological ploy that made me feel as though I should walk right through to the end, and not leave without buying something. The smell of leather, new shoes and polish was overpowering. I glanced up, and high on the walls, the original art deco light fittings were still there. I wondered if they ever use them these days, then above me I saw the fluorescent strip lights that floodlit the floor. I gazed in amazement at the sad transformation as my eyes began to water. ***"I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore."***

I turned quickly to see who had spoken, but there was no one near me. I saw the rows of ladies shoes, but none for men. I looked around and was very confused, ***"Houston, we have a problem."***

Then I noticed a large sign on the far side of the building loudly proclaiming 'Mens.' I assumed it meant shoes and not toilets. On my way there, I passed a family arguing. ***"Frankly,***

***my dear, I don't give a damn.***" Did he really say that? I was unsure, but quietly and quickly walked on by. Suddenly, there before me were more boots than a battalion of soldiers would ever need. I surveyed the wondrous display before me and picked up a boot, but I was not impressed with the quality. Had this cow put up a fight or just surrendered?

***"A census taker once tried to test me. I ate his liver with some fava beans and a nice chianti."***

I wondered along the row and then turned to see a sales assistant standing behind me. He said, ***"Go ahead punk. Make my day."***

"Excuse me?" I questioned. "Can I help you sir?" he asked. "Would you have something like this one in a size 10?" I queried. ***"Are you talkin' to me? You can't handle the truth."*** As he turned and began walking away I heard him utter, ***"I'll be back."***

I strolled on along another row, then another, and saw a pair of very high wedge boots, just the kind Elton John would have worn. To my surprise there was a large 'E' written on the sides. "No, it couldn't be" I dismissed the idea. I turned to where the screen would have been, and gazed in recollection, and wondered if they could ever get a screen put back there. ***"If you build it, they will come."***

A woman pushed by me, and grinned as she did. I felt my face redden, and I quickly hurried away. Then I noticed the salesman was walking back towards me carrying two boxes. At last I hoped there was something in them that I'd be happy with. He held out a rather nice looking pair of black boots. I found a nearby chair, took a boot from him and slipped off my own shoe. I had some difficulty getting my foot into it at first, ***"May the force be with you!"*** he said, at least I think it was him.

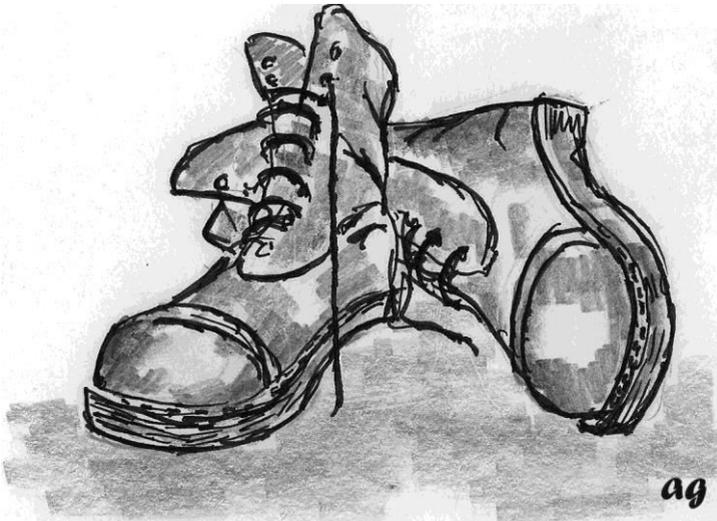
Once I had zipped them up, I sat still for a moment. They felt very comfortable. I tried walking up and down, ***"To infinity and beyond!"***

I decided to take these and gave him some money and he disappeared. ***"Open the pod bay doors, please, HAL."*** I hoped he'd bring me some change.

Again my mind wandered as I gazed around. I remember as a 8 year old seeing the film, "Calamity Jane" here, 6 times in one week, that was the week I fell in love with Doris Day. A few years after, a man sat next to me, put his hand on my leg. As soon as I realised what was on his mind, I quickly moved to another seat. I also remember bringing my first date to a film here. Strangely, I don't remember what film it was. The salesman returned, and gave me the change. Somehow I couldn't stop myself speaking, **"Take your stinkin' paws off me, you damn dirty ape."**

I hurried away to the exit, but why I had to turn and look back, I'll never know. He was smiling, **"Here's looking at you, kid. Hasta la vista baby."** Once I had got outside into the fresh air, it was as though a great weight had been lifted from me. To this day, the boots are still in their box in my cupboard, I don't know why but, I've never worn them. Perhaps I should have bought the red shoes?

10<sup>th</sup> May 2013



## The cellar

Her emotions were suddenly volcanic, pleasure, joy, satisfaction, and release. Slowly fear overtook them all, a dreaded fear, and blood raced around her body like water over the edge of Niagara.

Susan took a deep breath, tried to settle herself, and then looked down at her hand. Slowly, the blood trickled through her fingers as she held the knife. She tried brushing it away with the heel of her other hand, but as she did, it grazed the edge of the blade, and stung her as it sliced into her skin. "Ouch!" She yelled aloud in an irritated tone and dropped the knife to the floor. "Damn it! Now that's complicated things," she thought. "I'll have to make sure none of my blood is left here."

She looked down at his body. It was lifeless. Her deep breathing became easier, as she realised that the moment of impulsiveness had passed, the deed was done and he was stone cold dead. Her body trembled at the thought, and then at the consequences that were bound to follow.

She had to think quickly, had to stay calm, stay in control, deal with the situation and then, had to get away. Her biggest problem was how to dispose of the weapon, not to mention the disposal of his body. Susan decided she couldn't leave it in the cellar. She had to get it out and hide it, but where? And how?

She rushed upstairs to the kitchen and held her hand under the cold tap. The blood didn't seem to wash off. Grabbing a towel, Susan wrapped it around her hand. In a cupboard she found a tin of plasters and spread one across her wound.

"I must find a way to get rid of the knife, and his body."

The thought raced through her brain continuously, "Somewhere where the police won't find it, but where?"

Nothing seemed obvious, her mind was in turmoil again, no place nearby would be safe, it was already giving her a very bad headache.

Then another problem occurred to her. How on earth could she get his body out of the cellar? She couldn't lift it, he was a

well-built man. She could probably get it into a bag or a sack, but how to get it up and out of the house was a mammoth problem.

Calmly, she watched the kettle as it boiled. Susan sipped her coffee, and then she remembered the chute at the far end of the cellar. Years ago, coal was delivered down it for storage until it was needed upstairs. She would need some rope to drag him up and out of the house, but was there any?

No easy remedy was jumping out of her coffee cup! "I'll tie his body, or the bag with his body in it, to the back of the car and drive it away dragging it up the chute. That should do it!" She tried desperately to convince herself, despite her doubts.

Susan walked around to the side of the house to check the outside area around the doors of the chute. Fortunately, there was just enough room to back the car close to the doors. On one side she noticed a heavy canvas sack that sand had once been delivered in. The builders had left it behind after some recent work. It was much stronger than a plastic bag, and would be ideal for the task, or so she hoped.

Susan pulled the body across the floor toward the chute. His belt snagged on the work bench leg. She almost lost grip and fell backwards, and as she did his trousers slid down his body.

She got to her feet and was surprised to see that he was not wearing under pants. She froze, staring down at his pale, limp genitals. Her pulse was racing again. Thoughts rushed through her head as she bit into her lip.

Hurriedly, she looked around for the knife. After a moment's thought she decided that her prime task was to get rid of the body, not to dissect it. After all, that was the cause of the problem in the first place and it would only mean more mess to clear up.

As she struggled to roll the body into the bag, sweat streamed down her face and temples. A pool of blood was left on the floor under the body, and she swore and made another mental note to clear it next.

Eventually, Susan managed to tie the bag closed, with some electrical cable.

She made her way to the garage. There was a chance of finding some heavy rope or something that wouldn't break. Hanging from a roof beam was the hoist he used to lift engines out of cars. She looked at it, but couldn't see how she could make use of it. There was a chain hanging from it. She dragged at it and it came away in her hand. Susan became excited when she realised it was a good length and probably ideal for her needs.

Back in the cellar she attached the chain to the bag and then tugged it, she was convinced it would do the job. After some tricky manoeuvring, the other end of the chain was fixed securely to the trailer towing hook on the back of his car. She paused, and thought. "Would this work or not? Well there's only one way to find out!" Her clothes were sticking to her body as she started the engine.

An unpleasant noise filtered its way through the air and reached her ears and her blood ran cold. Her hopes fell to the floor, like the lift plummeting from the penthouse of the Shard. The police siren became louder and her hopes slumped even lower, and regardless of all her efforts, it was now, too late.

19-7-2013

## Shorts

Short pieces written on 'work days.'

Dear someone

Let me tell you something about myself, but I apologize now if it sounds a mess as I'm not used to writing about myself to Lonely Hearts Ads.

I was born nearly 50 years ago in Southampton, but now live in Grimsby. It's a very nice place once you get used to the smell of fish.

I am the manager of a supermarket and we have a staff complement of 87. It's a funny thing, being in the provisions trade all these years, and not being able to provide myself with a soul-mate.

I have a house, fully paid for, a car, and a good income, a pension when I retire.

My hobbies include hang-gliding, snorkel diving and knitting.

But, I must confess, I never do them all at once.

My other interest is sado masochism.

No No, I'm only joking,  
about the knitting.

I hope to hear from you soon.

27/7/2012

1,000,000 today

One million of the units had been sold. The Chairman and Directors of the company decided to publicize the occasion with an extravagantly wild party and invited numerous international celebrities to the festivities.

The Hilton Hotel was hired and lavish food and plentiful Champagne was consumed.

A fashion show was part of the evening's entertainment which ended in the early hours with balloons, fireworks and many other excesses.

The total expenditure was unknown, but the company were well satisfied as the event was covered by live TV, all the tabloid newspapers and TV reports and newscasts for the whole week.

Sales of the unit increased three fold as a result of this marketing ploy, and the Directors were paid their large bonuses and all were smiling smugly after the one millionth unit of Barbie was sold.

6/1/2012

The tube

For the third time in the last minute, he checked his watch. The noisy rumbling of the tube train was aggravating his early morning migraine.

Station names flashed by and he realised he still had some time to go before getting to the right stop.

He looked around at the other travellers. A baby was crying but it's cries were difficult to hear as the carriages juggled on their noisy journey.

The train stopped and the door swung open with a loud hiss. Several people left and another even louder hiss closed the doors.

The train motion and the smell of electricity began to make him nauseous.

This is it. He stood up just as the train stopped suddenly. He lost his balance and fell against an elderly Asian woman.

"Oh, sorry" he said, but before she could reply, he was onto the platform and heading for the exit.

A train on the opposite side whooshed in and the draught blew his hair into his eyes.

As the train started and rumbled away into the tunnel, he heard someone calling his name, but the other travellers leaving, pushed by as he stopped.

He looked around but could not determine where the sound had come from.

"Terry!"

He turned and saw her running towards him.

13/7/2012

Jack's potting shed.

The shed had seen better days. Paint was peeling, window putty had dried to a crisp. The door hinges just managed to hang on. The only good and recent addition was the lock

which was totally redundant as a strong gust of wind would have been enough to flatten the structure. But despite that, Jack spent many enjoyable hours inside. The floor was covered with pots of all sizes waiting and wanting to be used. Jack sat at the bench, with his feet on a small wooden box, and puffed away at his favourite pipe. There were many pots with young shoots bursting through John Innes No2 and a strong strange aroma filled the inside of the shaky structure. Smoke from his pipe would ease its way through the cracks between the wall planks, and the local residents would know that Jack was in residence.

He opened the door and stood looking across next door's garden, which was completely overgrown, and then at the empty house.

He said to himself, 'Every garden should have a potting shed in it.'

May 2012.

Morning

The tea kettle boils, I open the caddy and the tea bags are shouting,

"Me, me, no me, me now."

I grab one and throw it into the mug. I open the fridge door and it moos at me. I walk into my living room and sit. The mug slips and I am drenched. I sit there scolded, soaked and blaspheming.

Nan and Charlie

"Come on Nan, it won't take a minute," said Charlie.

"Oh I don't like these new-fangled ideas. You want me to sit there?"

It looks like a coffin, and that curtain, just like the one at the crematorium," she moaned.

"No, No it's not," rebuffed Charlie, "You just sit there and smile. I put the money in and we get a strip of photos of your face."

"Yea! All of them just like postage stamps."

"Oh don't be such a miserable.... That's it, now smile!"

He dropped a coin into the machine, and moments later there were several flashes from behind the velvet curtain.

Nan staggered out, gripping the side of the booth and blinking her eyes and trying to focus them.

"What were all the flashing lights for?" she questioned, "I thought we were being bombed again, just like the war it was."

Charley pulled the strip of photos from the machine and gazed at them in disbelief. "Oh Nan, they're awful!" he announced.

She grabbed the photos from him, "I told you these new-fangled things don't work!" she grinned at him.

"Yes! But you took your teeth out, why?"

"Well, they fell out just as I was smiling and it was flashing. Those flashes made me jump."

"Put them back in, let's try again!" Charlie tried to coax her back into the cubicle.

"If you want to go in there, then get in there yourself, and take my teeth, and don't forget to smile!"

8/3/13



### The Salesman

I want to make a sale!

There's enough cars here to make my fortune, so why don't they come and buy them?

Could it be the showroom? No, I don't think so.

It's tidy, clean and acceptable, at least I think so.

They're good cars, even got a clean low mileage Roller over there, that would give someone a boost in their social circles. So why don't they sell? Are they priced too high? I don't think so.

Perhaps it's me, do I frighten them away? Scare them off?

No!

They walk by, they stop, they look, and then they walk away.

I want to sell cars, so why can't I?

Perhaps I could bring in a younger salesman? Or even a sales woman.

Yes, an attractive young lady, nothing too tarty or trashy.

A young lady with a bit of class, like myself.

Ah, here's a young lady looking at that car now.

I wonder if she wants to buy it? Or maybe she wants a job?

"Hello, can I help you?"

"Yes" she said, "I'm Ann Robinson, from Watchdog!"

## Poetry

When I was young, Sundays would last all day,  
 But now Sundays are over too soon,  
 Those lazy, hot, sunny days are part of my past,  
 now Sundays end just after noon!

### TIME

Time is such a little word,  
 often said, but rarely heard,  
 regardless of time we carry on,  
 and before too long, the time is gone,

Isn't it time the mists had cleared?  
 Isn't it time doubt disappeared?  
 there's no answer to time, time always wins,  
 and I'll answer in time, for my many sins.

### DIN

When the candles are burning low,  
 and flickering in the gloom,  
 and no moths come investigating,  
 your quiet, lonely room,  
 and you can't hear the traffic,  
 outside the room you're in,  
 and only silence surrounds you,  
 then silence is a din.

### RHYTHMS.

Inner rhythms of the heart, are often quite erratic,  
 missed heart-beats are commonplace, like dust in granny's  
 attic,  
 arteries will coil and twist,  
 whenever tender lips are kissed,  
 and it's utter folly to resist, inner rhythms of the heart.

Other rhythms of the soul, choose only to amaze you,  
 chilling bodies to their bones, as early winter days do, strange  
 uncertainties are found,  
 when both your heart and hands are bound,  
 so don't ever build your heart around, other rhythms of the  
 soul.

Deeper rhythms of the mind, are easy to discover,  
 like spring and summer blossoms, and kisses from your lover,  
 crying eyes are certain signs,  
 Pagliacci has corpsed his lines,  
 only then, your heart and soul maligns, deeper rhythms of the  
 mind.

Secret rhythms of your life, are heard by no-one but you,  
 continually changing, yet always pulling you through,  
 though your heart and soul and mind,  
 will drive you crazy, make you blind,  
 only you can hope to hear, and find,  
 secret rhythms of your life.      6/2/79.

On the local village cricket green,  
 the shouts of ' how zat ' ring,  
 as the ball hits on willow, and scorches the air,  
 and the birds all gently sing,  
 the shadows lengthen as the sun sinks low,  
 and the whites are marked green and red,  
 a sleepy crowd drink warm mouthfuls of beer,  
 until the final wicket is shed.      28/8/77.

Children's voices, shouting and crying,  
 in the playgrounds of my past,  
 gone are the days, my mem'ries dying,  
 times that could never last.  
 So bloody knees and a runny nose,  
 subjects I couldn't understand,  
 where are they now? My friends and my foes,  
 even so, those times were grand.      29/8/77.

**My hot water bottle.**

My hot water bottle, keeps me warm while you're away, it  
sleeps with me, in my old bed, 'till the start of a brand new  
day, .... though,

My hot water bottle, is no substitute for you,  
if I squeeze it tight, it starts to leak, and that simply will not do!  
.... and,

My hot water bottle, doesn't look like you at all, it's got no hair,  
no big brown eyes, and doesn't hear me when I call, ....  
what's more,

I hate my hot water bottle, it's nasty to the touch, I much  
prefer to have you here, 'cause I need you, so very much.  
22/9/77.

***The List***

---

Make a list of the things you've missed,  
The girls you've known and the girls you've kissed,  
Nights out with the guys that ended with a fist,  
Just one more drink you couldn't resist.

I should have said no, or so I'd wished,  
That copper was mean but he would insist,  
Now my name and address is on his list,  
Then I staggered home, half dressed and half drunk.  
23<sup>rd</sup> March 2012

Chapter the first.

Like a Spanish gipsy, in a downtown cantina, she poured my drink for me,

Standing there, so full of life, for everyone to see,

Her long black hair, her eyes so bright, and her skin, so silky brown,

The guitars played, a new chapter began, as the summer sun went down.

The new chapter.

Now the windows are boarded, and the curtains are drawn, the gipsy has moved away,

The cantina's closed, there's no more wine, and there's so much that I didn't say,

Where is she now? with her silky skin, her bright eyes, and her long black hair,

The summer has gone, and the chill winds are here, did she ever care?

Another chapter.

They say that she has cut her hair, and her eyes aren't bright anymore,

That her skin has lost it's golden shine, and she's bought a liquor store,

She's doing well, in her new found life, and won't have time for me,

So I'll just sit and drink my life away, and won't care if the people see.

The final chapter.

Now won't somebody please, pour me a drink, I don't care who, I just live for today,

Yet I can still hear her beautiful voice, but I can't hear the guitars play,

So I'll finish my drink, and ride away, in search of a place in the sun,

With a horse, and a prayer book, and deep in my heart, only a bullet from a gunfighter's gun.

26/3/78

*Rain*

---

With pre-arranged warning, we met that morning,  
And went out in search of Jane,  
Two and three in each car, we travelled quite far,  
Down every sodden lane.

Through village and town, everyone there looked drowned,  
Water gushing down ev'ry drain,  
And then in a while, we all managed a smile,  
'tis the house where lived famous Jane.

From room to room, in that dim Friday gloom,  
We searched, but we searched in vain,  
We knew she'd been there, she left some of her hair,  
Then we went back out, in the rain.

We all bought a gift, which gave us a life,  
'n'were amused, when we all bought the same,  
No room in the shop, so no coffee pot,  
Now our bellies were beginning to pain.

Over in Greyfriar's pub, we all ate our grub,  
So sad we were too late for Jane,  
Chawton house next, bellies full, heads perplexed,  
We ventured out again, in the rain.

But the house was shut, like their foot in our gut,  
We sat in the church to keep sane,  
kept our cash in our purse, it couldn't get worse?  
Then we all went home, in the rain.

Although day was done, we'd all had some fun  
And really there wasn't a pain,  
With my right, writers friends, with their notebooks and pens  
We're determined to do it again.

1<sup>st</sup> July 2011

### *The Melissa Challenge*

---

If you monoga me, then I'll monoger you,  
He said he was monogamous,  
He smiled at me, a perfect smile,  
I hoped his pockets were bottomless,

His manner was soft, his eyes were blue,  
I should have known that was ominous,  
The days were sweet, I wanted nights that were hot,  
I looked forward to the syn-onymous

He began to choke, the silly bloke,  
Had a blockage in his oesophagus,  
He wanted water, I wanted altar,  
But he was becoming monotonous,

He's drunk all the scotch, and he's forgotten his watch,  
Now he's late for alcoholics anonymous  
He started falling about, so I kicked him out,  
And he boarded a passing omnibus

And before too long, it all went wrong,  
He was causing a terrible fuss  
The driver said no, you've both gotta go,  
He'd taken his pet hippopotamus,

But this woman had a plan,  
She quite fancied this man,  
So she bundled them into a sarcophagus.  
But there was still just, one grace saving plus,  
He swore that he was monogamous.

6<sup>th</sup> July 2012

***All the way back to Wickham,... for Melissa***

---

Hey, I've got a brand new motor  
 So put me on the rota  
 I'll always do my quota  
 But I don't drive a Toyota

Now if we get as far as Minnesota  
 We'll keep going, til we get to South Dakota,  
 Then we'll jump aboard a sailing boata  
 All the way back to Wickham.

Now Melissa's a fellow writer,  
 A writer whose very brighta  
 But I won't say she's whiter than whiter  
 Cause she was clubbing last night, at an all-nighter

Now we can't let the vampires bite her  
 So I think it's time to invite her  
 On a day trip to the, isle of wight er  
 Then all the way back to Wickham

She's really a happy soul, quite bonjovial,  
 Thinks he's an angel, totally super - natural,  
 Gets her blood pumping, arterial,  
 Loves the sounds he makes, audio-logical

Wants him on her tree, ancestral,  
 Because she likes what she sees, pictorial,  
 Wants him to whisk her off, on his motor cy---cial  
 All the way back to Wickham

16<sup>th</sup> July 2012

### ***Slip Away***

---

All the friends I knew, have slipped away, and now are never seen,  
 But mem'ries linger, in my mind, like a giant movie screen,  
 The names are still familiar and every girl said she would stay  
 So how did I let love just slip away.

The days and nights of laughter, everyone a loyal friend,  
 Those happy times, we loved so much, and swore they'd never end,  
 The Honky Tonk, where songs were sweet, and melodies would play,  
 And somehow I let love just slip away

Where are they now, I miss them everyone,  
 How did they slip away, into a setting sun?  
 Old friends, sweet friends, breaking the spell,  
 Old love, sweet love, I knew you well,

I loved the girls, their sweet embraces, love forever true,  
 Warm tender moments, soft as kisses, just as lovers do,  
 Then rain was falling, just enough, to spoil a perfect day  
 and through my fingers, love just slipped away,..... 18-1-2012

### ***The beautiful people***

---

The beautiful people are promising me,  
 an end to every care,  
 they smile at me and tell me their number,  
 in the hope I'll buy their ware.

From morning 'til night, as long as I please,  
 they'll smile as though they know me,  
 and all the time, offering this and that  
 they just can't wait to show me.

Now and again there's interesting items,  
 so I'll sit and watch 'til the end,  
 a soap or make-over, gard'ner or cook,  
 and they all, want to be, my friend.

Not an ugly face or a miss-shapen body,  
 to be seen from any angle,  
 at one and at ten, that's news to me,  
 and in between time, the jingles jangle.

They use the English language like a rubix cube,  
 swearing every other word,  
 one day, maybe they'll clean up their act,  
 and pigs'll fly, that's too absurd.

But I'm not convinced, so I won't be mis-led,  
 and that IS my final decision!  
 but the Beautiful People still smile at me,  
 from my television.

### **Revolving Door**

Will I? Won't I?  
 Can I? can't I?  
 Could I? should I?  
 Like I'm trapped in a revolving door.

Another day, another night,  
 Should I let go? Or should I bite?  
 Is it wrong? Can it be right?  
 Like I'm trapped in a revolving door.

Time to leave, to get away,  
 Be brave and face, a brighter day,  
 Open my mouth, and have my say,  
 And escape from this revolving door.      13/4/2012

### ***The Last days of Summer.***

---

It's time to head south,  
now the warm days are leaving,  
others will join me as we chase the heat,  
the mornings are colder,  
with the last days of summer,  
autumn is heralding another retreat.

With the flock on the wing,  
there's always safety in numbers,  
we'll be ready for any angry foe we should meet,  
soaring and diving.  
and riding the thermals,  
with the last days of summer, hear every heart beat.

Where the climate is pleasing,  
and nourishment plenty,  
and food enough for every hungry mouth,  
now it's time to consider,  
the next generation,  
and the last days of summer  
means it's time to fly south.

### ***In Hope***

---

No more Play up Pompey,  
No more Pompey chimes,  
Fratton Park raised to the ground  
No one can hear the Fratton Sound  
We cannot let it happen,  
Or let our City lose it's soul,  
It's time to save our football club  
Ev'ry supporter's goal.

So every Fratton ender,  
 No matter what your age  
 Aim for the moon you'll reach the stars,  
 Let's turn another page  
 In every seat around the ground  
 Your duty must be plain,  
 Put your hand upon (your heart), (the crest?)  
 And see Pompey rise again.

Remember Jimmy Dickinson,  
 Len Phillips and George Ley.  
 Fratton park filled to the brim  
 To watch those legends play  
 We love our Pompey heroes  
 In ev'ry Pompey side  
 We're calling true supporters  
 Stand proud by Linvoy's side.

12<sup>th</sup> February 2012

### ***The Fighting Temeraire***

---

After a battle fought long ago, the hulk remains are slowly  
 towed into a harbour, a harbour of peace.  
 Blood red skies above echo the battles of her past.  
 But what now for the Temeraire?

Her usefulness exhausted, her timbers groan with the cries of  
 dead men. Her dried sap enlivened with the human kind.

They tow her to a mooring at the far end of the harbour where  
 she can rot for the rest of her days.  
 Other stronger ships replace her, so that war can still be  
 fought, and English blood be spilt again.

20/9/13 (after seeing Turner's painting)

## Song Lyrics

### **In my dreams**

In my dreams, we're dancing through the night,  
I'm holding you so close,  
and God it feels so right,  
and the world won't bother us, ever again,  
and we'll be together 'til the end.

In your dreams, I'm everything to you,  
I'm lying by your side,  
the way you want me to,  
and we're making love so very tenderly  
and I know you'll always give your love to me  
In my dreams,

*Time and again I have imagined,  
just wrapping you inside my arms,  
and I know, in my heart  
I would never ever think of letting you go*

But it seems, you deny that I exist,  
and all that I can be,  
is an eternal optimist  
so show me loving like good loving used to be  
or are your smiles more than they may seem  
but only in my dreams

### **What are ya gonna give me on Christmas Day?**

#### **A Christmas song for the twenty-first century?**

#### **(female vocal version)**

What are ya gonna give me on Christmas Day? Will it be a big  
surprise,  
Will it roll and rock me, is it gonna shock me, am I gonna  
believe my eyes?

What can I unwrap when I wake up how much did you have to pay  
 Am I gonna raise a Christmas cheer  
 Loud enough to let the neighbours hear  
 Will it last all through the coming year at least until next  
 Christmas day

What are ya gonna give me on Christmas Day? will I like it  
 when I see,  
 How big and how wide, or will I run and hide? I will if it's not  
 good enough for me  
 And when I'm holding it tight in my hands will it help us when  
 we play  
 Check your prezzy listed, don't let me be excluded  
 Don't forget or let yourself be deluded  
 Make sure the label says batteries included to last until next  
 Christmas Day

*With a little bit of luck, Santa's gonna bring it  
 Rudolph says, Santa knows just how to swing it  
 and after Christmas dinner, mince pies and mulled wine  
 I can play with your toys ? And you can play with mine.  
 What are ya gonna give me on Christmas Day? Can I have a  
 look right now?  
 have you been to buy it? I just can't wait to try it, but I'll need  
 for you to show me how.*

When I open up the box it's in will it be a nice display?  
 Without it, would it break my heart to miss it?  
 Will I want to hug, and squeeze, and kiss it?  
 Will I always think that it's exquisite?  
 And never get enough on Christmas day?  
 Will I ever get enough on Christmas day?  
 Can we make it last 'til next New year's Day?

**Benidorm Sun - (Utopia)**

I knew I'd never miss, the January rain,  
 Skies of grey, that train late again,  
 A daily grind, hoping to find, utopia.

Now I know the bliss, of mañana days,  
 Azure skies, above perfect bays,  
 Riches abound, now that I've found, Utopia.

*I can't get enough of the Benidorm Sun.  
 The Spanish moon over the mountains,  
 All the senorita's begging me to stay,  
 And there's no reason to ever go away,  
 So now my new life has begun, under the Benidorm Sun.*

You get a big fat kiss, as you're walking off the plane  
 Come dip your toes, in glorious Spain  
 There's so much there, you know where, utopia

The world gets smaller every day.  
 All my old friends are just a flight away.  
 On the Costa Coast, There's a plentiful host,  
 To ease away your cares,  
 You'll win if you're the one who dares.

I can't get enough of the Benidorm Sun.  
 The Spanish moon over the mountains,  
 All the senorita's begging me to stay,  
 And there's no reason to ever go away,  
 So now my new life has begun, under the Benidorm Sun.  
 15-4-2004

**Goodbye Mr. Sun**

Goodbye Mr. Sun, it's really been a beautiful day,  
now it's nearly done, and Mr. Moon is on his way,  
old sleepy eyes get heavier, say goodnight to everyone,  
now it's Hello Mr Moon, and Goodbye Mr. Sun.

It's been a long long day, but I don't really mind,  
every second was so precious, now we leave that day behind.  
Tomorrow could be fine, but will we ever know,  
We'll let our God decide, so pray to make it so.

*Time will wait for no one,  
not even you my friend,  
old father time is making it clear,  
even the longest day has to end.*

Goodbye Mr. Sun, it's really been a beautiful day.  
Now it's nearly done, and Mr. Moon is on his way,  
old sleepy eyes get heavier, say goodnight to everyone,  
now it's Hello Mr Moon, and Goodbye Mr. Sun.

## The Heir to Fishbone Place

"Now come along Vernius, sit down and have your breakfast," she instructed.

"Yes dear, but I'm not very hungry, I'll just have a piece of toast!"

"Toast? What is that, you know since you've got back from Rome, with all these new-fangled ideas, you're a different man, you're not the man I married."

"Oh dear, I hope not," he said.

"And what other brand new revolutionary brainwave ideas did you see in Rome?" she demanded.

"Yes, there was something rather special; they call it, ice cream.

It's made of milk and sugar and several other things including flavouring. The best kind is chocolate ice cream, but even better is double chocolate, and then the very best is one that they call Death by Chocolate! Hooooooo!" he shuddered. "The best maker is a company called Lyons, Lyons of Rome. There is another one, and that's a company called Walls,.... of Jericho."

She nodded and servants brought in 20 trays of food and she started eating. Suddenly, there was an awful sound.

"What is that?" he asked.

"It's your son! He's doing what he calls - mew sick, and it's certainly making me sick!" she said through gritted teeth.

"He's down in the audience chamber with his friends making that terrible groaning sound and racket with cow skin covered boxes, kitharas, cornua, pan pipes and lutes, and lyres, apparently they are calling themselves El-visius and the Roman-aires."

"El-visius said they went down to the Forum last night and made that noise and they were paid money for it. The building was packed full, with people standing in the street, not able to get in. Strangely, most of them were young females."

"Oh yes, I know about that dear!" he said.

"You do? Then what are you going to do about it? You should speak to him, show him the errors of his ways," she insisted.

"My dear he is twice as big as me, he's 32 years old now. If I tried to say anything to him, he would tell me to go away, very quickly, and multiply! In no uncertain terms."

"But, Vernius, the whole of Fishbone is complaining about that... noise."

"Don't worry dear; I have a plan, a cunning plan."

"Oh yes, and what is that, if I may ask?"

"I have an acquaintance in Londinium, his name is Councillor Tiberius Parkerus, but I know him as Col Tib. He has arranged for them to make that noise at the Londinium Palladium, and then next week at the Colliseum over in Rome. Of course, when they get there and open their mouths and make that horrid cackling din, they are sure to get a 'thumbs down' from all of the assembly, and before they are able to finish, the gates will be opened and the lions will be let in and that noise will soon stop. You will then find that our only son has been gobbled up by king of the jungle,.... or El-visius has suddenly become a long distance speed runner, and then El-visius will have left the Col liseum."

"But, my dear, if your darling son is eaten by some beastly wild animal, there will be no one to leave this wonderful home of ours too?, Fishbone Place needs a son and heir."

"Yes," he thoughtfully stroked his chin, "Yes, I hadn't considered that. Well I suppose we'll have to think of something else."

They continued with their breakfast for a while and then Vernius spoke,

"I do know a captain of a legion over at Port - Chester in the castle, Portus Adurni, I could ask him to take El-visius into the army."

"A couple of years as a centurion soldier should sort him out. They are about to be posted to a more southerly part of the Roman Empire, and I bet those Germanic tribes will keep our lad very occupied for some time to come. If that's not possible, then maybe we can get him press ganged as an oarsman on a galley setting sail for the Emerald Isle. The

natives over there will certainly bring him back down to earth with a bang!"

The door opened and in walked El-visius, followed by four scantily clad young females. "Hi Mhawh, Hi Phawh!" he said, "a ha ha, How do you feel about aaaa changing the name of our home?"

"Change the name," repeated Vernius, "What's wrong with Fishbone Place? What do you want to call it?"

"Aaaa I think it should aaaaa be called Heart Break Hotel!"

"No! Certainly not" replied Vernius.

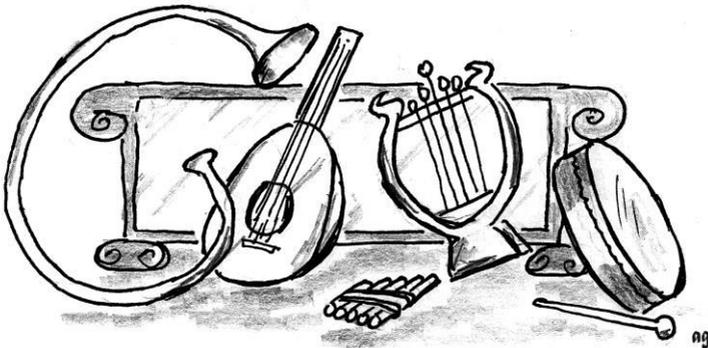
"Well aaa, how about, aaaa Placeland!"

"No, no, we like it the way it is. Of course everyone knows it's real name is Fishbourne Palace, but the name was changed before, three centuries ago by a dyslexic sign painter! No I think it's fine as it is."

"OK Mhawh, OK Phawh, I'm just going to have a bath." Then he suddenly burst into song, "VIVA LAS FISHBONE," and then stopped just as suddenly as he had begun. "Nope that's not right, there just gotta be a better word to go in there," he said, then turned and left the room followed by the four young females.

Vernius thought again, "We could always get him sent to Pompeii, as a volcano watcher?"

10-9-2012



## Fishbone Refurbished

Breakfast was almost over and Vernious was licking his fingers. Gracini scowled and said, "I don't know how you can eat that, that strange stuff they eat in Rome these days, what's it called again, toast? And then you spread that gooey mess all over it, marmalade, uck! That was a waste of a good Iberian orange!"

She got up and stormed out of the room before Vernious had time to empty his mouth and speak.

Gracini managed to cool down a little as she walked along the Palace corridor. In fact, she felt very cool in the Britannic summer. As she walked, a wet mark on the wall, caught her eye. It was dripping wet when she touched it.

"Oh dear, how on earth do these tribes here manage to live in awful weather like this? Now look at that! The wet is running all down the wall."

Vernious was summoned to assess the problem. "It looks as though it's seeping up the wall, but I don't know how it can defy gravity. We'll have to get someone in to deal with it! There's a man in Noviomagus Reginorum, the village they call Chichester, a friendly one amongst the tribe of Antrebates is a big fellow called Tommo Dewalsh, a strange name. He does a lot of hut building for them. I'm sure he can suggest a way to put this right."

Gracini was soothed by the thought that something would soon be done. "Can we redecorate the whole of this corridor, and our bedroom too?" she added. Vernious agreed reluctantly, just to keep the peace.

Moments later, the peacefulness was broken by the sounds coming from the audience chamber.

As they entered, the music stopped.

"Hi Mhaw, hi Phaw," said El-visius.

"We're going to have some refurbishment work done to the place, I mean Palace." said Vernious, "There's water running

down the wall on the west corridor, and a few other rooms need updating."

"That's fine, mighty fine," said El-visius, "Can we have this room changed too, at the same time?" he asked.

"Well, I suppose so," said Vernious.

"And who's going to pay for that?" demanded Gracini.

"Hey Mhaw, you got a suspicious mind. I got money," said El-Visius, "I'll pay for all the work to be done!"

"Oh! Oh! That's OK then," said Gracini instantly changing her tone.

"I wanna change this room into a jungle room!" said El-Visius.. Gracini started coughing with shock, "You want to change it to what?" she questioned loudly.

Vernious felt that he had to add some reason, "It's not another one of your fads is it? Like that hound dog you got and called Old Shep? We never did find out why it died did we? Or the horse you got from Trojia? It was ages before you realised it had a wooden heart and was totally useless. We had to return it to sender."

Again Vernious was ignored and El-visius continued,

"Yea, we'll have some trees, palm trees, coconut trees, and some vines, and some water, maybe a waterfall, or some kind of water feature!"

Gracini was speechless, a rare occurrence. Vernious felt the need to break the silence. "Oh, I see, and will you be wanting animals too?"

"Not lions and tigers, I hope," Gracini had resurfaced aggressively.

"Nope," said El-visius.

"Elephants and Rhinoceros, Rhinoceri or whatever they are? Or Hippopotamouses?" she continued in a bluster.

"Hey Mama, that's an African Trilogy."

"How about Giraffes and Zebras?" Vernious was trying to sound useful.

"Nope," said El-visius calmly.

"You'd better not be wanting creepy crawly things, like spiders and scorpions and snakes! I can't stand spiders!" protested Gracini.

"Would you like a chimpanzee? You could call it Bubbles!"

A few strange looks were cast in his direction but Vernious' comment was totally ignored.

"Nope" said El-visius after some time.

Suddenly, he burst into song. "I just wanna baby teddy bear!" Gracini was shocked, "El-visius!" said his mother at the end of her tether, "I wonder at you, do you wonder at yourself?"

"Awwwww mhaw, sufferin' succotash! You are the wonder, a wonder of you!" said El-visus.

As Vernious and Gracini turned to leave they heard him sing again, "Reddy Teddy go bear go. I'm ready ready teddy to rock'n'roll."

On the way back to their own living room, she asked, "Have you heard from your man at Port Chester yet?"

"Yes dear, they said he died three years ago, the postal service is a bit slow these days."

"And joining the army in Germanica?"

"They said his hair was too long, he looks like a woman, and they don't have women in the Emperor's army!"

She sighed loudly, and tried her final ace,

"OK, what about Pompeii?"

"Oh yes dear, I heard that it erupted last week!" he confessed, afraid his wife would now erupt.

She stopped dead in her tracks and erupted, "Damnation! There must be something we can get him for his jungle room. I know, it's the perfect gift, we'll have to get him an asp!"

28/8/2013

## The Adventures of Cyril

(A fairy story for adult children)

### **CYRIL STEPS OUT. 1.**

Cyril woke up early and straight away realized he was hungry. He looked to his side and there she was, curled up beside him. He gently stood up so as not to wake her, and stretched. "Oh, that feels good," he thought.

The cold morning air twanged around his nostrils and he decided to find some food. He stepped outside and began walking along the path. There were still a few blackberries on a large bush, so he quickly grabbed and devoured them. He walked on and found a few nuts strewn across the path. He gathered them up and stuffed them into his pouch. As he did, he was suddenly startled by a voice. "Well, would you believe it, Cyril Squirrel, what are you doing out this early?"

Cyril stood up and turned to see who it was, "Oh it's you Spikey Mikey, and don't call me that!"

"What? Cyril Squirrel? That is your name isn't it? Core blimey, your parents must have had a sense of humour, calling you that!"

"Well, Ok but don't go on about it!" said Cyril.

"And then you go and find a female to shack up with called Beryl, so now she's Beryl Squirrel!"

"Yes all right, but you can't talk Spikey Mikey, what a stupid name to call a hog hedge?"

"Hedge Hog!" Mikey shouted at him.

"OK, OK, don't keep on, I'm too busy to stop and talk to you"

"Why, what are you up to?"

"I'm looking for nuts!" said Cyril.

"But you're eating them all!"

"No I'm not, I'm putting them in the pouch, in my mouth, and I'm taking them home. Beryl can have some, and the rest will be stored, winter is nearly here! You know?"

"I don't eat nuts, they give me the wind in my willows, you should try eating some worms."

"No I don't eat creatures, eating worms would probably give me the runs"

"Oh?, are you a vegetarian then?" asked Mikey.

"No, I think I'm what they call a vegan."

"Well Bully for you!" Spikey Mikey snorted, turned and wandered away.

This put Cyril in a bad mood, but his search went on. He was very wary of the cat that lived near-by. Several times he had been chased, but of course Cyril can quickly climb trees and the cat is not so nimble. Suddenly, he noticed something moving in the undergrowth. He stood very still. It moved again. He watched, and then saw, it was an ant eating a leaf. After several minutes, the ant saw him. They stared at each other for some time. Cyril moved closer, and asked, "What are you called?"

"Me? Oh I'm an ant."

"Yes, I know that, but, do you have a name?"

"Yes, I'm called Antony."

"Ah, I suppose I should have guessed that."

They continued staring at each other without moving.

A distant, lonely and confused, owl was hooting into the day.

Then Antony asked, "Are you going to eat me?"

"Nooo!, I don't eat living things, anyway you wouldn't fill my belly."

"Oh, thank goodness for that, then, can we be friends?"

"Friends?,... why?"

"Well," said Antony, "We all have to get on with each other don't we?, so why aren't we all friends, surely that way we can help each other?"

"I don't think that would work, that sounds silly."

"Why not?" asked Antony.

"No!" said Cyril, "It's like this, dogs are meant to chase cats, cats are meant to chase birds, birds chase flies and flies

chase the rear end of dogs, and so on, It's called the circle of life."

"What does that mean?" Antony was confused.

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about if I were you, you just carry on eating that a, whatever it is, and I'll be on my way, good day to you."

At that moment a large black beetle strolled into the clearing.

"Oh, excuse me," he said very apologetically, "I hope I'm not interrupting something important?"

"No, No, I was just going," said Cyril, and then thinking to himself. 'I wonder what incredibly stupid name you have'?

"And who are you?" enquired Cyril.

"Who? Me? Oh yes, I'm what is called a European Rhinoceros Beetle, but those clever scientist fellows have given me a latin name, *Orycles Nasicornis!*"

"What? How stupid" grunted Cyril, "Latin, are you foreign?"

"Oh no, I have lived here all of my life and so too, have many of my ancestors. Are you a foreigner? You're grey aren't you?"

"I'm greyish red, I mean reddish grey."

The beetle contemplated his reply, but Cyril could see he wasn't convinced. Cyril quickly changed the subject, "So which of those impossible names do we call you?"

The beetle looked up and said, "Oh, my name's Trevor!"

Cyril said nothing more, then turned and left.

"I'm home dear!" he yelled, as he started unloading the food he had found.

"Hello Dear," said Beryl, "I have something to tell you."

"Oh yes, and what is that?" asked Cyril.

"Tiny feet!"

"What?" Demanded Cyril, "Have those mice got in again? Right I'll set a trap down, straight away!"

"No, no, we are expecting the sound of tiny feet!" she confirmed.

Cyril sighed a large, loud "OOHHHH!" and fell into a chair. Moments later, he jumped up, grabbed, hugged and kissed Beryl and sat back down again and said, "It's the circle of life you know!"

"Yes, I know dear," she said, "But now we have a terrible problem."

He looked at her quizzically, "What are we going to call them?"

27-1-2012

## *The adventures of Cyril.*

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(A fairy story for adult children)

Where you see the word (POP) you are required to insert your index finger into your mouth and pull it out quickly making a popping sound.

### **DELIVERANCE. 2.**

Cyril Squirrel walked up, and then he walked down again. Again he walked up and down, even more impatiently than before. "Oh come on, come on," he muttered, and then louder he begged, "What's taking so long?"

"Calm down," said Spikey Mikey, "It'll happen when it happens, there's nothing you can do about it to make it any quicker."

"For heaven's sake, somebody call for the midwife!" said Cyril.

"She's already up there, and you couldn't have a better midwife than Bessie Badger, believe me."

"Yes, I suppose you're right, I must calm down, breathe deeply and slower," decided Cyril.

He took several long breaths and then started coughing. "Oh no. That's no good,

I think I'll just lie down on the floor."

"Yes, you do that," said Spikey, who was close to the end of his tether.

(POP)

"It's here." said a voice from another room.

"Get up, quick," said Spikey, "Did you hear that? it's here."

Cyril clambered to his feet, "Really? Did she say boy or a girl?"

"I don't know," said Spikey.

(POP)

"There's another one," said a voice from afar.

"Did you hear that Cyril?"

Yes, of course I did, so it's twins! Phew! but did she say boy or girl?"

"No she didn't" confessed Spikey.

"Oh damn that woman, we need to know"

(POP) (POP)

"Two more," said a voice without a body.

"What? That's four now, its quads or something!!

Phew, Gosh! This is wearing me out, how are we going to feed quads?

I have to sit down."

Cyril tried the deep breathing again, and this time it seemed to have some effect.

"So," said Spikey, "You're gonna need four names, have you talked about names with Beryl?"

"Yes, we have, but just one boy's name and one girl's name!

Now, where did that book of names go, I had it only yesterday?"

He searched around and eventually found the thin volume.

(POP) (POP) (POP) (POP)

Cyril dropped the book, and took a sharp intake of breath.

"Oh no, is that more?" asked Cyril, almost in tears.

"I think so," whispered Spikey.

So how many is that now? First there were two, three, four, that's quads, five is,...

I don't know what five is. Six, seven, how many was it?"

"Eight I think" said Spikey reluctantly.

"EIGHT? This will never do, we'll have to give some of them back!"

"No! You can't do that, they are yours now, your responsibility!"

"Oh Yes, of course, you are right, Spikey, there's a wise old head on those shoulders of yours. I'm glad you're here, you're a pal!"

Cyril was silent in thought.

"Eight? That's septepulets or something, isn't it?"

"No, September is the ninth month," Spikey corrected him, "so if there were nine, it would be Sep, or something or other."

(POP)

"Oh crikey Spikey Mikey, I don't likey, I mean... I don't like that! Nine? That's incredible! Or was that Ten?" Cyril crumpled into a chair.

"Yes, Cyril that is amazing," added Spikey, "how could you manage to make nine! Or even ten, what have you been eating recently? You'll have to give up acorn nuts and stick to something a little less arousing! Oooo you haven't been at those funny mushrooms again have you?"

"What? What on earth do you mean?" demanded Cyril,

"Certainly not!"

"Are you sure?" interrogated Spikey.

"I might have," mumbled Cyril.

"D I D Y O U?" probed Spikey, in a deep David Frost voice.

"Well, I may have just strolled by them, and sniffed their nice perfume!" admitted Cyril.

"Ah that's it then. Trust you! OK, now let's think about names, what was the first name you thought of for a boy?" asked Spikey.

"The one I really liked was, Tyrell!"

Spikey gave him a weird look.

"What?..... Tyrell Squirrel," said Spikey.

"That's...." He searched for the appropriate word, "That's.... That's fine." Spikey conceded uncomfortably.

"And for the girl," said Cyril, "we had decided on Cheryl, because the wife likes that girl with the long hair on the TV advert!"

"Oh, I see," added Spikey unconvinced, "So, Cheryl Squirrel? Hmmm???? OK," he decided to battle on, "Well that's two down, now it's seven to go."

(POP)

"Oops, I mean, eight to go, so that must be ten, did you have any other names in reserve? Hope so."

"Yes, there was also, Birel, Daryl, Errol, Ethel, Wirral, Merrill, Martha and Arthur."

Cyril sat down, exhausted after the effort of remembering all the names, "Gosh, this parenthood thing is quite wearing isn't it?" said an amazed Cyril.

Spikey smiled a weird smile at Cyril, and said "I did think that maybe you just might want to call one of them Mikey? You know, after me?"

Cyril's face turned to thunder and anger curled his upper lip. Spikey was scared.

If you have ever seen a squirrel with a curled upper lip, then you too, would be very afraid.

"If any of those youngens have spikes, I shall have a few choice words for my Beryl, and I shall come looking for you...."

Spikey backed away showing his palms to Cyril, "No, no perhaps that's not such a good idea after all then!"

There was an uneasy silence for several minutes as they stared at each other.

"Well, now you nearly have enough offspring to take on the



Arsenal!" said Spikey, trying to raise a smile from Cyril.

"What is the Arsenal?" asked Cyril.

"No, don't worry, it doesn't matter, but before we pick names, we need to know their sexes."

At that moment, Bessie ambled into the room, "Cyril, you'd better pop in, sorry I didn't mean to say 'pop' but go and see your Beryl, she needs a cuddle."

"Yes! Yes I must, is she OK? Is it all over now?" he enquired.

"Well that's good of you to ask, you'd better go and see for yourself. In the end there were 27!" said Bessie.

"What?" Cyril instantly went very pale.

"No, no, only joking," Said Bessie with a smile, "I think there were, about 10, or was it eleven, I can't remember," she chuckled and disappeared out the front door.

"I'd better be getting home," said Spikey, easing towards the door.

"OK then, I'll catch up with you later, don't quite know when, I suppose I might be a bit busy from now on?" said Cyril.

"Is that the circle of life that you are always going on about then?" asked Spikey.

"Yea! I suppose so!"

30th March 2012

## ***The adventures of Cyril.***

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(A fairy story for adult children)

### **THE WISE OWL. 3.**

Oswald was a young and rather handsome long eared owl and did the same thing every morning at the same time. He hooted like all owls do, but sadly for Cyril Squirrel it was much too early in the day, or to be more precise, the early morning. Finally, Cyril threw the bedclothes off and went down and stood outside his front door. Looking up, he could see Oswald in the top of a tree, a little way down the path.

Cyril shouted at him, but Oswald continued hooting oblivious of his neighbour's distress. Cyril picked up a stone and attempted to hit Oswald with it, but missed miserably.

There was nothing for it but to climb up and confront Oswald face to face, or even fist to fist. However, he hoped it wouldn't come to that.

The tree bark was slippery after an earlier fall of rain, but Cyril's sharp claws coped well with his ascent.

"Hey Ossie!" shouted Cyril as he finally got the branch where Oswald was standing. "Stop, stop all the hooting, you're keeping everyone awake," Ossie looked round astonished to find he was being interrupted. "What," said Ossie, "No I can't stop, I gotta hoot, that's what owls do!"

"No, you gotta stop, do you know what time it is? It's still dark, it's the middle of the night and you are keeping everyone in the wood awake! There's hedge hogs, badgers, bats, dormice and me, all trying to sleep!" he said loudly!

"But, I've got to hoot, I'm hooting for a mate."

"What? In the middle of the night?" he gasped, "No you don't wanna do that, you don't want any of them night owls do you? That's not the kind you want, oo no. Wait until it's daylight and then you get a better class of owls passing by."

"Really?" wondered Ossie. "I know you've been lucky, you and your Beryl seem very happy. You must think you've won the lottery with her?"

"Oh no!" said Cyril, "with the lottery, you sometimes win!"

"What?" quizzed a confused Ossie. Cyril sniggered quietly to himself.

"No, I'm only joking, My Beryl is a gem, least that's what she tells me!"

"Perhaps you're right." Ossie was beginning to see Cyril's point of view." OK, I'll hang on until the morning, and starting hooting again in daylight."

"That's a grand idea Ossie, and may I say a very wise thing to do. All your woodland friends will be very grateful to you, and they will all get some sleep. Thank you Ossie." Little did Ossie realise that his woodland friends were hibernating, and wouldn't be awake again until the spring.

"That's OK." Said Ossie, but before he could finish, Cyril had begun climbing back down the tree. As he walked along the path, he was pleased and smiled to himself. "I think I handled that rather well," he said giving himself a verbal pat on the

back. He began to speed his pace, anxious to tell Beryl how well he had done. He was very happy with his methods of persuasion and diplomacy. In fact, he was feeling quite smug. "I only hope those little ones of mine will keep quiet and let me get some sleep," he said aloud. He took a deep breath as the sun rose up over the horizon.

Suddenly he heard a sound that made icy shivers run up and down his back and his long bushy tail.

No, it wasn't Ossie, it was the crowing of the cockerel, sat on a nearby fence. "Oh no," said Cyril, "I want to go home to my bed, but now," he was resigned to undertaking some further negotiation, "Now I suppose I'll have to have a word in his shell like ear. Now that's a thought, do cockerels have ears? This might be a little difficult."

11/1/13

## ***The adventures of Cyril.***

(A fairy story for adult children)

### **SMELLYWOOD. 4.**

He opened his eyes after a long sleep and slowly looked around. Thankfully, nothing much seemed to have changed during the long winter. The one thing he did notice was that his tail seemed to be fluffier than before. He smiled to himself and remembered how warm it had kept him during the hibernation.

Then he saw his face in the mirror, and noticed that his whiskers had also grown. The smile slipped from his face as he realised he looked a mess.

Several of his youngsters were making a noise out of sight. Beryl, his wife, walked in. "Come on Cyril, the spring has started, it's a time to wake up!"

He was about to get to his feet when an obnoxious, rancid smell assaulted his nostrils. He let out a high pitched shrill, which made Beryl jump.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

“What the,... who the,... where the hell is that stench coming from?” he bellowed.

He knew it wasn't his wife's cooking, because she didn't cook. Was it the kids getting up to mischief? He quickly got to his feet and went looking for his young. Strangely, they were sat quietly and he realised they were not to blame.

Once outside, the smell became even stronger. Normally the woods were fresh and welcoming at this time of the year, but Cyril's incredibly sensitive squirrel nose was flashing red with danger.

He noticed that in a nearby tree root, there was a hole that wasn't there before the winter.

Carefully, he walked towards it and looked in. There was a pair of eyes looking back at him. Cyril broke the silence. “Is that you making that awful smell?”

“I'm afraid so, well to be honest it's not me!” said the timid voice from within.

Cyril was confused for a moment and then asked, “What is it?” he begged.

The eyes within moved out and Cyril was looking at an elderly rat.

“Hello,” said the rat, “I'm Matthew, call me Matt.” After a few moments, Matt explained that the smell was coming from his grandmother. They had moved in just before the winter snows, then she had died and, because of the horrid winter conditions, they couldn't dispose of the body, and that was what smelt.

Cyril stroked his whiskers for a minute as he assessed the situation. Suddenly he proclaimed, “We must have a woodland funeral,” he then firmly added the word, “Quickly!”

Shortly after Grandmother Rat was laid to rest in an enchanted and peaceful glade deep in the wood. All of the woodland's inhabitants were there. Spikey Mikey the hedgehog read the eulogy and Antony ant and Trevor the stag beetle helped to carry the coffin, hastily fashioned from a discarded fast food container.

They were there partly to wish the dearly departed a speedy journey into the next world, but also to meet the new woodland family, of Matt and his wife Pat Rat, and their four young ratlets, Dat Rat, Gat Rat, Nat Rat and Zat Rat. The atrocious smell was soon replaced with the aroma of primroses, bluebells, dog roses, rhododendrons and fir trees, and the wood was at peace once again. 14-6-13

## ***The adventures of Cyril.***

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(A fairy story for adult children)

### **ARE WE BEING WATCHED? 5.**

Cyril was strolling along the path with several of his youngsters.

Daryl and Errol were climbing through the trees and shrubbery above, looking for food to take back home. If the truth were known, they were eating more than they saved. Wirral was straggling some distance behind Cyril, but Merrill was asking lots of questions of his father. He was very curious and enquiring about the names of trees, and plants, and after a short distance, they were joined by Spikey Mikey.

As they walked, they joked and pulled Merrill's leg about the weird and wonderful creatures that inhabit the wood. Cyril explained that the family of foxes were often see in the far end of the wood and beyond that was the village where the humans lived. "They have cats," he said, "and cats are a menace." Merrill took it all in. Further down the path, Merrill stopped suddenly. Cyril and Spikey, turned to him, "What wrong? asked Cyril.

"There something watching us!" he whispered loudly.

"Where?" They all queried in unison and in a loud whisper he answered back.

"Over there, it's a pair of eyes in amongst the gorse bushes, and a set of big teeth," said a now irritated Merrill.

Slowly they all walked towards the bushes. Then Cyril realised what it was.

"Oh no, panic over, there are flowers!" said Spikey.

"Ah yes, it's the rare and mysterious Grinning Monkey Orchids!"

"Quick, run!" shouted Merrill.

"No, No, it's OK they are flowers, not real monkeys, they won't hurt us," he said with a twinkle in his eye.

Slowly, Merrill became a little easier that the smiling faces were not going to hurt any of them. He looked closely at the flowers and said, "Oh how pretty they are." For a moment, Cyril was worried about that word, but when Merrill added, "Faultless, immaculately natural and complete," Cyril realised his worries were unfounded.

In time they joked and laughed about Merrill's young mind and youthful naivety which in turn made Merrill feel embarrassed. They walked on, chatting as they went. Again Merrill's eye noticed something slithering through the grass ahead of them, but this time he was more curious than afraid.

Cyril noticed his reaction, and to reassure Merrill, he quickly said, "Ah, here's Joe, I'll have to introduce you to him."

"Is it a snake?" asked Merrill.

"Oh no!" chuckled Cyril, "This is Joe the slow - - - worm."

"Worm," said Merrill, but he looks more like a snake than a worm."

"Well actually, he's not even a worm, he's a legless lizard." said Cyril.

Merrill carefully studied the new arrival. "Here chum, who do you think you're looking at! Hmmm?" said the snake.

"Oh, I am sorry, I meant no offence. I was trying to see your legs, I mean, ... where your legs should be." Merrill begged.

Joe and Cyril and Spikey started giggling, "It's all right Merrill, Joe is just pulling your leg!"

"Well, we certainly can't pull his leg, can we?" replied Merrill, with a sly grin on his face.

Very soon there were a number of creatures walking together, happily chatting and laughing as they walked. Suddenly, Merrill stopped and loudly said, "Wait! There's something down there," he pointed into the distance.

An orange cat came slinking along the path towards them.

"Quick!" shouted Cyril. "Run for your lives, everyone, run for your lives!"

The whole crowd of them turned instantly and started running back down the path. Cyril knew they were partial to squirrels, so he was running the fastest. Soon Cyril realised that he couldn't see Merrill running with them. He slowed and stopped, and then turned to look back. To his horror, he saw that Merrill was stood talking with the cat. Cyril rushed back a few paces, and shouted to his son, "Merrill, get away, run, and run bloody quickly!"

Merrill smiled at his father, "It's OK, he's quite friendly, he says he's run away from home, and wants to live in the wood, with us!"

"Oh yes," said Cyril in disbelief, "Don't they feed him enough there? Well, as long as he doesn't want to eat any of us, I suppose it'll be alright."

On the way back, Cyril explained to the cat the rules of the wood, especially the one that says, "We don't eat each other." The cat agreed and added, "I've become a vegetarian. I was taken to the veterinarian, who proved to be a bit of a disciplinarian, and because he was a septuagenarian and a totalitarian, he insisted veggies only. It took a bit of getting used to at first but, in the end, I grew to like vegetables! It's very healthy, and I have lost some weight in the process. I do feel much healthier, but it does have one side effect, one awkward draw back."

The listeners were transfixed by his every word, and now very curious to know what the side effect was. Merrill was more curious than the rest, "And what is that?" he asked.

"They give me wind." admitted the cat.

Everyone took a backward step and began sniffing the air, and the cat smiled.

"No it's OK, the funny thing is, there is no smell, no odour, nothing to worry about, honest!"

Slowly the animals relaxed, and came to accept their new friend and his strange ways.

Merrill asked, "The one thing we haven't found out about your name, what are you called?"

"Mortimore," replied the cat, "I used to be a carnivore, but now I'm a herbivore, not even an omnivore, not anymore. That is to say that since I saw the veterinarian, he was a Hungarian

and a bit of a libertarian, just a little of a sectarian, but still a nice man! He said I must not eat meat, but I should eat vegetables!

The onlookers were somewhat confused, and had begun to lose the will to live listening to his explanations. Cyril spoke up to bring everyone back to reality. "It must be time for dinner, must get back to the happy home now, won't you join us Mortimore?" Everyone nodded their approval and they all made their way home. However, Cyril did notice how well Mortimore and Merrill were getting on which gave him a little concern. Several days later the two of them disappeared and were never seen again.

5-7-13

# Christopher's Friends – The Fantasy You Just Won't Believe

## *1. Flames of the devil*

---

He pulled the paper from his pocket, opened it and read the letter for the tenth time, or was it the one hundredth? His eyes began to boil, his lips pursed and his fingers squeezed into the paper as he read the words aloud,

“As of the 31st of this month, due to the implementation of 21<sup>st</sup> century technology, your services will now longer be required. Only if this decision is not contested, will an unconditional ex gratia payment of £500.00 be made to you and the company wishes you luck in the future. Yours Sincerely, H. R. Emmerson, Company Director.”

He crushed the paper into a small ball and angrily threw it against the wall. It bounced and fell into a half empty cup. He retrieved it and shaking off the drops of liquid, opened it up again. Ceremoniously, he tore it into thin strips then into small pieces. When his fingers were unable to tear anymore, he ripped each small particle into smaller pieces.

He rolled the scraps back into a ball and threw it at the wall again, which, sprayed out as it fell across one of the projectors and then on to the floor.

"There's gratitude," he said through gritted teeth, with his eyes now boiling over, "17 years of my life, given to this company, and this building, and its lousy customers, and all they offer me is a measly, poultry 500 bloody quid, they will regret

crossing me!"

Each time, as he had read the letter, he was planning revenge. Now, it was time to act. The next film had just started and the building was quiet. Some staff were grabbing coffees and waiting for the next rush of customers. He checked his watch for reassurance. 14 minutes to 6. Indeed, the time was right so he began with his plan. He reached into a hold all under his desk, and pulled out an Evian bottle, but the bottle did not contain water. Holding it carefully close to him, Christopher slowly unscrewed the top. As he did, his nostrils twanged at the fumes of the liquid fuel.

He dribbled it across the floor, then up and down the wall. The floor around the first projector was soaked and then he moved to the new and much hated digital projecting machine, and grinned as he drenched the floor beneath it.

He desperately wanted to drench the machine, but if he did, the film would stop and he would be discovered. He took another bottle from the bag and began to repeat the exercise over the same walls and floor. They were soon dripping and running with his revenge.

He glanced through the window to the screen and then moved to the door and turned.

Taking matches from his pocket, he lit one and held it for a moment, as his eyes scanned the room. He took a deep breath and the fumes made him cough.

He flicked the match as far as he could, but nothing happened. There was a moment of panic in his head, as beads of sweat burst out onto his temple. He expected to see the room ignited, but he was disappointed and he swore. He lit another and again, he flicked it as far as he could. This time, instantly, the room was in flames.

He made a quick exit, ensuring the door was closed firmly behind him. Turning towards the stairs, he heard footsteps. As his manager Jim passed by, Chris said, "I'm breakin' my neck, when you've got to go, you've got to go!" He thought to himself, 'how true that is!' They both smiled and Jim went into his own office, next to the projection room. "Perfect, I couldn't have planned that better," thought Chris as he hurried down the stairs.

Charlotte in the ticket-office, noticed him crossing the foyer and wondered why he was leaving the building at this time in the evening.

Once in his car he felt free, and he drove directly onto the motorway. After several junctions, he turned back towards the town.

Just before the large flyover, he veered left towards the hill. Dusk was falling and there was an early October chill. He found a parking place on the hill top, overlooking the city. The area was deserted.

In the far distance was the open sea, in the near distance the vast sprawl of the city with its flickering street lights running down the avenues and lanes. The near distance was dissected by the motorway, with the hotel, and the pub and the supermarket full of light on a busy evening.

He then saw a large curl of smoke lifting from the cinema, and there were just a few flames visible. He smiled to himself thinking, "A job well done."

Blue flashing lights could be seen, and sirens heard on vehicles rushing to the cinema. He could hear distant shouts and screams as he watched and smiled. He started his car engine.

Soon the flames were reaching high above the building and he felt that he could almost feel a warm comforting glow from it.

He slipped the car into gear and released the hand brake. Gradually he moved forward, and then let the car roll down the hill.

There was no panic, as he undid his safety belt. The car gained speed and he smiled.

The front wheels slipped into a ditch and twisted, causing the falling vehicle to roll and somersault several times, down the hill.

It eventually came to a sudden crash against an electricity pylon. Chris was hurting on his right side and his right leg was trapped. He looked down and saw blood, and smiled, and waited for the end.

Wires from the pylon broke away and fell to the ground, several hitting the car, causing a cascade of sparks like every November 5th. Moments later there was suddenly flame all around him. "Hmm, this wasn't the plan" thought Chris. With his left hand, he took a tobacco tin from behind his seat, prised it open with the hand brake handle and four joints rolled out across his lap. Picking one up, he held it to a flame and then took a long drag on it. As he did, more sparks gushed from the broken cables and there was a large explosion as the petrol tank ignited. He could now feel the heat behind him and soon his dreadlocks were alight. He was beginning to cough and choke and he thought he heard a quiet voice, calling him. Immediately he became irritated and shouted, "I don't want to be rescued!" Then, in his ear, he clearly heard the words "Come along Christopher, you will now spend eternity with me in hell!"

## ***2. Conversations with Big B***

---

He was walking, but it wasn't easy. It felt as though he was treading on a bouncy castle, or a giant bed of marshmallow. But soon the ground, or whatever it was under his feet, became harder and walking was easier. Then he noticed somebody walking a few paces in front of him. He was dressed all in red with a long pointed tail.

"Hey man, where am I?" shouted Christopher.

The figure in red turned and grinned. As Chris got closer, he was shocked to see such an evil grin on a red face. His teeth were like gravestones, and there were two large bumps, protruding from his forehead.

"Where am I? And who are you?" he questioned.

The grin got wider and more evil, making Chris feel very uneasy.

"And where do you think you are young man? Hmmm? What do you remember last?" asked the red man.

"Well, I was,.... I was in my car" he said thoughtfully. He

looked down at his leg, no blood and no pain. He felt his dreadlocks....”and it was rolling over, heat, oh yes, the cinema.”

“Yeaszzz, the cinema!” Chris didn’t think that grin could get more evil, but it did.

Suddenly he felt a shiver, “Oh dear, what happened?” he asked.

“It was burnt to the ground!” The figure continued grinning.

“Casualties?” questioned Chris.

“No,... there were none, damn it. That girl in the ticket office, she saved 27 people’s lives! She carried them out, one by one in a fireman’s lift across her shoulder! Now she’s a national hero.”

“Errr,... heroine?” Chris corrected him.

“Hmmm? No thanks not right now. She was in all the papers and on the TV. A proper goody goody. You can tell her from me when you see her, she’ll never be welcome down here, huh!”

“Yes,” said Chris, “Yes, I want to go back.”

“No,... no you can’t do that, not now, not after what you did.”

“This can’t be right, you’re telling me this is,... hell?” The evil grin was beginning to annoy Chris. “Noooo, you can’t expect me to believe that, the existence of heaven or hell, or God or the devil, has never been proved!” he remonstrated.

“So,..... where do you think you are?” asked the red man.

For a few moments, Chris was lost for words, then added, “so you are the,... Devil?” He was beginning to believe.

“No, it’s the 21st century down here too. They call me The Big B!”

“Oh yea, and I bet I know what the B stands for!” Chris sniggered at his own joke.

“It stands for Beelzebub!” said the big B, indignantly.

“I am the MC Big B, king of rap!”

What!” demanded Chris in disbelief.

And the Big B leapt into performance.

***“Now that you’re down here, don’t cha have no fear  
Cause we’ll keep you extra warm, man,  
You done the deed, no matter how you plead***

***You got a record, you got form man!  
Let me tell you this....."***

"Stop! Stop!" demanded Chris. He was unimpressed with Big B's talent. "I've heard enough. I want to hear Led Zeppelin, or AC/DC or Bon Jovi, No more rap please," he begged.

They had been walking for what seemed like, only minutes, and Chris could smell smoke and burning, and it was getting very warm. They came to a large desk that had three doors behind it.

"And what's this?" asked Chris.

"This is our reception, it's here we decide where you spend eternity, where you would be best suited, depending on how bad you were in your mortal existence. Behind the red door it is something like the Savoy Hotel in London, with lots of young ladies with no clothes on, running around."

"Ooooooh," Christopher's eyes sparkled.

"The yellow door is an ordinary existence, boring and mundane, with lots of naked, not so young, ladies running about."

"Ahhhhh," Chris was disappointed.

"Yes I know! Sorry about that, but that's how it is down here" he continued, "and the black door will take you to the centre of the earth, the boiler room of my kingdom, and there you will sweat like you've never sweated before, shovelling coal and keeping the fires burning, and no ladies, of any age, with or without clothes, ever go there Ha ha ha!"

There were moments of silence, suddenly Chris shouted,

"No, I want to go back."

"Won't you get it through you head, you cannot!"

"Nobody was hurt, I don't deserve to be here!" demanded Chris.

"Hmmm..... true nobody was hurt, but, "B thought for a while, "yes you didn't kill anyone did you. Damn you! OK,.... I'll make a bargain with you. If you go back and cause a disaster, something big like a plane crash, a liner sinking, a train crash or an earthquake," B was getting really excited, "I will have lots of new customers here to replace you! How about that?"

Would that be good for you young man?" he rubbed his hands and grinned his gravestone grin.

"No I can't do that, I can't kill people or cause people to die."

"But,... you have already tried that, and let me add, failed miserably!"

Chris wondered if he could trick Big B, go back, but not do as he was asked, surely it would be possible.

"OK" said Chris, "maybe I could"

"And,...a," Big B stumbled a little with his words. "You will have a chaperone."

"A what?" questioned Chris.

"Just in case you are thinking of not playing fair, you know, not playing cricket, Marquis of Queensbury rules and all that, scout's honour." B giggled, he pointed to a youth in drab clothing with a hood, standing in front of the black door

"There is one further requirement," Big B continued.

"Oh yea, and what's that," Chris was beginning to worry.

"Fried bread!"

"What?"

"Fried bread, I love the taste of fried bread, and we can't get any down here. Bring me fried bread"

Chris was trying to grasp the unreal situation, and said,

***"OK man, now you got the heat,  
but you can't fry bread,  
'cause you got no wheat!"***

"Stop!" demanded the big B, "I am the king of rap down here." Excuse me," said Chris, "the king of what?"

"Rap!"

"Sorry I misheard you the first time, I thought you said... No it doesn't matter!"

"Go! And bring me fried bread," demanded the big B.

"I'll bring you a bakery if you want! And what about all those nasty calories?" he asked sarcastically.

"Oh that's wonderful, yes please, lots and lots of calories, please," begged Big B.

Moments later Chris found himself standing on a pavement,

with traffic and people rushing by.

It took a moment for him to gather his thoughts and clear his head.

He wondered where he was, as nothing looked familiar. He decided to ask someone, and stopped an elderly lady pushing a shopping trolley.

"Er... Excuse me, what is the name of this road? Please?"

She stopped and looked at him warily. Her fingers squeezed tightly around her handbag as she gathered it to her chest.

"London Road," she said defensively.

"And what city is it?"

"Garn, get away. What are you? Some kind of pervert," she snarled angrily, and hurried away.

Chris was confused. Surely there's no airport nearby, or sea.

"There's no way I can start an earth quake," he said aloud. "I suppose there might be a railway station somewhere around here?"



At that moment he heard a scuffle and a woman yelling. He turned to see the old lady rolling on the ground with a youth in a hood grappling for her handbag. Instantly Chris was running to the spot. He then realised he was, somehow automatically and unintentionally, diving through the air, and grabbing the legs of the youth. Soon he was surrounded by people and shortly after the youth was marched away by a policeman.

Chris brushed himself down and took the thanks and gratitude of the small crowd, and the old lady.

He walked on, and passed an open church door. Inside he could see a figure with a beard, dressed in white. It beckoned him in, and he felt compelled to obey. He sat in a pew next to the figure and thought, "Christ! I must find a police station and hand myself in." He got to his feet and left the church.

As he sat alone in a silent cell, his thoughts were drawn to his parents, what were they thinking of him now? So maybe he would be incarcerated for a time but, he would be released, and then the rest of his life was still before him. As he contemplated his future he began to feel uneasy. It was as though he wasn't alone anymore, and then he heard a voice, angrily saying, "And what about my fried bread?" 22<sup>nd</sup>  
 April 2012

### ***3. The devil walks among us***

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The park was very cold. A cruel northerly wind blew mercilessly across the wide lawns and around every tree trunk, bush, shrub and dandelion.

The snowdrops were cursing the fact that Mother Nature had brought them out so soon, and now they were shivering from the tips of their petals to the depths of their roots.

Christopher sat on a bench, alone. The icy wind penetrated his clothing and flesh and became blunted as it hit every bone in his body, but Chris did not feel it, he was glowing.

Uppermost in his mind with the fact that now, he was out. He

looked at his watch, and mentally logged the fact that it was now 27 minutes since his freedom began, released at last. He took a deep breath and listened as the birds sang.

Chris had been eager for the 7am discharge, and refused a breakfast before his release.

On the bench by his side, was a brown paper parcel tied neatly with white string. It contained toiletries, a clean set of underwear, a pair of socks and shoes, and a neatly folded suit and a white shirt.

This was the regulation parcel for every released prisoner from HMP Strangeways. He had planned for this very moment every day of his 20 months inside. Gone were the dreadlocks, the ear rings, and the joints, and now the crown of his head was beginning to push through his hair. There were many temptations inside but he had managed to stay clear of them all.

A paperboy rode by.

Chris had been given train travel vouchers to get him home and he had decided that his first duty was to visit his parents, hoping he would be welcomed.

An elderly lady passed by, walking her dog.

He had been drawn to the open spaces of the leafy green park, and sat breathing the clean, fresh, unsullied, un-institutional air.

From the far side of the park, a traffic warden was walking in his direction, but Chris' immediate thoughts were to grab some food. The smell of bacon being cooked was wafting towards him from the greasy spoon café, in the street behind. The dark clouds above instantly clung together and the skies were blackened and threatening. The watery sun tried to brighten the scene but struggled in vain.

The warden walked by, and to Chris' surprise, sat next to him on the bench. He inched courteously to one side, to make space.

"Morning," said Chris without looking up. The bitter chill suddenly disappeared and the air became very warm. The warden replied, "Yes, it's a beautiful day, isn't it?"

The voice sounded familiar. Chris turned and was horrified to see the gravestone teeth and the grinning red face of Big B, under the warden's cap.

"Oh, Beelzebub, it's you!" uttered Chris, "I didn't think that you'd be far away."

"Yes, we had a deal, didn't we? and now I have come to collect!"

"No," said Chris, "No chance!, I have had plenty of time to consider what I am going to do, and that doesn't include you, unless, maybe you want some breakfast too?" he smiled at Big B.

"We had a deal, and if it hadn't been for that stupid youth, mugging that old lady instead of keeping an eye on you! Once a mugger always a mugger! Silly little mugger! All I need to do is to push you under a truck or a train, and then I can have your soul back, and you in my kingdom!"

"No, I have decided on my future."

"Oh yes? And what is that?" enquired Big B.

Chris was hesitant, and was now starting to feel the chill for the first time.

"I'm going to join the ministry."

"The what? Ah yes, the ministry of transport. Ha, so you want to be a bus driver then? No, no, I got it, the ministry of agriculture and fisheries?" said Big B in a sarcastic, comic voice. "Or better still the Ministry of war! Yeah that's it. That way you can get me more customers for my kingdom!" You can kill lots of people in the war ministry!"

Chris giggled and said, "No, the ministry, the ministry of the church."

"Oh, ouch, ohhh, don't say that, that really hurts me deep inside, and surely they won't allow that anyway, you've been in prison, you've got a record!"

"Whilst I have been locked away, I haven't just been staring at the walls. If you don't talk to the walls, or yourself, then who do you talk to? You always hope someone is listening. I believed someone was listening. So I was moved to start an Open University course, and there's just a few months left to do. Soon I will apply to join a Theology College. That course is a year-long and I will see if I am really 'called' and then

attend University to get a master's degree. Also, I have been advised that my record will not go against me, it's a hurdle that I could get over."

"Hmmm? You really have given this a lot of thought haven't you?"

Chris nodded, "Yes, I have. I firmly believe that when one door closes, another door opens. That prison door slammed behind me today, and luckily for me the next door had already opened while I was inside. I have a very long road to travel. I know there will be some hurdles, and maybe a fall or two."

"And some temptations," said Big B smiling happily. Chris continued.

"Yes, I'm sure you will trip me if you can, but next today, some breakfast, and then home to see my folks."

Chris stood up, grabbed his parcel, and began walking towards the café. After a few paces, he stopped, and turned back to Big B, "Fancy some nosh?"

The stormy clouds above them parted, and beams of sunshine lit their way as they entered the café. Chris was amazed when he saw Big B's uniform disintegrate. It was instantly replaced with jeans, tee shirt and a fleece.

"Hey! how did you do that?" wondered Chris.

Big B replied, "Well, I couldn't wear that uniform in here, could I?"

They both made their way to the counter. "I am going to have the full English, how about you?" asked Chris.

Big B thought for a few moments and said, "Yes, sounds interesting, but, the root of all evil, I have no money!"

"That's Ok, leave it to me," added Chris.

They ordered full English for two, from the girl with nose and eyebrow piercings and rainbow hair, and then sat at a table near the door.

"So is there nothing I can do to convince you to come with me?" asked Big B, "I'll even let you go in the red door, you know, the 5 star hotel with all the naked young ladies! You know, I will get your soul and your spirit one day!"

"Get behind me Satan!" Chris smiled to himself as he recited

words he had read so many times.

"What did you say?" asked Big B.

Chris ignored him, and said, "I know where my soul and my spirit and my body will be for the next 40 or 50 years, or at least where I want them to be. Maybe then, we will see who has the greater claim on them!"

For once, Big B was lost for words, and so far, the day had not gone as he wanted. They sat in silence.

The café was now almost full, and the smell of body odour from workmen customers was beginning to circulate.

Somebody was smoking, and Big B's nostrils twanged at the thrill of something burning and hot.

The rainbow girl yelled from the counter, "Who ordered the two full English?"

Chris looked at Big B, who slowly and sheepishly raised his hand. The whole café turned to look at him. His complexion drained of blood as he sank low into his seat.

Then she continued, "d'you want it with, or without fried bread?"

27<sup>th</sup> May 2011

## ***4. The Journey home***

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They decided to walk to the station. Now, the sun was warm and high in the sky and traffic was busy on the main road. Big B groaned as they talked. "My belly is aching like a Sunday morning sinner," he said.

"Well! you ate so much didn't you, what do you expect? You certainly didn't need seconds, or thirds! But you couldn't say no, could you?"

"Does this always happen when you eat?" he asked.

"No, only when you have too much, as you did. A full English is usually more than enough for anyone, but you had to have two extra slices of fried bread around a large chunk of black pudding, didn't you?"

"Yes, it didn't look too good at first, but, when you told me what was in it, yes! That black pudding was delicious!"

"Then you had extra baked beans, as well!"

"Hmmm!" Big B seemed un-impressed with baked beans, "They did taste strange, and now I think they are all having a sort of volcanic effect in my gut."

Chris smiled to himself. After a moment's thought he asked, "Tell me, do you every have to go to the...." he paused, unable to find a word that he thought Big B would understand, he continued, "Do you ever need... a leek?"

"A what? Oh! I see what you mean. No! I don't have to do that.

To be honest, I don't normally eat, but you have some wondrous things to feast upon here in this weird world of yours."

"So, if you're going to keep eating that much every time, you'll get enormous," Chris paused again, and then added, "Well I certainly don't want to be anywhere near you when you explode!

That would be rather messy!"

Big B looked at him quizzically, not understanding his meaning.

"They have some very strange food up here in the north, I'll have to let you try a plate of tripe," said Chris.

"What? What's that?" he was curious.

"Tripe is the stomach wall of a cow" he explained.

"Ohhhh, that sounds tasty, it that hot or cold?"

"Oh you can have it hot or cold!" Chris grinned to himself.

Big B was unaware he was being tricked.

"What other foods are there," asked Big B.

"Well, down in London, the cockneys feed on jellied eels, that's chopped pieces of eel, cooked and wrapped in jelly."

"You mean strawberry or blackcurrant?"

"No, no, it's just a savoury jelly. Lots of people like that, but not me. Then there's cockled eels."

"Oh! You mean eels wrapped in..... no, you can't be serious!"

Chris ignored him, and decided to let him remain ignorant of the truth, then eventually added, "No, cockled means marinated in vinegar and other lovely things!

Then over in Wales they eat seaweed!"

"Really? Is that hot or cold?" said Big B breathlessly.

"Well they serve it in various ways, and call it lava bread."

"Lava? Isn't that what comes from volcanoes? I've already got a volcano deep in my insides!"

Big B was deep in thought. Chris wondered if he was planning his next meal. He was. "Next time we eat, I will have some black pudding and cockled eels wrapped in tripe, between two slices of fried lava bread!" He licked his lips enthusiastically.

"No! You can't do that, that's not right, but, I don't know, maybe you can? I really don't know," Chris was confused, trying to picture a plate of what Big B had just described.

Suddenly, and with immense strength, Big B nudged Chris, hip to hip, and Chris found himself somersaulting across the gutter and into the road. At that moment an 18 wheel, 42 ton heavy goods vehicle roared by and Chris fell and bounced off of the mud guard and underneath and between the wheels of the giant juggernaut.

Big B stood motionless, looking down at the lifeless body, as the vehicle roared off into the distance, oblivious of the apparent fatality.

"At last" said Big B aloud.

Several people gathered round and the traffic halted, but nobody went close. A woman pushed through and knelt at Chris' side. She leant forward and gently touched his cheek. His eyes flickered and she moved back. He blinked and coughed and tried to move. He was helped to his feet and he brushed himself down. He turned to thank the woman, but she was gone.

The traffic slowly started again as he got back to the pavement.

"Why did you do that?" he asked Big B.

There was no reply, just a wicked smile.

"So that's how it's going to be, is it? Right! I'll be ready for you next time."

Within a few minutes they were at the station, and Chris made sure not to get too close to the platform edge.

The journey from Manchester was largely uneventful. They sat opposite each other looking out of the window. Cities, towns and countryside rushed by, and the rocking of the train settled them deeper into their seats. Chris was amused when

he noticed Big B close his eyes and begin to doze. Must be the effect of all that food, he thought. The carriage was almost empty, he turned and saw the woman sitting by the window on the far side. She looked familiar then she turned and smiled at him, and he smiled back. He noticed that her coat appeared to be shimmering. He rubbed his eyes and the shimmering disappeared. He fiddled with the newspaper that had slipped down the side of his seat. His eyes scanned the page that he had already read several times. He was tempted to look back at her again, but didn't want her to notice his glance. He looked, but she had gone.

Big B woke and said, "I'm getting hungry."

"What?" quizzed Chris, "It's only a couple of hours since you filled your belly" he said in disgust.

"Are we there yet?" groaned Big B.

"About another 25 minutes to London, then the underground to Waterloo."

"Underground?" Big B's eyes widened, "Do we go, underground? Is it hot down there?"

"No, but it's a bit windy! So you won't be out of place."

The train slowed to a crawl as it pulled into St Albans station. Chris noticed people waiting on the platform, and then he saw her. It was the woman who was in his carriage, just a while back. The woman who had smiled at him. It was only then that it dawned on him; she was the woman who had touched his cheek as he lay in the road. His blood ran cold and the hairs on the back of his neck dug deep into his skin like a million acupuncture needles. The train did not stop. Chris hurriedly got to his feet. "Stop the train, stop it!" he demanded. Big B woke out of another slumber, "What's that? What's wrong?"

Chris fell limply back into his seat, "No, it doesn't matter, it's too late now."

No more was said until they got to London. Big B, stood up and rubbed his hands and grinned his gravestone grin. "Is it time for the underground, now? Are we going down?"

## 5. Going Down

---

St Pancras station is always busy, and this day was no exception. Chris and Big B got off the train, walked down the platform and across the concourse, towards the tube station.

Big B was excited. He was looking at each person as they passed. This made Chris feel uneasy, as anyone could have taken exception, and maybe, could have started some trouble.

He turned to Big B. "Over here is the escalator and we go down it, to get to the tube."

Big B was confused, "What's an escalator?" he asked.

"Hmmm, yes I suppose you've never seen one of those. It's a moving staircase that goes down underground"

Big B smiled, "Ooooh, that's a good idea, so it's a quick and easy way to get people down to my place? Is that it?"

"No, it comes up as well, and they are usually at every station, to move people around quickly."

Big B was even more confused now. They stood at the top and Big B watched people jumping on to the moving track and disappearing into the depths.

"Come on," said Chris, as he stepped onto the machine.

"Quick! Quick!" he urged.

Big B stepped on and fell over. He quickly regained his feet, somewhat flustered, and held on to the moving rail. He was shaky and uncertain at first but, after a few moments he started to smile, realising it was a pleasant sensation. Chris waited at the bottom and grabbed Big B as he stumbled off.

"That was good, let's do it again."

"No, we haven't got time," Chris protested. "If we hang around, we'll miss our connection at Waterloo."

Big B had noticed the moving staircase alongside going up and without hesitation, he jumped on it and began to ascend, and he beamed his gravestone grin back to an impatient and annoyed co-traveller.

Chris took a deep breath and sighed. Eventually Big B came down again, still smiling like a schoolboy after a visit to Santa Claus's Grotto. Chris grabbed him again and dragged him down the passageway.

"That was fun!" said Big B. "Do we see any more of those machines on our way?"

Chris ignored him, thinking to himself 'not if I can help it!' On the tube platform, they waited. Big B was eagerly viewing each person around them. "What's that noise?" he asked. Seconds later the train oozed out of the tunnel and roared into the station. The doors opened and Chris stepped on. He turned to Big B, "Keep Up, keep up," and Big B did as he was told and then asked, "Does this machine take us down further?"

"No" Chris corrected him, "It stays on this level and goes from station to station, and we get off at Waterloo."

Big B's smile slipped as he realised the train wasn't going to 'his place.'

Chris looked at him, "There's one thing we have to sort out before you meet my parents, and that's your name. I can't tell them you are called Big B, it's daft! so we'll have to think of something better."

"What?" protested Big B, "But I am Big B, the king of rap! Remember?"

"Oh yes!, no it has to change."

"And what do you suggest?" enquired the being between names.

Chris mulled over the possible names in his head and mumbled a few to himself, "Lucifer? No we can't call you Lucy! Can we? The reaper? No not that! Beelzebub?, Bub? hmmm Bub? No, there's got to be something wiser than Bub!" Chris smiled, and looked at 'no man' but there wasn't any reaction to his joke.

His train of thought was broken. "Call me Buddy, after all, I am your Buddy now!" proclaimed Buddy.

"That'll be the day!" said Chris. But then he thought, "Well, maybe it'll do for now, it'll be good enough for my mum and dad, I suppose."

Buddy smiled, and his gravestones sparkled.

For a while nothing was said as the train rumbled on, then Buddy asked, "What are those pipes out there, along the wall of the tunnel?"

"Oh those!" Chris decided to have some fun, "Those are the curry pipes!"

"The what?"

"Yes, Curry pipes. All over London there are lots of Indian Restaurants, and those pipes take the curry from the central kitchen to each restaurant!"

"What? All over London?"

"Yep! That's it. All over London!"

"Really? That's very clever," said Buddy thoughtfully, adding, "You mortals are truly strange beings!"

Chris struggled to keep a straight face.

"You should try some curry, you'd like that, it's very hot, some are unbearably hot and others, so hot, you just can't eat them!"

"Oh! Yes! if it's hot then it's for me!" proclaimed Buddy.

"On the other hand," added Chris, "Us humans have a way of disposing of waste matter, but you don't seem to have that facility! Do you?"

"Oh no, it's not a problem for me, I don't need that!"

"Really?" said Chris in total disbelief.

Buddy asked, "What's that rumbling noise?"

Chris thought, "Oh you mean, that's the sound of the wheels of the carriage on the track"

"Hmm! that sounds good, it's a fine beat, a cool rhythm, I feel a rap coming on!"

"Oh no!" Chris began to wince and shrivel in his seat, but there was no escape.

Buddy stood up and started clicking his fingers to the

rhythm. "Come on you people, clap your hands, feel the beat!" The carriage was nearly full. The passengers looked at each other sheepishly, wondering who this loud, red faced fool was. An Asian lady stood up and began wriggling to Buddy's swaying. Two children stood and started waving their hands and before Chris knew it, the captive audience were drawn into a bizarre disbelief on the Northern Line.

**Clap your hands, to the wheels on the track,  
We're goin' all the way, and we're not comin' back,  
Come on move your bodies, and move your legs,  
Show your gravestone, toothpegs.  
Won't cha sway your hips, and raise your hands,  
how can you avoid, my evil plans,  
Dig in your pockets, and pull out your cash,  
Hand it all to me, before I make a dash.**

Soon the whole carriage was up on their feet, and jumping around and dancing like they never believed they could. One old man was waving his stick in the air and an old lady was dancing with her shopping trolley.

"Whatever next?" Chris wondered, and he crumbled.

The train pulled into a station and stopped. The doors opened and Chris grabbed Buddy and hastily dragged him out onto the platform, as the entire carriage of people cheered and applauded loudly. Buddy smiled and waved at them as Chris almost wrenched the coat from his shoulders in an effort to extricate Buddy from his adoring fans. Chris looked around and was pleased to realise, it was Waterloo.

It suddenly dawned on Chris, why is he bothering to wait for Buddy?

If he likes the escalator so much, then leave him down here! Chris hurried to the stairs, alone, and then ran up the escalator. As he crossed Waterloo station, he looked up at the big clock, then looked around and Buddy was nowhere in sight. There was still plenty of time before the 14.50 to Petersfield. He decided to grab a coffee, and as he got to the

stall, he was surprised to see Buddy waiting for him.

"Damnation!" Chris muttered. "And where did you get money for that coffee?" asked Chris.

"Oh, they gave it to me down there, on the underground!"

"You mean you conned it out of them!"

"No, they were happy to give it to me, for my rap!"

"Look" said Chris with determination, "You can stay here if you want. There's lots of people here, and if you push a few under a train, that will make your day won't it?"

Buddy beamed at Chris.

"No! Don't do that!" Chris became embarrassed and turned away.

"You seem to have conveniently forgotten," said Buddy "We had a deal, and I am here to collect, I want your body and your soul! And I think I'll try some of that curry on my fried bread this time!"

29/7/2011

## ***6. Home at last***

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The taxi drew to a halt outside number 18. Chris jumped out of the cab and paid the driver, and then turned to look at the house as the taxi pulled away. Many childhood memories of the house, and of the street, came flooding back. The good times, and the bad times. Chris smiled to himself, and then he heard a noise. He turned to see Buddy grinning at him.

"Yes, I thought you'd be here!" begrudged Chris, "OK, but don't stand too close. I'd hate the people behind those twitching net curtains across the road, to think I've turned gay!"

Buddy said nothing.

"And one more thing, before I go in, or.. before we go in," said Chris, "You must remember they are old people, and you must not and will not upset them, D'you understand?"

Chris stood, staring into Buddy's bloodshot eyes. Buddy smiled, "You mean if we upset them, they might die suddenly?" he grinned.

"No! of course not, you will not up-set them and they will not die, got it?"

A view of Buddy's twinkling gravestones was agreement enough for Chris.

Grenville Road was part of the mid Victorian Bedwell Estate, built for workers from the new railway and flourishing new industrial revolution that hit the area in the mid 1800's, all those long forgotten years ago. But that was then. Today it struggles for life. Most of the houses were originally, two up and two down with a scullery and outside toilet attached to the rear. Over those years, many of the owners had updated their properties, with bathrooms and roof space extra bedrooms, but number 18 hadn't changed much except for a few coats of paint every once in a blue moon. Another coat was well overdue now.

Chris knocked the door of his parent's house, and waited. Nothing happened so he knocked again. The door eased slightly open, as far as the security chain would allow, and an eye peered out at them.

"Who's there?" a voice demanded, "I said who's there?"

"Dad! It's me, Chris!"

"Who?" enquired the voice.

"It's Chris, Christopher, your son"

"No, my son's locked up in prison"

"No! No! It's me, they've let me out, and I'm free now."

A female voice said, "Get out of the way John, who is it?"

She pushed him to one side, released the chain, and gazed into her son's eyes. Momentarily, she was speechless, and then joy beamed all over her face and she hugged him.

"Christopher, it's you, you're home, come on in!" She turned to her husband, "John, bring him in."

"Yes Gretchen," he obeyed.

They were ushered into the back room, and again he was hugged by his mother, and his dad shook his hand.

It was then that his parents noticed Buddy.

"And who's your friend?" his mother asked.

"No! He's not a friend" he had to think quickly, "He's somebody I met in prison, his name is Buddy."

"Oh! Right! Come on, and sit yourselves down," said his mother.

Chris dropped his brown paper parcel on the floor and sat down. Buddy stood, looking out of the window to the garden. "It's good to see you, you're looking well, did they feed you well?" she babbled.

"Yes I'm fine."

"Are you hungry, when did you eat last?" she asked.

"I'm hungry" said Buddy.

Everyone ignored him. Mother continued, "and you've cut off your dreadlocks!"

"Yes, said Chris, "It's not a good idea to be different where I have spent my days recently."

As his mother cooked, Chris told them of his days in Strangeways, and how he had found his direction and decided to join the church.

At first, they were shocked as Chris had never before shown any interest in religion, or the church, and his father was in total disbelief.

They began to eat the food but Buddy didn't really care for it and prodded at it with his fork, and ate very little.

"What is this?" he enquired.

"It's sausage and bubble and squeak. Eat it all up, it'll do you good, put hairs on your chest!"

John tried to sound convincing and was surprised at Buddy's reluctance to eat it.

Buddy looked quizzical, "But I don't want hairs on my chest and I don't want to bubble or squeak."

Mum asked, "Do you want some apple crumble Christopher? And what about you Buddy?"

Chris jumped in quickly, "I will, but Buddy doesn't eat sweet things."

Buddy perked up, "Do you have any curry?" he looked expectantly at mum. Chris shook his head and she walked into the kitchen.

"Look," said Chris, turning to Buddy, "This is not right. You're not human, you're not mortal, you're not of this world, you'd

best go back to where you came from." he added, emphatically.

"Your room is ready for you, it's been ready since you were here last!" said mum.

Chris looked up at her and smiled as he finished his meal. "But we don't have room for your friend, what's his plans?" she asked.

Chris swallowed heavily, "Oh no, he's not staying, he'll have to make his own arrangements! Don't worry about him." Buddy said nothing and looked blankly at Chris, and then back out to the garden.

"So he's not sleeping with you then?" joked John.

"NO! he's not," said an angry Chris.

Mum picked up the dirty plates, cups and saucers and took them into the kitchen. "Shall I bring the table cloth Gretchen?" There was no reply so he, folded the table cloth, and walked into the garden. Watched by Buddy, he shook the crumbs from the cloth.

Buddy asked, "What is your name?"

"Christopher."

"No, what is your last name?" Buddy interrogated.

"Frost"

"What!!! Did you say Faust?"

"No, No, it's Frost!" Chris insisted.

"Oh for a moment there, just a split second, I thought it was a case of

Deja Vu, but, no, I was mistaken"

"Now, listen to me!" Chris said sternly. Buddy turned to see a very serious expression on his face.

"You cannot stay here, we are not going to feed you or put a roof over your head, and you're not getting any money. So you have to go! The best thing would be for you to go back to where you came from, d'you hear me? There's nothing for you here, so just go! And don't give me any of the guff about 'we had a deal', just leave, go now!"

Buddy looked decidedly unhappy, "But.... I was beginning to like it here," he whinnied

"No! Just go, now," Chris pointed to the window and the great outdoors.

Buddy stood slowly, and made his way to the kitchen, looking back just once, then walked on out into the garden.

Chris began to feel pangs of meanness. 'No', he said to himself. 'No, he's not staying!'

He decided to follow Buddy out, to make sure he left the house and the garden.

Chris pointed to the garden gate, and Buddy left.

John was watching from the kitchen door, "Has he gone?"

"Hope so," said Chris.

"Shame, he was quiet likeable, in a weird sort of way."

Chris gave his father a strange look, and then they walked back into the living room and sat down. Chris was quiet and deep in thought, wondering why he had sent Buddy away. It wasn't exactly a 'Christian' thing to do, turn someone in need, away from your door, especially considering the life Chris was contemplating in the church. "No" he remonstrated in his head. "No! he tried to kill me earlier today. If it hadn't been for that woman,.... Now that is another mystery? Who was she? No, no way is he staying here!"

As the evening wore on, the whole matter kept nagging at him. Chris felt bad, and it got worse. He decided to go to bed, and he lay there for hours, unable to sleep.

27/8/2011

## ***7. To shop or not to shop***

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Christopher woke up suddenly and painfully after a restless night. He managed to wash and dress and get downstairs and to make a drink and some toast without much fuss, but, his mind was still occupied with the previous day's problems.

He stood with a mug in one hand and toast in the other, looking out of the window into the garden, and the new day.

He was still feeling very unhappy about sending Buddy away, and then he noticed that the glass in their small greenhouse was all misted. He walked into the garden and up to the

greenhouse and stood, mug and toast in hands, staring at the structure and wondering why it had misted. Suddenly the greenhouse door opened, which made Chris jump. Buddy walked out.

"Oh it's you, you startled me, what are you doing in there, I told you to go!" said Chris.

"Well, it started raining during the night, and I don't do water, so I just popped in there, and it was so warm, I made myself comfy, and fell asleep."

Chris accepted his explanation, grudgingly.

Buddy grabbed the toast from Chris' hand and quickly put it all into his mouth. "Hmmm, that's good, what is it?"

"It was,....toast and Marmite!"

"Yes, I like that! Marrrrrr- mitttte!" said Buddy slowly and deliberately.

"You can't stay here, you must go." Chris realised that he sounded like a record stuck in a groove.

"OK, yes OK, I am going. I'll get some new clothes and I want to eat curry, I must eat curry."

Despite the attempt to murder him the previous day, Chris still felt pangs of guilt and pulled a £20 note from his pocket and gave it to Buddy.

"Then you'll need this."

Buddy took it and smiled and said, "That's evil!"

"Look," said Chris, "the house is going to be empty today. I will be at the library, I've got a paper to finish for my OU studies, my mum's gone to the shops, and Dad's gone to Lords. The house will be empty and all locked up!"

"Lourdes? Is that where they do miracles? When somebody's crippled or maimed? They make them walk again?" asked Buddy.

"Noooo, Its Lords, it's where they play cricket!"

"What's cricket?" asked Buddy.

Chris had no intention of explaining the rules of cricket to him, he didn't have a spare 'forever and a day' so said nothing for a moment then added, "Look, take that money and get some new clothes at one of the charity shops in town, and in the greenhouse is my dad's woolly gardening hat, you'd better wear that to cover those two little bumps on your head. You're

also gonna have to do something about your tail. If anyone sees that they'll have a heart attack!"

"Really?" said Buddy hopefully and enthusiastically.

"No! don't get excited. If that happens, you'll get arrested and put in jail, and you won't want that, believe me! You'd best tuck your tail down inside your trousers, then forward underneath your body, between your legs and up in front, but curl it round somehow, so it's not seen."

Buddy did this reluctantly, and then said, "Goodbye." He turned and left the garden.

Is that it? Chris wondered, has he really gone, he was not convinced.

On his way, Buddy crossed the river bridge and noticed people in canoes floating on the water. There are some good possibilities down there, but I don't like that wet stuff, maybe I'll cause them some problems there on my way back.

The streets were busy with shoppers. People chatting, kids screaming and old people sat on benches in the street. An elderly man with a stick was walking past, and Buddy kicked the stick and stood and smiled as the old man fell to the ground and struggled, like a crab on its back, to regain his feet. "Oh I'm sorry," said Buddy in an unbelievable tone and pretended to help him up. "Are you OK?"

"I'll be alright," said the man,

"Shame" said Buddy, "Shame on me for not looking where I was going." He quickly turned and hurried away grinning from ear to ear.

Soon, he found what looked like a charity shop and went in and came out 20 minutes later. He was now wearing a pair of iridescent lime green shell suit pants and a day glo yellow, high visibility waistcoat, purple wellington boots covered with small designs of orange elephants and a pink feather boa, which, he particularly liked. The kind lady assistant in the shop advised him against the pink bra, saying 'It really wasn't his size.'

He walked on down the street and was pleased, and a little surprised, to be the centre of attention. When young good

looking females, and some of the older ones, stopped to gaze at him, he flicked his tail inside his pants, which made them smile broadly and move closer. As he walked, a strange ache rumbled, with un-divine expectation, in his belly, and he decided he must be hungry. 'I must eat a curry', he decided. Yards further on, he noticed the sign that made his mouth water and saliva began to dribble from the corner of his mouth and his tummy rumbled expectantly. At last, he thought, I can try this curry, and if it's not as hot as they say, I will cause havoc. He walked briskly in through the door, and was instantly shocked and amazed to find he was surrounded by plasma screens, digital cameras, computers and mobile phones. "Oh my God!" he said, "oh no, I don't mean that, I mean, Bloody Hell!"

A young pimply man asked, "Yes sir, can I help you?" Buddy turned immediately and rushed out, looking back at the sign over the shop front. "I'm sure that says Curry's, so why do they sell all that electronic stuff?"

"I want a curry and I will have a curry," he stated.

He marched on, and realised that the young lady followers had now disappeared, and then he smelt a whiff of a strange and interesting aroma. He followed the airborne spicy trail and soon stood outside a building called Taj Mahal Indian Restaurant. This must be it, he agreed with himself. He entered the shop and sat at a table. An Asian gent walked up to him, but before he could speak, Buddy asked, "Do you have Curry?"

"But, sir, this is an Indian restaurant, we certainly do sell curry!"

"I want one that is very hot, the hotter the better!"

"Sir, if you really want it hot? We have a curry that is the hottest in the world!, it's called The Bollywood Burner! would you like that?"

"You mean the hottest in this world!" The Asian waiter gave him an uncertain look. Buddy continued, "Right, I'll have that!, And do you have fried bread?"

"Fried bread sir???" asked the waiter

"No, No, Fried bread!"

"Yes Sir, er,... no sir, we don't have that, sir."

"Oh," said Buddy, "I wanted to spread the curry on fried bread."

He was unhappy, and annoyed to be deprived of his fried bread. He thought aloud, 'If this curry is not as hot as he says, then he will regret it. I will burn this place to the ground, and then they will know what hot, really is!'

Twenty minutes later a plate of steaming hot curry was placed in front of him, together with a jug of water and a glass.

"What's this?" he enquired.

"It's water sir, the curry is very hot, you may need water."

"No, no I don't do water." The Asian left, and Buddy started eating. He rapidly shovelled large spoonfuls of food into his mouth. The plate was soon empty, and Buddy sat back. He felt a strange sensation inside and then began to feel very hot. Soon, very hot became tropical, then equatorial, then unbelievably unbearable! His belly became turbulent, even vociferous.

He quickly grabbed the water jug and poured the contents into his mouth. It sprayed over his face and down his body and onto the floor. Almost instantly the jug was empty, but he needed more.

He looked around, but there was none.

He took a deep breath, and that seemed to ease his discomfort. He continued breathing deeply and he soon felt better but still uncomfortable.

His belly was full and he counted out his last few pennies onto the table.

He had spent nearly all the money on his new apparel and he knew there would not be enough left to pay for the meal.

He spread out 27 pence on the tablecloth.

At that split second, three burly men, burst in through the entrance and up to the two Asian waiters standing by the kitchen door.

One of the men momentarily flashed an identity pass and said, "We are from Her Majesties Dept of Immigration, and suspect that there are people working here, who are illegal aliens."

Two uniformed police officers came into the restaurant, and all of them bundled the waiters into the kitchen.

Buddy had sat and watched the whole episode, and now he was alone.

This, he decided, was his moment, so he quietly stood up, looked down at the coins, and then left un-noticed.

9-9-2011

## ***8. The piper has to be paid***

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Chris drained his second cup of coffee. He had made an extra slice of Marmite toast, and somehow knew that Buddy would still be around, somewhere close. He gazed out of the window at the greenhouse, and thought, "Yes, I'm sure you are still in there. Will I ever be rid of you?"

He expected to see the same misty glass that he had yesterday, but it was not misty, it was different.

He walked out to the green house and saw that the glass was darkened. Was someone expecting an air raid and had blackened out the windows. He struggled to understand exactly what it was. As he opened the door, a wall of offensive odour hit him, and he coughed and recoiled back several steps.

Looking in he saw Buddy lying on the floor, between the tomato grow bags and the cucumber pots. He was writhing and groaning and covered in some strange runny substance.

"Hey, what's wrong?" Buddy ignored him at first, then begrudgingly and painfully uttered, "Awwwww I feel awful." It was then that Chris noticed sliding down the glass were particles of food. He recognised vegetables and chunks of meat.

"Tell me! what's happened?"

"Ohhh! it was horrible, I erupted! It was worse than all the volcanoes in the human world erupting at once."

"What? What do you mean, erupted? You mean you were sick?"

"It all came out, it didn't stop, it just went on forever!"

The whole picture now became very clear to Chris.

"Well what do you expect?" asked Chris, "If you put food in, then it's got to come out sometime! Sooner or later you have to pay the piper!"

"What?" demanded Buddy.

"Pay the piper. Oh, that means that sooner or later you have to face the inevitable consequences of your actions, huh! And boy! Did you! It seems your body and physiology is not that different to mine after all!"

"Awww It just didn't stop, kept coming, out of every orifice, every hole in my body, even holes I didn't know I had."

Chris took a moment to gather his thoughts.

"You mean.... every hole?.... you mean.. "

Buddy belched, and then passed wind.

"Yes, that's it! You seem to have developed extra human parts!"

"No don't be silly, that couldn't possibly happen."

"Oh yes, What did you eat yesterday?"

"Well! I had a curry, and it was very hot!"

"Ah," said Chris knowingly, "anything else?"

"Well,...before that, I had something called a kebab, too."

"Two?"

"Well it may have been three," admitted Buddy.

"What! No fried bread?" said Chris mocking him.

"They didn't sell fried bread in the Taj Mahal" said the miserable Buddy.

"Well that's it, think about it, you did everything a human would do, except fill your belly with beer first"

Buddy groaned loudly.

"And I suppose you weren't in any fit condition to find a woman to spend the night with!"

Chris chuckled to himself.

Buddy groaned again, even louder.

"So now you've got a belly ache, well! let's see what we can do about that. I'll see if mum has got some Alka Seltza."

"Alka what? What's that," quizzed Buddy.

"It's a tablet you put in water and it fizzes, you drink it and the fizziness will settle your belly!"

"No, no I don't do water, well I didn't until yesterday, that curry was hot!"

Buddy rolled over toppling a tomato plant on to him. He pushed it away angrily.

Chris looked down at Buddy and noticed the bumps on his had had almost disappeared. He was very pale, but Chris decided this was because of the way he felt, but now, after a curry, he breaks wind.

"Do you know something? I think you are becoming human!" Buddy looked up in disgust, "You what? No! no way, that can't possibly happen. I don't belong to this world so why would I develop human parts?" Chris was tempted to ask if any other human parts had appeared but didn't quite know how to phrase the question, so he decided to get the drink first. He returned and gave the glass of fizzing water to Buddy, who held it at arms-length.

"Go on, get it down. One big gulp and it's down," urged Chris. Buddy took a deep breath and drunk the contents without stopping.

Realising the drink wasn't quite as bad as he thought it would be, he struggled to stand, and tried to brush the substances and mess from his clothing.

"Hey!" said Chris in belated realisation, "What are you wearing? is that what you bought with the money I gave you? What a waste!" he declared.

For a moment Chris hesitated, then disappeared, soon retuning with a hose, and began to wash down the inside of the greenhouse. The food particles began to move with determined persuasion. "Go easy, it's spraying on me! And I don't do water!" said Buddy.

"Well I think you do now, in fact that water you just drunk is gonna make you feel a lot better." Chris could not resist the temptation and turned the hose on Buddy, who staggered back a step and protested, "Hey, pack that in, stop, stop!" Buddy had no escape, and soon he was clean, but dripping wet and his day-glo, glowed once again.

"And now for the bad news!" said Chris.

"The what? Oh no, not more."

"The bad news is, that your feather boa is now deceased!  
Drowned in your own vomit!"  
Buddy groaned yet again, and sat down heavily onto a tomato  
plant filled grow bag.

## 9. *Over and out*

---

Chris chuckled to himself as he walked away from the green house. He looked back to see Buddy, still dripping wet, and sitting, totally perplexed and confused, on the greenhouse floor.

He started to wind the hose back onto the reel on the back wall of the house, as his mother rushed out of the kitchen door, "Christopher, Christopher, it's your dad!"

"What's my dad, what's up now?" he smiled at her, unsure of what she was about to say.

"There's just been a phone call, he's injured, and been taken to St Cecelia's Hospital."

"What? What happened? He went to cricket, didn't he?" ask Chris.

"Yes, he did, apparently he was hit with a ball," she said.

"OK, get your coat, let's go straight there now."

They rushed into the A&E, out of breath.

Chris grabbed a passing individual dressed in green operating theatre garb.

"I believe you have a Mr Frost in here?" asked Chris.

"Oh yes, he was brought in 30 minutes ago. He's in theatre right now, they are working on him. Take a seat, the doctor will see you shortly," and with that, the speaker disappeared through a transparent swing door.

They sat and waited, and Chris' mother hugged her son and cried.

Suddenly, through the theatre swing door, Buddy appeared.

"Hey, did you know, your dad's in there and they are sticking all sorts of tubes in him?" said Buddy without any thought of his words, and mum burst into loud sobs.

"Oh shut up will you? She's upset enough, and your stupid words are only adding to the problem."

Buddy sat down on the third seat and said no more.

"Anyway," said Chris. "What are you doing here? And how did you get here?"

"I have ways and means," said Buddy, "and besides I wouldn't miss this, is he going to die?"

Mum's tears and sobs got much louder.

"Look, just sit there and shut up. Of course he's not going to die...."

Chris' sentence was unfinished as a doctor asked, "Mrs Frost? Mr. Frost?"

"Yes I'm his son, and this is my mother, his wife."

"Yes, right," said the doctor, "He was brought here in a coma, apparently a cricket ball hit him in the middle of his forehead, we managed to bring him round, and strangely, he said just one word."

"What was that" asked Chris.

"All he said was 'over.'"

"Over? Oh yes he was umpiring the cricket match," confirmed Chris.

"What is cricket?" asked Buddy, but he was ignored.

"Oh, I see," said the doctor, "but then sadly we lost him. He expired 4 minutes ago."

The sobs continued, as the doctor added, "I'm so sorry, we did all we could, If you'd like to see him, you can." Nothing more was said, and he walked away.

Eventually, mum managed to regain some composure.

She looked at Chris and he knew she wanted to see her husband. They moved to the swing door, with Buddy trailing silently behind them.

They stood and looked at dad's body, half covered with a white sheet. He had both of his hands together on his chest, but strangely, his index finger was pointing towards the ceiling. Chris thought to himself. 'Oh well, once an umpire always an umpire, and now it's over and it's out! Aye dad?'

Mother leaned forward and kissed her husband on the red mark on his forehead.

Buddy moved forward, lifted the sheet and looked under it.

"Get away!" shouted Chris and Buddy pulled back.

"Oh, no! I was just checking for rigor mortis."

"What? Get out, get out of here now! Before I kick you out through that door." Buddy exited quickly and waited outside.

Mother hugged Chris again, and after many sobs and silent moments and remembered memories, they slowly turned and walked out.

The next morning early, Chris returned to the hospital to pick up the death certificate and a few personal effects, including a wedding ring, a wallet and a watch. He stood and held them, and wondered, "Is that all there is to a life?"

He started walking out, then stopped and fell heavily into a waiting room seat, and tears ran down his cheeks.

Later that day, Chris and his mother visited a local funeral director, just a few streets away.

"Come in, come in," said a crouched elderly gentleman wearing a black coat that had seen better days. His tired eyes peered out from a wrinkled face, over his half-moon spectacles. Wisps of hair clung to his cranium.

Chris noticed that his shirt collar was dirty and wrinkled.

"I am so sorry to hear of your sadness," he said wringing his hands. "I am Cedric Snoding, the proprietor of this company, I am sure, whatever your requirements are for the deceased, we can find something that will be a suitable finale to such a fine gentleman's life." He smiled at them and continued wringing his hands. Chris shuddered.

He showed them several photograph albums of coffins and caskets and they talked for some time about the arrangements and they decided upon an interment. A strange scented aroma filled the air, "Would you like coffee?" asked Snoding. He disappeared behind a curtain to bring refreshments.

Buddy walked in through the street door. "Do they have lots of bodies in this building?" he asked.

"What are you doing here? You are not wanted, so please go!" demanded Chris. Buddy vanished through the curtain where Snoding had gone.

"What next?" uttered Chris through his gritted teeth, "I really have had enough of that..... creature!!! When we get out of here, I will send him packing, once and for all! Enough is enough," he said in desperation.

Snoding returned with the drinks. They chatted on and finalised the funeral plans.

Once outside, they saw Buddy waiting by an outbuilding.

"Hey, they have lots of bodies in that place there," he whispered and pointed to what looked like a small factory unit behind the front building.

"Listen to me," said Chris with as much determination as he could muster.

"Mum and I are now going home, you will not follow, and you will not be allowed in the house or on the property, including the greenhouse! Do you understand? You must go, Now! And never ever return, Do you hear me? Go back to where you came from!"

"You mean? You mean???" Buddy knew exactly what he meant. Buddy turned, and with his tail tucked neatly between his legs, he started walking away, looking back occasionally, but somehow, he knew this was the end, or was it?

## ***10. The ride away from hell***

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He could see the bus in the distance, so hurriedly checked the change in his pocket. The Bus drew to a halt and the doors swung open, Chris hopped in and asked, "City Centre, please?"

"Certainly sir, that's 95 pence!"

The voice sounded familiar. He looked up but the reddened face didn't match the voice, and the voice smiled an evil smile back at him. He quickly turned and found a seat, and sat

thinking for a moment, where have I heard that voice before? Can it be? He thought no more and found a seat.

The bus rumbled on through the city, and came to the next stop.

A face in the queue waiting also looked very familiar, but the identity of this woman was instantly to the front of his brain.

It's her, he thought, it's her.

She was the woman who had knelt over him after the accident, and then she was on the London train, but, that was so long ago.

She sat on the opposite side of the aisle from him. He tried, awkwardly, to look sideways without turning his head, but it was impossible not to look, so he did. She was looking directly back at him, and smiling.

Shivers ran through his body. He looked again, and without thinking stood up and moved to the seat next to her.

Nervously, he said, "Hello."

"Hello Christopher," she replied.

"Oh, you know my name?"

"But of course!"

"Oh" Chris was lost for words and feeling embarrassed.

She continued, "I have been watching you."

"What?" asked Chris, "OK, so where's the hidden camera? Come on, the game's over now."

"Well, to be correct I have been watching, over you"

"What?" he questioned again in disbelief, "Yea yea! Are you some kind of guardian angel, or something?"

"Well, yes I am," she confessed.

Again Chris was speechless. He looked at her, brown shoulder length hair curled as it hit her shoulder, she was about twenty something, wearing a damson red coat, and a beautiful face, she was very easy on his eye, and he liked what he saw.

She broke the silence, "Who do you think is driving this bus?"

"I don't know, how would I know that? But, yes, he did sound very familiar."

It's your Prince of Darkness, Beelzebub, he hasn't forgotten you, and still wants you. I am here to see that he doesn't get you."

"What? Buddy? That's not him, are you sure? He looks so different."

"Oh yes, he has many disguises, and you never know where he will show up next, but you must always be wary." Her words were reassuring.

"Oh God! Ooops sorry I didn't mean to say that. No! Come on you don't expect me to believe all this nonsense. Guardian angel, devil???, It's not April the first is it?" and then his head cleared and he remembered.

She looked him in the eyes, "If it weren't for me, you would have gone with him after the truck hit you."

He leant forward and touched her hand, "So, really I should thank you."

Her hand was warm and soft. He suddenly pulled back, "Oh, you're warm!"

"Yes, I am human, the same as you!"

"Now let me get this straight, you are here to look after me? is that right? So why?" he questioned.

"You did something wrong and were punished by your human law, but while you were off balance, you tried to end your life so, er, your friend Buddy, wanted to claim you for his bottomless cauldron of fire and brimstone in hell, and because of your decision to enter the church, we couldn't let that happen"

Chris tried to joke, "You mean, up there? In head office?" He pointed to the sky.

The bus jolted suddenly to a stop, and Chris slipped forward. She grabbed him. "Careful there," she said.

He laughed awkwardly and thanked her, but he was not convinced.

"Now wait a minute, this whole thing is incredible, and totally unbelievable. Am I dreaming, or something?" he wondered aloud. After some thought, he continued,

"You know, I was gullible and stupid enough to believe him when he suddenly appeared in my life and I still don't know

why. Surely such a thing is just not, scientifically possible! Is it?" Confused, he took a deep breath.

Suddenly, he realised where the bus was, and stood up, "Oh, this is my stop, I have to get off, are you staying on?"

"Yes, where your friend Buddy goes, I have to go."

"Will I see you again?" he asked knowing he wanted to see her again, every day for the rest of his life.

"Oh yes, I'll be with you now, for the rest of your life."

"Oh, that's just what I was hoping." Chris thought for moment and wondered if she could read his mind.

"Hey," he continued, "I don't even know your name."

"Angelina," she said.

"Angelina," he repeated, "So you're my Angel?"

"Yes, I am your angel, take care."

He turned and slowly left the bus.

He stood outside and watched her as the bus moved away. She smiled at him, and he was frozen to the spot where he stood, and marvelled,

"How can love be so sudden?"

17<sup>th</sup> February 2012

## ***11. The Interviews***

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He made the journey, early one Monday morning and reported to the reception at the Salisbury College Campus.

"Hello," he said, "Christopher Frost, here for the interviews."

"Oh yes," She checked a screen on her desk and said, "Yes, yours is 11.30, you're early. OK, here's an information sheet. I'll get someone to show you to the interview room in Sarum House, and then to your lodgings, Randall?"

He was waiting for her instruction.

"Yes Caroline! Follow me sir."

They crossed the large court yard and walked into a grand Georgian building and stopped by a door. "Here's where the interviews are and your room is up on the second floor, follow me Sir." The small dowdy room, down a long corridor, was stark and simple, a bed, a bible and candle on a small table, a

wardrobe, a chest of drawers and a cross on the wall. Randall left and Christopher started to unpack his case.

Chris sat in the interview room, waiting to be called for his interview.

"You are the last one, number seven," said Randall.

"Oh," said Chris, "I hope that's my lucky number!"

Randall smiled at him, and left as quickly as he had appeared. Chris started reading the sheet he had been given which gave details of the lunch times and other recreational and religious activities he would be expected to get involved with, over the next three days.

In recent months, Christopher had made many friends at his local parish church, St Bartholomew's, and been drafted onto several committees.

He had got to know the vicar, John Griffin, and they had many long talks on all subjects under sun, but with a particular interest in religion and Christopher's chosen future career. However, there was one nagging problem on his mind. If he went away to Theology College, it would leave his ageing mother on her own. The day was saved when his mother's younger sister, who was also a widow, and lived in the north, decided to sell up and move down to share their house, and be company for his mother.

So with that problem solved, it left him to concentrate on his next career step, which was to attend a series of acceptance interviews at the Theology College in Salisbury, and then hopefully start a 30 month course at the college.

The morning and afternoon interviews went well, Chris was happy that he had said the right things. He spent the evening after the meal chatting to several other interviewees and students in the common room, but at about 10pm decided to go to his room and read, before turning in. He settled himself onto the bed and banked up the pillows against the headboard.

After a short while, there was a quiet knock at his door. As he got off the bed the knocking was repeated louder and more urgent. He opened the door and was surprised by his

unexpected visitor. "Angelina! What?" He was unable to finish his question.

Loudly, she whispered, "Let me in, quickly, I don't want to be seen out here."

"You can't come in here," he insisted, but she pushed her way into his room, closed the door, and leaned back on it.

"I'll be in a lot of trouble if anyone finds you here, you'll have to go, you must go." He tried to insist as she turned the key in the lock and stood looking at him, saying nothing.

Suddenly the lights went out and they were in total darkness.

"Oh dear, Wait a minute," he said. "It's lights out at eleven, I've got a match here, somewhere."

His fingers scrambled over the bedside table. Soon, he found the matches and lit the candle. He sat on the bed and looked at her. She unbuttoned her coat, slipped it off, and it fell to the floor.

"What are you doing? You must go!"

She was wearing a loose fitting semi-transparent gossamer thin apricot coloured dress. In the candle light, she appeared to shimmer and glow, her eyes sparkled in the dimness. She smiled at him and he nervously smiled back. "You'll have to go," he urged her, but without too much conviction.

"I am a woman, and this is a woman's body," she stated.

"I had noticed," Chris spluttered and swallowed painfully.

Her fingers slowly eased the dress from her shoulder and it fell to the floor on top of her coat. She stood there completely naked and beautiful. The warm affectionate rays from the candle danced a sensuous tango, happily over the curvaceous terrain of her inviting body.

Chris was breathless for a very long moment.

"And this woman.. has needs," she added. Then she lifted his legs onto the duvet and climbed onto the bed and lay on top of him. The weight of her body on top of him was negligible.

Chris was aroused and submissive and did not resist. She showered kisses over his face and neck, and he found it impossible not to hug her and kiss her face and her ears and enjoy her.

They were both, now oblivious of their surroundings, and were in their own new world of love. That very same new world of

love would have united them in pure ecstasy, had Christopher had time to remove his M&S pajamas.

The problem was very soon dealt with and the night passed pleasantly.

Early next morning, Chris sat alone in the refractory, staring into, and stirring, his cold coffee. He felt numb, and was in total disbelief of what had happened to him, but he could remember everything. He also remembered uttering the words, "I've never had an interview like this before!"

Not only the previous night, but since, and before, his release from prison, life had been so unpredictable, so amazing and utter fantasy. First it was Buddy, and now Angelina. He had pinched himself many times, and was very aware that he was fully awake and they were real, especially after last night.

"Would you like some breakfast sir?" Chris looked up and Randall continued, "There's cereal, fruit, toast, and a cooked breakfast with fried bread."

Christopher took a sudden intake of breath,

"And there's also kippers!" added Randall.

"I'll have the kippers!" said Chris and Randall turned and disappeared into the kitchen.

Chris gazed out of the window, at the surrounding impressive buildings. Moments later, he felt his arm being pulled, "Don't eat the fish, it's been poisoned!" It was Angelina. She pulled him out of his seat and they hurriedly left the room and the building and together, they ran down the long leafy drive.

24<sup>th</sup> February 2012.

## ***12. Corn Talk***

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They ran for a while and then slowed to a walk. At the gate, the town was to the right, and the countryside was to the left. They looked at each other and smiled, and both knew. They turned left.

After several miles, they were surrounded by fields full of

crops.

On one side, a yellow topped fusion of Oil seed rape, and on the other side, a blue haze of a field bursting over with Linseed. Further on, they slowed to look at a windblown field, full of golden corn ready to be cut, and then walked into it. In the middle, they lay down, just the two of them alone, together, immersed in nature. He cuddled her and she kissed him.

"I must be the luckiest man alive!"

"Oh, why's that?" she asked.

"Well, here I am with you, and I couldn't want for more. You say you're here for me, so now I have the most beautiful girl in the world in my arms! What more could any man want?"

"Flatterer! Could that be the devil's tongue in your head," she joked.

"What? No! certainly not the devil's tongue.

Well it's true, you are beautiful! Am I wrong? No!

Are you really here for me?" He didn't answer his own words.

"What do you think?" she parried his question.

"I hope so, but it all seems all too perfect. You say you're human, but no human is perfect, and certainly not me, so what are your imperfections?"

"That's for me to know, and you to find out." She smiled a coy smile.

"Oh, I see. Well, you don't have bad breath. You don't have dirty finger nails and your feet don't smell, so I wonder what. For all I know you might be one of Buddy's creations. Sent by him to lull me into a false sense of security, and when I am not suspecting it, you and he will have me away to the bottom of hell!"

"Don't be silly, Let me put your mind at rest. I am nothing to do with him, on the contrary. You have not known me very long, but I have been watching over you for many years." She stated.

"Really? What? At the cinema too?"

"No, not there, it was when you were hit by the truck and when you were sat in the church.

Your friend Buddy has been trying to get you back to Hades

ever since.”

“Yes, so he has.”

Chris picked a stalk of corn and gripped it in his teeth.

A hawk was circling above in a blue sky. Chris stared up at it.

“So where do you come from, don't you have a family?

Parents or something?”

“I don't know,” she said.

“You don't know, what do you mean? You don't know?”

“Exactly that, I have no memory of more than a few years,” she confessed.

“Oh, That's peculiar, so.....”

He thought for a moment.

“I am very pleased you are here,” he said, “and if that allows me to spend more time with you, that's fine with me!”

There was more silence, as he looked at her.

“So what now?” he asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you say you are with me for the rest of my life, so, what does that mean? Marriage?” he asked.

“You'll have to ask me nicely!”

She kissed him, and he kissed her. For a while they said nothing as they had other things on their minds. Chris struggled to get his belt undone, but eventually managed it. Soon the earth shuddered. Chris wondered if his technique had improved, but they took little notice.

Again the earth moved and the wind roared at them. A whiff of diesel filled Christopher's nostrils. For a third time, and this time much louder, the earth shook and engine sounds brought him out of his ecstasy. Chris looked up, over the corn heads, and was shocked to see a combined harvester heading straight at them. They quickly grabbed their clothes, and half dressed, scrambled, on their knees to the edge of the field and safety.

Finally, they were dressed and looked over at the machine, fully expecting to see a familiar face in the driving seat. But no, it was not Buddy. They could see a woman was driving the harvester, and thought no more of it.

They made their way back to the road and after walking for a further mile, they found a small pub. Their thirsts needed quenching so they went in. They got drinks and sat at the bench table outside the building. The sun was now high above them and very warm. They touched hands across the table, and were happy just sitting there in the mid-day sun, sipping their drinks. Three tattooed and rough looking biker lads came out of the pub and sat at a table nearby.

"I never did get any breakfast, I wonder if they are serving food here?" said Chris. "Would you like to eat?"

She shook her head. "No."

"Will you be OK for a minute?" He glanced at the other table.

She smiled to acknowledge him. "Oh yes," she said quietly.

"Yes of course, I should have known," he punished himself with the thought.

When he returned the lads were sitting at the same table as Angelina. They saw Chris, and stood up and went back to their table. He looked at her enquiringly, and she smiled a knowing smile back at him, and he sat down. He was angry and intent on giving the youths a menacing look, or even a fierce word or two, but as there were three of them, he decided against it.

He sat looking at a menu but felt uneasy at the closeness of the bikers. A motor cycle roared loudly to a halt. The rider removed her helmet, and her black hair cascaded in curls down her back as she shook her head. Chris suddenly realised it was the woman who drove the harvester, and wondered, how can that be? Just 20 minutes ago she was dressed in jeans and T shirt. She turned and stared at him with dark piercing eyes and smiled with one eyebrow raised, which made him feel very uneasy. Her lips were bright red, and she was dressed head to toe in tight fitting black leather. She walked slowly and sat with the biker lads. Chris began to feel even more uncomfortable and fidgety, but Angelina realised and again squeezed his hand reassuringly.

Chris looked down to see what was, or who was, on the menu.

9/3/2012

## 13. Settling down

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Angelina took his hand and gradually pulled him to his feet, and they slowly walked away.

Further down the lane, they laughed and joked about the whole biker incident.

As they talked, they heard the biker's engines in the distance, getting louder.

One by one they roared by the couple. The last rider slowed and looked at them as she passed.

Chris began to feel happier as they all rode away into the distance. However, his reassured confidences was just a little premature.

Yet another biker, came from the pub direction, rode round, and stopped in front of them. Once he had removed his helmet, they could see it was Buddy.

"Oh it's you, I suppose I should have known this was your work," said Chris.

Buddy smiled, and said, "Yes, it is me!, did you think you had lost me? No way, I still have not forgotten that we had a deal, and you reneged on it. I have let you get away with it until now, but soon I will be 'collecting' on our arrangement. Your time in this world is limited."

"What do you mean? I thought you had settled yourself with that undertaker?"

"Yes, I did find that rewarding, I managed to resettle many lost souls, and now they are completely happy or, unhappy as the case may be, in my domain. I now have new friends who you have already met. I feel very at home in their world, your world. You will have met my lady friend? She nearly ran over you in that corn field. Missed you by inches, shame"

"Your what? Your lady friend?" Chris could not believe his ears.

"Yes, that's it. My lady friend, if you can have one then, why can't I?"

"You mean, ... you created her?" said Chris in disbelief.

For a moment there was silence. Buddy smiled at them. "My new friends, ... they are called Hells Angels, how appropriate," said Buddy.

Chris couldn't help but smile, "So is that your plan? To stay with them for the rest of your ... for now?"

"Yes it is, I can mix with them and nobody will suspect a thing. I can still cause lots of havoc, and as I say, I haven't finished with you yet! You are top on my 'things to do' list."

"Oh, so what have you got in mind?" asked Chris.

"That's for me to know and for you find out, and you will, find out very soon."

Chris shrugged his shoulders.

"I have to catch up with the rest now," said Buddy, pointing into the distance.

"And with your lady friend?" ask Chris.

"Yes, and with Lilith, so I'll see ya, see ya very soon!" he said smugly.

Buddy revved his motor and sped away.

Angelina had said nothing. She turned to Chris, "Don't you worry about him, I'll be keeping my eyes open for anything he might try."

"Yes but," groaned Chris, "Whose keeping their eye on you? She slid her arm around him and said, "Don't worry."

Chris began to gain some comfort from her words, and thought that, by now, he knew Buddy well enough, and would be ready for anything that might happen. He did, however, wonder what mischief was in his mind.

They soon got back to the college and Chris had to account for his absence with a small white lie. He explained that during the night he had pains and first thing this morning went to the local A&E for a check-up. Tests were completed and a rumbling appendix was decided upon. Fortunately, the pain had now gone. His story was accepted and the remaining interviews were re-arranged. After a few weeks he was notified that his application had been successful. Ahead of him was a 30 month course at the theology college.

He was meant to be a boarder, but he and Angelina rented a house nearby, and Chris was able to get home when time allowed. He and Angelina made a perfect home for themselves.

Christopher's time at college went by without any real incident to recall, with one exception. During his summer recess, they decided to spend some time at a nearby city by the sea.

Angelina had read about some old ships that were open to the public there, and she revealed that she had a strange fascination for the sea. They decided on a few days visit and found a local hotel. On their first day, aboard the old steamer, they could almost feel the sea spray in their faces. Then to the old 17<sup>th</sup> century galleon that had many flags flying from its masts. Chris explained to her that it was a message about expectation. The third ship was one that was retrieved from the seabed, and was displayed in a large building. Angelina and Chris spent many hours taking in the history of the vessels and enjoying the freedom and atmosphere of the shipyard.

They stopped in a nearby café for some refreshments, then Angelina noticed the tall white tower in the distance. Chris said that the view from the top was amazing. The entire coast and the sprawling city was a glorious sight to see. The decision was made, it would be their next port of call.

As they approached the tower, they could see it was shaped like a billowing sail, tall and white and impressive. Once in the lift, they realised they were alone. Chris pressed the button to ascend. He kissed her tenderly on her cheek. She smiled and they hugged. They were the happiest couple in the world.

Nothing could spoil their wonderful day. 17/8/2012

## ***14. The Catastrophe***

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The lift ascended slowly at first, and gradually increased in speed. It soon felt as though it was going too fast. Christopher gave Angelina a worried look. Suddenly the lift stopped dead. It threw them against the wall and the lights went out. Fortunately, the emergency light functioned automatically, and

gave enough light for Chris to check the small array of buttons on the wall. He couldn't see any kind of emergency button to call for help. Then, the lift started moving up again, and relief settled on Christopher's face. He slid his arm around Angelina and hugged her. He fumbled in his pocket for the small box but the doors opened, and they both walked out onto the first viewing platform.

There was a group of school children and an adult, enjoying the view from the large windows. Chris and Angelina joined them to admire the amazing panorama. He decided that the time right. He pulled a small box from his pocket and opened it. The sparkles from the gem lit up the ceiling like the rotating crystal ball of the Blackpool Tower Ballroom. For a moment she was speechless and breathless, and then whispered, "Christopher."

He started his rehearsed lines. "I have told you many times how much I love you, and I know I will love you to bits for ever, I cannot believe how lucky I am, I hope it's not a dream, but I must ask Angelina, Please will you marry me?" He slipped the ring on her finger, she didn't resist, and then looked up, "Christopher, it's wonderful, just like you, and of course I will marry you." They hugged again and several of the children looked and started giggling.

Several of the youngsters were walking across the glass floor, and laughing and joking and daring their class mates to do the same. After a few minutes Angelina slipped her shoes off and followed them walked, and turned waiting for Chris. She held her hand out to him, and he felt compelled to walk over and join her. As he did, the rigid glass became like quicksand, and in a second he had sunk down to his knees into the strange transparent mixture. Angelina grabbed him and she was able to drag him up and out of his terrifying plight. He lay on the floor, trying to recover and she knelt by him. Everyone was pre-occupied with the casualty, all except two people who watched from a distance. Christopher got to his feet, "I'm alright, it's Ok, what was that, what was wrong with that floor? No, it can't be glass, so what is it?" said Chris. He looked

back at the floor and the now solid transparent floor. It all appeared to be quite normal now. An official rushed up to them, apologized and tried to reassure them. As they talked, the tower shuddered. "What's that now?" asked Chris and worry returned to his face.

Meters below them, the structure began to crumble and break up. The tower began to lean. There was panic in the room with the children screaming and running in all directions. The tower fell, crashing down onto a ferry boat that was docked alongside the tower. Crunching sounds of the structure and the loud yells and groans could be heard as rubble and dust filled the room. Chris was thrown to one end and a desk rolled onto him. He managed to push it away and with difficulty managed to get to his feet. He was surprised when he realised he didn't appear to be injured, so he checked around for Angelina, but she was nowhere in sight. Then he saw a child who was pinned under a metal girder. He tried to lift it but it was impossible.

Angelina had been thrown against the window, which simultaneously shattered into a million pieces. She fell through it and landed below on the ferry boat deck and out of Christopher's sight. In an attempt to cushion her fall she felt a sudden pain in her wrist, and after feeling it, she decided it must be broken. She got to her feet and then noticed the two figures up at the bow of the boat. It was Buddy and his leather clad lady friend Lilith. He called to Angelina, "Now is the time for me to collect on the deal, and it seems I am getting the two of you. It's my lucky day!" And then he burst into a hideous cackling laughter and then into a rap:

***This is the time, for me to collect,  
The seal the deal, and regain respect.  
I've told you before, I won't be beat,  
And where I'm gonna take you, there's a lot a heat,  
We'll all go together, yea, side by side,  
So bring some bread and you'll soon be fried  
It's a place that you'll love, and a place I know well,  
You ask me what it's called, well it rhymes with smell.***

He laughed aloud, and she started running towards him, and rugby tackled him with a flying hug. They lost balance and fell against the side rail, "Hey! Get away, leave me alone. "She did not let go and he struggled vigorously to get away from her. "Now watch out, or we'll both go over the side!" he protested.

His foot slipped and over and down and down and down they plummeted.

Buddy yelled, "No! No!, I don't do water." But it was too late. Angelina smiled broadly and said, "Well you do now! And what better way to christen you than in the heavenly waters of the Solent!"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HarEgLd2n7k>

Christopher slowly opened his eyes. But he couldn't focus on anything at first. He could see the light and a blue haze all around and two shapes very close. For a split second he wondered if Buddy had actually succeeded in his evil plan. He heard a voice. "Christopher, it's alright, it me, Angelina! Everything is fine." He reached out in the direction of the voice, and squeezed her hand. Then he realised there was a strange feeling in his left leg. This brought him fully back into consciousness and the real world. He saw that he was in what looked like a hospital room and she was looking down at him in a bed. "You have hurt your leg," she said, "You were trapped when you tried to release those children from under the wreckage, when something fell and trapped you. Your knee was crushed and leg broken. It's all in a metal brace, a traction frame for a few weeks until it mends, and then they'll probably let you come home."

He was reassured, and looked to the other figure, she added, "This is Doctor Allen, he's the one who has put your leg back together again." He acknowledged the doctor with a nod.

Chris and Angelina chatted for a while, then she left, and he slept.

2/9/2012

## 15. *In bed alone*

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Christopher was in bed, awake and alone. He turned to check the clock, and its luminous hands said 2.37am. He looked to the window and the full moon was staring back at him. The hospital bed was comfortable, but he couldn't wait to get out and be mobile again. Sadly, the frame on his knee and leg would not be removed for at least another week. He longed to cuddle up to Angelina, but she wasn't there.

When all the visitors had gone, there was plenty of time for him to think, and there was a great deal to think about and remember. What an amazing year or more it had been. How he now regretted setting the cinema alight, and then that strange incident when he met that strange being, no that can't be right, did it really happen? Did he really meet Beelzebub? His time in prison was a real eye opener. He had finally decided what he should do with his life, a calling into the church that he believed was right. Then there was the incident falling under the truck, and meeting Angelina. Dad's death was a great shock, but his mum was happier now that her sister had moved in with her. They were good company for each other, and fortunately, they got on well together.

Then there was all that silly business with Buddy. I still don't believe it really happened. But if it didn't then what am I doing here in hospital? What a load of stupid nonsense that was, but getting to know Angelina was wonderful. The college was easy, but Buddy turned up again to spoil things. At least he didn't get us with that combine harvester. Christopher chuckled to himself. And then there was the catastrophe of the tower falling. Oh dear, such a tragedy.

Despite that, he had managed to find time on the day to ask Angelina to marry him, and he was so happy that she had said yes. That made him smile. He felt out to his side, but she still wasn't there.

That's it, he decided, I will wake up in a minute or two. I'll be back at home with mum and dad. He'll be about to leave to umpire another game somewhere. Mum will be pottering about in the garden, and I'll be getting ready for my next shift at the cinema.

He lay there, breathing deeply, waiting, but no, he didn't wake up. He was already very much awake. Can it really of happened, just the way he remembered it. It all sounded so fantastic, and so impossible. So what now? Will Buddy ever show up again? Surely, after his drenching in the glorious waters of the Solent, he is finally gone. Perhaps his fire has finally been extinguished? Let's hope so.

There shouldn't be a problem finishing the college course, hopefully. The tower accident was widely broadcast and they can't refuse me a break while I recover.

The first thing to think about is our wedding. We must fix a date, maybe sometime in the early spring. Once the college is done, it's all a question of finding a parish that will have me. I suppose, to get my spurs, I will have to start at an inner city run down church, and have to try to re-ignite the interest of the locals. But first I must finish at the college, and then marry my darling Angelina.

No, I still haven't woken up. He looked again at the moon and then gradually slipped into slumber, a deep slumber.

He heard Angelina calling him, he turned to her and she took his arm. She was wearing a long white dress. They walked down the path, through a lych gate and into a building. There were lots of people, all standing looking at them as they walked down the aisle and stopped. He was so happy and only had eyes for her, she looked so beautiful.

"Dearly beloved," a voice said, "we are."

Ah yes, thought Chris, it's our marriage.

"gathered here today to join together this man Christopher and this woman Aaaa." The voice stopped as the word became difficult to say. Chris looked round and to his horror, he saw Buddy's head protruding from a dog collar. "No! No not you!"

Chris grabbed Angelina's hand and they ran back down the aisle and out into the church yard. They walked and soon came to Christopher's father's grave. They stopped for a moment to look down at the headstone. A figure in a dark cloak came to the grave side carrying a large shovel. He started digging into the grave. "Hey!" shouted Chris, "Hey, stop that, stop it!" Chris pulled him round and the cloak fell off, revealing Buddy, but it wasn't the Buddy they knew. It was Beelzebub in all his evil glory. His slimy horns sparkled, and he smiled his gravestone grin and let out a cackle of laughter. "No! Get away, no, no I said NO!" Chris shouted at the top of his voice. "No, no, ..."

"Wake up Wake up, it's OK, everything is OK, everything's fine, you're having a nasty dream," said the nurse.

Christopher opened his eyes suddenly and tried to sit up, but he was prevented. He realised there was something holding his leg down and then as his head cleared, he slowly he remembered he was in hospital. "No, oh no, that wasn't a dream, that was a nightmare."

Chris stared at the ceiling, not wanting to fall asleep, ever again.

10-9-2012

## ***16. The Epilogue***

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Christopher was kept in hospital for another three weeks, and then he had to endure a further eight weeks walking around on crutches. That was followed by a few months limping, but eventually, his broken leg and hip injuries healed completely. The college took him back in and he actually managed to finish there without any further major incidents. He thanked heaven for that.

However, before the final day, he and Angelina were married at a small church near to Petersfield, where his parents had been married and he had been christened.

It was the perfect day in early spring, on her birthday, April 15<sup>th</sup>. Many of Christopher's family and friends were there but none of Angelina's family were present. They were all very pleased that there were no uninvited guests.

The inquiry into the collapsing of the tower, seemed to last forever. Christopher was called to recount his experiences at the proceedings and quizzed for several hours. To this day, the actual cause of the falling tower has never been finally explained. Materials used in its construction were blamed by most parties. There was a report that two people were seen falling from the ferry into the water, but despite a thorough search, no bodies were ever found.

Angelina and Christopher made a home for themselves near his mother's house with the intention of keeping an eye on her as she became less mobile.

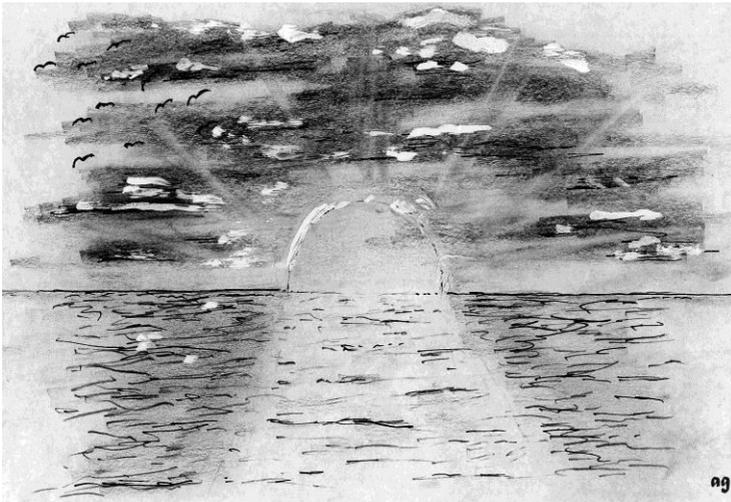
For his first mission into the real world after his ordination, he spent several years as a curate in a working class parish on the outskirts of Manchester. He was away from his new wife and home, but she was often able to make visits to him. Then they had a stroke of luck. He was asked to cover a parish, just a little to the west of Winchester. The elderly incumbent there had died suddenly, and he was asked to oversee three small churches in a large area of countryside. It involved much more travelling than he had been used to, and the hours of the day ran out before he could find time to finish his calls and rest. However, the positive part of the move was that they were able to move into the vicarage near one of his churches.

The phone often rang and he was constantly speaking to his parishioners. There were many christenings, weddings and funerals to conduct and very soon Christopher and his wife were accepted into the local parish scene and assorted activities of the villages. The church authorities made the move to the parish a permanent one, several months later,

after positive reports had got back to them from the locals and after the bishop had visited. Of course he knew that it was always possible that after a few years here, he might be moved onto another parish, but they decided they'd be very happy if they could stay in this area for many years to come.

Christopher had been busy all day, but managed to get back to the vicarage in the late afternoon. It had been a hot day, as the temperature was in the high twenties, unusual even for a British summer. There were a couple of phone calls but otherwise it was strangely quiet.

After dinner Christopher sat on the porch bench, looking down the garden to the river, as the sun began to slide down the cloudless blue evening sky. His mind wondered, and for a second he thought of Buddy. What ever happen to him? Where is he now? Will we ever see him again? Who knows? Angelina brought out two cups of coffee, and they sat there chatting about his day, and then about her day. They had made the house their own with furnishing and drapes, and Chris had even tried his hand at decorating and do it yourself, with mixed results.



They were happy and very contented, and very much in love. "I think I'll drive into Stockbridge tomorrow, pick up some more paint."

"Yes dear," she agreed.

"And some sandpaper and white spirit, and a few brushes."

He made a mental list.

"Oh? What are you planning?" she asked.

"The box room, I'll need to clear that out. There's things there that we'll never need so, much of it can be disposed of and..."

"The box room? Why?" she interrupted him.

"Yes, the box room, well er," he hesitated, "I think er," he hesitated again, "I think it would make the perfect nursery, don't you?"

She smiled at him and glowed with love. He gazed into her soft eyes and thanked God for his angel, his Angelina, for her love.

The sun was now very low on the horizon. They cuddled closer and she rested her head on his shoulder. They could hear the trickling of the river and the sun's golden reflections sparkled from it, as a flock of starlings circled, then flew away and settled in the top of a tall tree on the far side of the river.

The sky slowly grew orange, red, and then maroon, "Look at that sunset," he said, "what have we done to deserve this beautiful vista? It looks like a Turner masterpiece."

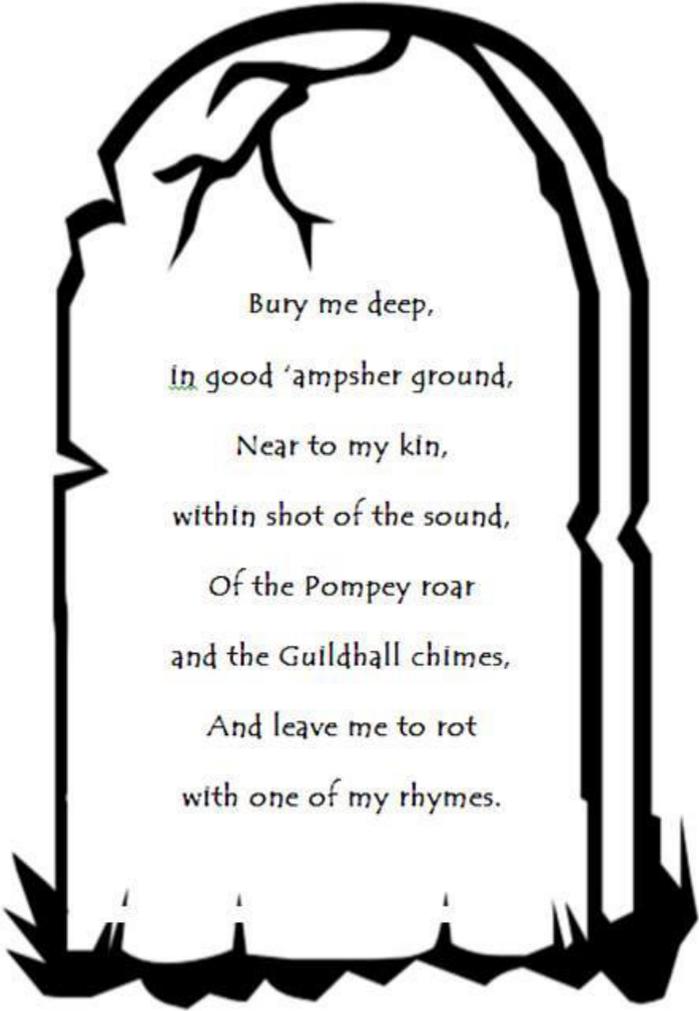
Several nocturnal creatures ventured out searching for food, crickets could be heard chirping, and dragonflies zoomed in, and out, and around and away.

"Hmmm yes," he shivered and then yawned, "Getting just a little chilly now, shall we turn in?"

He stood up and held out a hand to her. They walked into the house, she rinsed the cups and he locked doors and checked several windows, then pulled the curtains, and their day ended peacefully.

The End 12-9-12

## Epitaph



Bury me deep,  
In good 'ampsher ground,  
Near to my kin,  
within shot of the sound,  
Of the Pompey roar  
and the Guildhall chimes,  
And leave me to rot  
with one of my rhymes.

My Six Minute Stories are the work of Portsmouth born Mick Cooper. They have been written over a number of years in local writing groups.

Mick is a former professional musician and photographer and previously compiled books on the History of Portsmouth Football Club, and another about Portsmouth's music history.

He lists H G Wells as a favourite writer, and has previously had his writing published in three Writers@Lovedean anthologies. We hope you enjoy reading these adventures and fantasies.