

Flanagan's Running Club – Issue 23

Introduction

The first rule of Flanagan's Running Club is everyone should be telling everyone they know about Flanagan's Running Club! After all, sharing is caring.

Feel free to forward on to anyone you want, tell people about it the works, and just get them to sign up. It's quick and easy at the website homepage of <http://www.onetruekev.co.uk/> enter the e-mail address and select whether you want Flanagan's Running Club or blog post updates or both and then hit submit.

Can I ask you all a favour, please can you review my book on Inkitt, and the link is below. Even if you don't take time to read it properly, please flick through a few chapters, give it ratings and a review and vote for it please. It may help me get it published.

<https://www.inkitt.com/stories/thriller/201530>

Pub Crawl

The 2019 Pub Crawl is fast approaching. This year it is going to be a trip through Brighton & Hove, and it will be happening on Saturday 22nd June (a week tomorrow). Usual 12pm start, 12 pubs and a curry.

Liam has organised the route, and he has now finalised it, the details are below. The theme is Brighton & Hove, so each of the establishment spell out Brighton or Hove, and the Lion & Lobster provides the ampersand. They aren't being done in alphabetical order, first, because it would mean there wouldn't be time to walk between them all without having to neck every drink, and secondly, because we don't want to start with a curry.

<u>#</u>	<u>Pub</u>	<u>Area</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Food Available?</u>
1	Idle Hands	Brighton Station	12:00	American
2	Good Companions	Seven Dials	13:00	Classic pub grub
3	Open House	London Road Station	14:00	Classic pub grub
4	Holler	London road	14:45	Pizza
5	Office	North Laines	15:40	Thai
6	North Laine	North Laines	16:25	Classic pub grub
7	Ranelagh	Kemptown	17:20	N/A
8	East Street Tap	South Lanes	18:05	Veggie
9	Victory	South Lanes	18:50	Classic pub grub
10	Tempest	Seafront	19:35	Seafood
11	Lion & Lobster	Brighton/Hove border	20:25	Classic pub grub
12	Hove Place	Hove	21:15	Classic pub grub
Curry	Bali Brasserie	Hove	22:00	

On This Day – 14th June

1158 – Munich is founded by Henry the Lion on the banks of the river Isar.

1381 – Richard II of England meets leaders of Peasants' Revolt at Mile End. The Tower of London is stormed by rebels who enter without resistance.

It's Day of Memory for Repressed People in Armenia, and World Blood Donor Day.

365 Reasons To Be Proud To Be A Londoner - Magical Moments in London's History

The Rock Begins To Roll

The first tourists began queuing in the rain outside a Hard Rock Cafe today in 1971 when the very first such restaurant opened its doors in Piccadilly. The memorabilia-clad walls only started in 1979 when Eric Clapton asked the manager to reserve his favourite table by hanging his red Fender guitar above it. Pete Townsend did the same, and within a few years the cafe chain was the largest rock 'n' roll collector in the world. It has an archive of 70,000 items in 175 Hard Rock locations across 53 countries.

Chuck D Presents This Day In Rap And Hip-Hop History

1994 - Arrested Development release their second album "Zingalamaduni" on Chrysalis.

Named after the Swahili word for 'beehive of culture', the group's sophomore effort employed a number of African musical elements. Peaking at #55 on the Billboard 200 and #20 on the R&B chart, the Speech-produced album included the singles "Africa's Inside Me", "United Front", which reached #66 on the R&B chart, and "Ease My Mind", which reached #45 on the Billboard Hot 100.

Births

1961 – Boy George
1969 – Steffi Graf

Deaths

1946 – John Logie Baird
1994 – Henry Mancini

Number 1's

Number 1 single in 1985 - Paul Hardcastle - 19
Number 1 album in 1985 - The Style Council - Our Favourite Shop
Number 1 compilation album in 2007 - Various - Massive R&B - Spring Collection 2007

Drabble

A drabble is a complete story that is exactly one hundred words long.

Stitched Up

The little girl was bored; she'd bribed her big brother into taking her into town with him.

What he didn't know was that she had set him up in the first place.

She'd made it look like he'd drunk all of their parent's drinks cabinet.

When he had got back from the pub with his obnoxious friends and woken her up, she had waited until they had all fallen asleep, and then crept downstairs, tipped most of the alcohol down the sink, and then left the nearly empty bottles leaning against the four of them asleep in the living room.

Joke

A scientist gets on a train to go to New York. His cabin also has a poor farmer in it. To pass the time the scientist decides to play a game with the guy. "I will ask you a question and if you get it wrong, you have to pay me 1 dollar. Then you ask me a question, and if I get it wrong, you get 10 dollars. You ask me a question first." The farmer thinks for a while. "I know. What has three legs, takes 10 hours to climb up a palm tree, and 10 seconds to get back down?" The scientist is confused and thinks long and hard about the question. Finally, the train ride is coming to an end. As it pulls into the station, the scientist takes out 10 dollars and gives it to the farmer. "I don't know. What has 3 legs, takes 10 hours to get up a palm tree and 10 seconds to get back down?" The farmer takes the 10 dollars and puts it into his pocket. He then takes out 1 dollar and hands it to the scientist. "I don't know."

Random Items

Facts

Since the league was started in 1888, only one non-league team has won the FA cup – Tottenham Hotspur in 1901 when they were members of the Southern League.

For his part in the gunpowder plot Guy Fawkes was Hung, Drawn and Quartered, and not burnt.

Thoughts

If a vegetarian eats vegetables, what does a humanitarian eat?

Do married people live longer than single people or does it just SEEM longer?

Forgotten English

Benegroe

To make extremely dark.

Words You Should Know

Tawdry

Cheap and tatty, from the goods sold at medieval fairs in honour of St Audrey (split that as sain taudrey and it makes more sense). The word is used to describe various forms of adornment (tawdry earrings, a tawdry substitute for velvet) or emotion (the tawdry sentimentality of low budget rom-coms).

Popular Expressions – What They Mean And Where We Got Them

Over A Barrel

To be stuck in a helpless position, powerless to get yourself out of it, or to be at someone's mercy.

The phrase is possibly nautical in origin and is said to derive from the practice of draping over a barrel someone who has been rescued from the water when close to drowning, so encouraging the ejection of water from the lungs.

A more likely derivation, however, may be a form of punishment or torture in which the victim is bent over a barrel and beaten.

Flash Fiction

Something between the 100 word shortness of a Drabble, and the short story, these are works of fiction somewhere between five hundred and seven hundred words.

The Chase

It's still there. The beast isn't giving up. I've been chased endlessly. I've run over roads with no regard for traffic. The screech of brakes and honking of horns don't stop my progress as I flee. I run through shops, office building, even houses. Bursting out of fire escapes, scrambling over walls and fences where there are no gates.

I've run into the woods. It's dark enough to hide from prying eyes, but the sound of the beast is always there, just behind me. I can feel the hot breath. I can smell the fetid stench of its innards. Occasionally I feel its touch, a glancing sensation on my legs or arms or head. Yet no matter how hard I try I can never see the beast. It always manages to be lurking outside the field of my vision. Suddenly stopping and spinning on the spot doesn't help.

I emerge from the woods into the light. Rushing across uneven fields of grass and crops I can't identify. I get to the river and plunge headfirst into it. Ducking myself under the water to mask my own smell, to throw the beast off the scent. The river isn't deep. It had been hot and dry for too long now. When I stand up the water only comes up to my thighs. I wade diagonally downstream to come out on the bank below a bridge.

A train rumbles over it as I do, and I run up the side of the bridge and climb over the fence. I run along the tracks going at a steady pace, each stride hitting a concrete sleeper. I run in the opposite direction on the track the departing train had gone by on. I will see the next train coming. I run, I haven't thrown off the beast yet. It still comes, its sound filling my ears. The horn of the passing train blocks it out for a few seconds.

The horn was for me. Get off the tracks it screamed. So I did, down the embankment and over the fence into the back garden of the house at the bottom. I run through the garden, hurdling the bicycles strewn on the patio. I go through the open patio doors and through the house to the front door. Ignoring the cries of the house's occupants.

I increase my speed; I don't look as I run across the main road. More horns, more screeching and then the metallic clang of a crash. I'm not to blame; it is the beast who echoes my every step.

And then I'm home, bursting though the communal door of the block I live in. Up the four flights of stairs and into my flat, slamming the door behind me. Turning the key and locking it before slotting home the additional bolts.

I go to the bathroom. I need to wash myself. I look in the mirror and suddenly I see the beast for the first time. It is there staring back at me.

I am the beast.

Leicester

Random Historic Item

The Jewry Wall

This impressive Roman wall and site of the Roman public baths is the largest surviving wall in Britain. The wall itself was the dividing wall between the Roman baths and the exercise hall that would have stood where St. Nicholas Church stands today.

It is unknown as to the where the name for the wall came from, but it is thought that there are two likely explanations. 1. That it was named after a community of Jews that used to live in the town until 1250 when they were expelled by the town charter brought in by Simon de Montfort, 6th Earl of Leicester. 2. It was associated with the wailing wall in Jerusalem, which was the only surviving wall of the great Jewish temple that was destroyed by the Romans.

The ruins as they are laid out today were excavated during the 1930's, and were at the time thought to have been the forum / marketplace of the Roman town. However the forum / marketplace has since been found to have lay underneath where St. Nicholas Circle is today. It was then found that the ruins were in fact the public baths, and the layout of these can be seen when looking at the ruins from a raised view. The baths themselves would have been in the style of what Turkish baths are like rather than the swimming pool style we know today.

At ground level next to the ruins is the Jewry Wall museum, which houses the Leicestershire archaeological collection, with pieces from prehistoric times right through to medieval times. The upper level(s) of the building houses Vaughan College, the adult education part of Leicester University.

A Leicestershire Church

St Peter's - Belgrave

Set in the ancient Briton settlement of Belgrave, which lies to the north of the city, and was swallowed up by the city during its expansion in the 20th century. There may have been a Saxon church on the site, but there have been no remains found.

The first reference to a church is in 1082, when a much smaller building stood where the south transept of the current church stands. There is a coped tomb in the sanctuary dating from 1170, the font is Norman and some of the cedilla and piscine from the late 12th century can still be seen. Hidden behind the south porch is a 12th century Romanesque doorway built into a 13th century wall, which is due to the fact that it was moved from the original south wall when the aisle was widened. Just inside is a medieval tomb from the 13th century, which has no markings, and no records exist for whom it was made for.

Roger de Belgrave enlarged the church and built the tower during the early 13th century, the bottom part of the tower still remaining from this date, and the Norman archway on the south doorway still remains, covered and protected by the south porch added as a memorial to William Bradley in 1816. The tower originally had a spire but this, and most of the stained glass were damaged and later removed by a gale in 1824. The nave is from the early English period and has four bays, and the clerestory above is built in perpendicular style. The church was restored in 1857 by Ewan Christian, and the Jacobean style pulpit was removed and given to St. Michael's, and replaced with the current stone one.

Inside are a number items from various times through its history, there is a Tudor monument on the north wall of the nave that shows damage likely to have been done to it during the civil war, the parish chest dates from 1550, the communion table in the sanctuary from 1819, the lectern from 1863, and the Chinese style screen across the chancel is from 1879.

The tower has eight bells, which date from 1630, three from 1631, 1871, and three from 1888, the clock dates from 1760, and although it no longer works, the movement is still in the belfry.

Top Ten

The First Ten Elements By Atomic Number

Pos	Element	No	Symbol
1	Hydrogen	1	H

2	Helium	2	He
3	Lithium	3	Li
4	Beryllium	4	Be
5	Boron	5	B
6	Carbon	6	C
7	Nitrogen	7	N
8	Oxygen	8	O
9	Fluorine	9	F
10	Neon	10	Ne

Poetry Corner

The Things I Did As A Child

The things I did as a child.

Climbed up that tree and then couldn't get back down.
 Fell into the boating lake and was almost drowned.
 Deliberately scuffed my shoes and made my mum frown.
 Flew off the roundabout and smacked my head on the ground.
 Knocked over all the candles and set fire to the clown.

The things I did as a child.

I would lick every last crumb from off of my plate.
 Never wore a watch and was always home late.
 My mum pulled her hair out cos I'd made her wait.
 Swung both ways until the hinges fell off the gate.
 Ate the salty maggots that were supposed to be bait.

The things I did as a child.

In the garden I ate all the peas straight from their pods.
 Sat in front of the telly and watched Playschool and Bod.
 And I wondered why my parents sat and prayed to God.
 Freshly baked cakes with my finger I gave a big prod.
 Rode my bike into the stream just because I was a little sod.

The things I did as a child.

Played hide and seek and cheated so I would win.
 Had a tantrum and threw all my toys into the bin.
 Drove my mum to become a big drinker of gin.
 Had a drum set just so I could make a terrible din.
 Then lied at confession, "I committed no sins."

The things I did as a child.

Played with my friends on the railway tracks.
 Knocked off my bike by a car I fell flat on my back.
 Got lippy with my parents and earned a good smack.
 Kicked the football at the window and made it crack.
 Wanted football stickers so stole two hundred packs.

The things I did as a child.

Tipped a bucket of water on my friends as a joke.
 Ate Quality Street so quickly that it made me choke.
 Stressed out my dad so much that he had a stroke.
 Through the fence with a stick I gave the neighbour's dog a poke.
 Played knock door run every night and annoyed all kind of folk.

The things I did as a child.

Now I'm an adult looking back, I'm surprised I'm alive.

Cathedral Fact Files

Cathedral	Southwark Cathedral		
Dedicated To	St Saviour and St Mary Overie (Formerly St Mary)		
Type	Medieval	Architecture	Old English
Religion	COE	Tower / Spire	1 Tower
Site Founded	852	Height (External)	163ft
Church Founded	1220	Height (Internal)	55ft
Bishopric Founded	1905	Length	262ft
Current Bishopric Founded	1905	Width	130ft

Thirty-Three And One Third Revolutions Per Minute

Beastie Boys – Licensed To Ill

Licensed to Ill was the debut studio album by American hip hop group Beastie Boys. It was released on November 15, 1986 by Def Jam and Columbia Records, and became the first rap LP to top the Billboard album chart. It is one of Columbia Records' fastest-selling debut records to date and was certified Diamond by the Recording Industry Association of America in 2015 for shipping over ten million copies in the United States.

The Beastie Boys were an American hip hop group from New York City formed in 1981. The group comprised Michael "Mike D" Diamond, Adam "MCA" Yauch and Adam "Ad-Rock" Horovitz. They were formed as a four-piece hard-core punk band, the Young Aborigines, in 1979 by Mike D, MCA, John Berry and Kate Schellenbach. They appeared on the compilation cassette *New York Thrash*, contributing two songs from their first EP, *Polly Wog Stew*, in 1982. Berry left shortly thereafter and was replaced by Horovitz. After achieving local success with the 1983 experimental hip hop single "Cooky Puss", the Beastie Boys made a full transition to hip hop, and Schellenbach left the group soon after.

The group originally wanted to title the album *Don't Be a Faggot*, but Columbia Records refused to release the album under this title—arguing that it was homophobic—and pressured Russell Simmons, the Beastie Boys' manager and head of Def Jam Recordings at the time, into forcing them to choose another name. Adam Horovitz has since apologized for the album's earlier title saying the group were pressured into giving off an image of bad boys which actually went against the grain of what they had set out to do. It was this acting up that led to a media frenzy when they toured the UK with Run-DMC in 1987. The *Daily Mirror* made up a story saying that they had abused children in wheelchairs at Manchester Airport on their arrival into the country. This led for calls for their shows to be cancelled and for them to be kicked out of the country. The publicity ensured their shows were sold out, but the group were uncomfortable with the stories and settled out of court with the newspaper who paid an undisclosed sum to charities of the Beastie Boys' choice.

Following hot on the heels of RUN-DMC's crossover hit with Aerosmith, "*Walk This Way*", and this album's success could be seen as the moment that hip-hop became mainstream, attracting a new white audience to something that had, on the whole, been considered a novelty. Although the Beastie Boys have always suffered from their initial image that surrounded this album as being white boys dumbing down black cultural music, and probably don't get the respect they deserve.

Kerry King of Slayer made an appearance on the album playing lead guitar on "*No Sleep Till Brooklyn*" and appeared in the music video which is a parody of glam metal. The name of the song itself is a spoof on Motörhead's *No Sleep 'til Hammersmith* album. King's appearance on the track came about because Rick Rubin was producing both bands simultaneously (Slayer's *Reign in Blood* was originally released a month earlier on Def Jam).

The use of rock music throughout the album shows the groups punk roots, and the heavy use of samples from rock, rap, soul and funk was considered ahead of its time. Their follow up album *Paul's Boutique*, recorded at the same time, but released after De La Soul's "*3ft High and Rising*", was considered the zenith of sampling and layering. Both groups were at the forefront of fighting claims for royalties from the gamut of samples included and the change in the industry to pre approving samples rather than dealing with claims post release.

CBS/Fox Video released a video album of the five *Licensed to Ill* videos, plus "*She's on It*" in 1987 to capitalize on the album's success.

The full album cover, front to back, features the Beastie Boys' private jet crashing head-on into the side of a mountain, appearing as an extinguished joint. The idea for the album's cover came from the album's producer, Rick Rubin, after reading the Led Zeppelin biography, *Hammer of the Gods*. The artwork was created by Stephen Byram and World B. Omes. The album cover was featured in Storm Thorgerson's and Aubrey Powell's book, *100 Best Album Covers*. The cover design has since been appropriated by fellow rapper, Eminem, for the cover of his 2018 album, *Kamikaze*. The plane's tail identification number of 3M TA3 reads EAT ME when mirrored.

The album was certified Platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) on February 2, 1987 and eventually was certified Diamond on March 4, 2015. The single "*Brass Monkey*" was certified Gold for shipment of 500,000+ sales. In 2012, in the week following Adam Yauch's death, which subsequently resulted in a surge in sales of Beastie Boys albums, *Licensed to Ill* reached number 1 on Billboard's Catalog Albums chart. The album also re-entered the Billboard 200 chart at number 18.

Track listing

All tracks written by Beastie Boys and Rick Rubin, except where noted.

No. - Title - Writer(s) - Length - Notes

1. - "*Rhymin & Stealin*" - 4:08 - Samples "*When the Levee Breaks*" by Led Zeppelin, "*Sweet Leaf*" by Black Sabbath, "*I Fought the Law*" by The Clash. Sampled by Derek B in "*Bad Young Brother*"
2. - "*The New Style*" - 4:35 - Samples "*Drop the Bomb*" by Trouble Funk, "*Kool Is Back*" by Funk, Inc., "*Peter Piper*" by Run-DMC, "*Two, Three, Break*" by The B-Boys. Third single released from the album. One of the most sampled tracks in history, sampled in 286 (and counting) tracks.
3. - "*She's Crafty*" - 3:35 - Samples "*The Ocean*" by Led Zeppelin. Sixth single released from the album as a double A side with "*Girls*". Third single to hit the UK charts, reaching number 34 and spending 4 weeks on the chart. sampled three times.
4. - "*Posse in Effect*" - 2:26 - Samples "*Catch a Groove*" by Juice, "*Pee-Wee's Dance*" by Joeski Love, "*Change the Beat (Female Version)*" by Beside. Sampled 16 times.
5. - "*Slow Ride*" - 2:57 - Title refers to the Foghat song of the same name. Samples "*Low Rider*" by War, "*Down on the Avenue*" by Fat Larry's Band, "*Take the Money and Run*" by Steve Miller Band. Sampled 6 times.
6. - "*Girls*" - 2:14 - Sixth single released from the album as a double A side with "*She's Crafty*". Third single to hit the UK charts, reaching number 34 and spending 4 weeks on the chart. sampled 110 times and covered 6 times.
7. - "*Fight for Your Right*" - 3:27 - Fourth single released from the album, first to chart in the UK, reaching number 11 and spending 13 weeks on the chart. Sampled 66 times and covered 14 times (including by the abysmal Jedward)
8. - "*No Sleep till Brooklyn*" - 4:07 - Slayer's Kerry King provided the guitar solo. Fifth single released from the album and second to hit the charts, reaching number 14 and spending 7 weeks on the chart. Sampled 21 times and covered 3 times. Most famously spoofed by Morris Minor and the Majors "*Stutter Rap (No Sleep Til Bedtime)*". Interpolated into Prophets of Rage's (Chuck D, B-Real and Rage Against the Machine) "*No Sleep Til Cleveland*"
9. - "*Paul Revere*" - Adam Horowitz, Darryl McDaniels, Rubin, Joseph Simmons - 3:41 - Prominently featured in the track is reversed Roland 808 closed hi-hat, bass, and rimshot. Samples "*It's Yours*" by T La Rock and Jazzy Jay, "*Rocket in the Pocket (Live)*" by Cerrone, "*Hardcore Hip Hop*" by Mantronix. Second single released from the album. Sampled 112 times and covered 5 times.
10. - "*Hold It Now, Hit It*" - 3:26 - Samples "*Take Me to the Mardi Gras*" by Bob James, "*Funky Stuff*" by Kool & the Gang, "*The Return of Leroy Pt. 1*" by The Jimmy Castor Bunch, "*La Di Da Di*" by Doug E. Fresh and Slick Rick, "*Christmas Rappin*" by Kurtis Blow, "*Drop the Bomb*" and "*Let's Get Small*" by Trouble Funk, "*Time to Get Ill*" by Beastie Boys. First single released from the album. Sampled 89 times.
11. - "*Brass Monkey*" - 2:37 - Samples "*Bring It Here*" by Wild Sugar. Sampled 12 times.
12. - "*Slow and Low*" - McDaniels, Rubin, Simmons - 3:38 - Samples "*8th Wonder*" by Sugarhill Gang, "*Flick of the Switch*" by AC/DC. Sampled 76 times and covered by Run-DMC
13. - "*Time to Get Ill*" - 3:37 - Samples "*I'm Gonna Love You Just a Little More Baby*" by Barry White, "*Down on the Corner*" by Creedence Clearwater Revival, "*Custard Pie*" by Led Zeppelin, "*I Love Rock 'n' Roll*" by Joan Jett & the Blackhearts, "*Nothing From Nothing*" by Billy Preston, "*Gucci Time*" by Schoolly D, "*Mister Ed*" by Jay Livingston, "*Take the Money and Run*" by Steve Miller Band, "*Flick of the Switch*" by AC/DC, "*Green Acres*" by Vic Mizzy, Eddie Albert and Eva Gabor, "*Rocket in the Pocket (Live)*" by Cerrone, "*The Party Scene*" by The Russell Brothers, "*Funky Stuff*" by Kool & the Gang, "*Jam on the Groove*" by Ralph MacDonald. Sampled 33 times.

Personnel

Beastie Boys – producers

Joe Blaney – mixing

Steven Ett – audio engineer

Kerry King – lead guitar on "*No Sleep till Brooklyn*"

Rick Rubin – producer

Steve Byram – art direction

Sunny Bak – photography

World B. Omes (David Gambale) – cover art

Nelson Keene Carse – trombone

Danny Lipman – trumpet

Tony Orbach – tenor saxophone

Charts

Chart - Peak position

Australia - 62

US Billboard 200 - 1

US Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums (Billboard) - 2

Club Fact File

Los Angeles Rams	
Founded	1936
First Season Played	1936
First Season in NFL	1937
Ground	Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum
Capacity	78,467
Previous Stadium(s)	Cleveland Stadium, League Park, Shaw Stadium, Anaheim Stadium, Busch Memorial Stadium, The Dome at America's Centre
Previous Names	Cleveland Rams, St Louis Rams
Trophies	
NFL Champions	1945, 1951
Superbowl Winners	2000
NFC Champions	1980, 2000, 2002, 2019
NFC West Division Winners	1973, 1974, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1985, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2018
NFL West Division Winners	1945, 1949, 1950, 1951, 1955
NFL West (Coastal) Division Winners	1967, 1969
Wildcard Playoff Berths	1952, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1989, 2004, 2017
League Seasons	
Seasons in American Football League	1
Seasons in NFL/AFL	81
Seasons in NFC	49
Seasons in NFL West Division	29
Seasons in NFL West (Coastal) Division	3
Seasons in NFC West Division	49

Story Time

Burning Issues – Part 1

Cremation Day

Mark stood staring at the smouldering wreck of his car. Well technically it wasn't his car yet, but with no siblings, it would be when his father's will was finalised. Though looking at what was left of it, it wasn't ever going to be his car. The fact that it had been burnt out in the crematorium car park whilst his father was being burnt himself, was causing Mark palpitations.

His father had been dead for nearly a month. Stabbed in a random attack in the local chippy. The autopsy required had meant it had taken a while for the police to release the body. They were no closer to finding a suspect than they had been the evening it happened. The choice of cremation for his father had meant they had kept the body and done every possible test and inspection they could think of. There is no exhuming a cremated corpse after all.

Mark had heard the sirens when he was in the service. He had thought nothing of them. Gilroes was stuck between New Park and Beaumont Leys, there was always something going down in those estates. He hadn't paid much mind to the smoke he could see when in the garden of remembrance. Who wouldn't expect smoke at a crematorium? He had thought back to the childhood joke,

Teacher, "Why are you late Johnny?" "My dad was caught in a fire." "Oh, that sounds terrible, was he badly burnt?" "Yeah, they don't fuck around at the crematorium."

He had tried to suppress the smile he knew was trying to form, and stifled the laughter that wanted to come with it. The distant relatives wouldn't approve, and as for his father's cronies, well even after knowing them all his life, they still scared the living shit out of him. They were all off their rockers.

Mark was staring at the remains of his father's Alfa Romeo, that he had only got a chance to drive the twice, when Stan put a hand on his shoulder and asked,

"Do you need a lift son?"

The last thing Mark needed was a lift from one of his father's cronies. He never expected to make it alive to the other end of the journey whenever he got in one of their cars. Yet today of all days, he couldn't be seen to showing them any disrespect, no matter how much they deserved it. So he just nodded and followed Stan to his car. The police had arrived and wanted to speak to Mark about the fire, but Bill and Cliff, another couple of his father's cronies, had persuaded the police to try at a more appropriate time. The police had decided not to push the issue. People very rarely did where his father's cronies were concerned.

The wake was being held at the Northfields Community Centre. Mark had grown up in a house on Jubilee Gardens, less than two minutes-walk away from the community centre on Brighton Road. He wasn't looking forward to this at all. When he had left home to go to university in Manchester, he had left Northfields for ever. It had been too much of a rough hole for him as a sensitive child. His father had tried to toughen him up, but Mark just wasn't cut out to live there and so he never went back. He only survived the estate because of who his father was, and in many ways Mark had resented him for that. It had taken him a lot of time to adjust, only to find himself living in just such an area when he finished his studies and started work. Hulme was just as bad, if not worse. Then he found that his upbringing helped him blend in.

For nearly twenty years, from the moment he left to go to university, Mark hadn't gone back to Leicester at all, let alone to Northfields. Then, five years ago he had got a job with Bostik, and within six months had got the offer of a promotion. One that came with relocation to their factory and offices in Leicester. Those offices were just the other side of the train tracks from where he had grown up. If it had been any other location in the country he would have snatched their hands off immediately. It was only the fact that he was in the process of divorcing Lisa that made his mind up. He would be able to start over, and so he moved back to Leicester. His father had moved as well, finally coming off the estate, and as had most of his cronies, he had moved to the new Hamilton estate. Still close enough to their old haunts, yet now in posher and newer houses.

Mark had found a flat in Scraftoft, one of the villages that surrounded the city. There was no clear demarcation between them anymore. Leicester's urban sprawl having eaten them all up since the seventies, with only the header on the council tax bills to define the difference. Transport links into the city were good from there. This was mainly because of the campus at Scraftoft that De Montfort University had there. There were regular buses at all times of the day and night. The buses went past the top of Forest Road as well, so it would only be a short walk from there into work. Even if part of it was through the edge of Northfields.

Once back in Leicester, Mark began to see his father again. He went round to the new house a couple of times, but more often than not it would be at The Willow or The Humberstone. Most of his father's old drinking dens had been closed down, converted or demolished. The Salutation, The Naseby, The Running Fox, The Jockey, The Gipsy, The Full Moon, The Albert, The Ox, The Windmill; all gone. The Wyvern had somehow managed to survive, but for some reason it was never a pub they went to. Even though these remaining pubs were a bit more rural than the old-school dumps his father had favoured, Mark still never felt entirely comfortable in them.

In fact he never really felt comfortable with his father at all. Despite having a good job and a decent enough life he realised he was considered somewhat of a failure in his father's eyes. The lack of grandchildren produced hadn't helped, but there was little he could do about that now.

The neighbourhood centre wasn't as run down as Mark had been expecting it to be. It looked like it had been decorated recently. There were no signs of graffiti on the walls. He surmised it must have been sandblasted recently. Either that, or the local youths had other pastimes these days that didn't involve tagging anything that didn't move.

As he looked at the neighbourhood centre and thought about the local youths, he remembered a couple of teenage memories of his own. The first was when he was thirteen. He had been on his way back from playing pool in the Playbarn and had stopped at the pelican crossing just before the inner ring swung around from Gipsy Lane in to Victoria Road East. The lights had changed to stop the cars and he had started to cross when four kids older than him, ones he knew but stayed away from, ran out from Tomlin Road. They jacked up one of the cars waiting at the lights, removed the rear wheel, and disappeared with it back into the estate. It had been done in about the time it had taken Mark to cross the road. They would have made a crack Formula 1 pit lane crew. The driver had been too scared to get out of the car, and it sat there blocking the road until the police turned up some time later.

The second incident was five years on from the first. Mark was playing a charity football game on the pitch backing onto the Humberstone Heights Golf Course. It was now one of the pitches belonging to the Emerald Club, something his father had not been impressed with; he never had liked the Irish. Mark had tried to tell others taking part in the game not to drive there if at all possible, and certainly not to bring anything valuable with them. Most had thought he was exaggerating, especially when he told them the tale about the car having its wheel removed whilst at

traffic lights. Yet, the game hadn't even kicked off when two local kids had ran on to the pitch, nicked a corner flag each and ran off onto the golf course beyond with them. During the game the dressing rooms were robbed, and two players had their car tyres slashed. The other players had been less than impressed when Mark had commented 'I told you so!' Some going as far as blaming him, saying he'd got his mates to do the damage. Yet this was the life when living in Northfields.

Back at the neighbourhood centre in the present day, Mark walked inside. It was packed. The reasonably sized congregation of about fifty from the crematorium had swelled to at least five times that. Mark didn't know how many people the room was supposed to hold, but he suspected it was a lot less than the actual volume of people crammed in. There were tables laid out all the way down the left hand side of the room. Foldaway ones, that in normal circumstances would be quite stable, but they were all sagging under the sheer volume of food piled up on them. Piled higher than his head in some cases. He didn't know who had sorted the food out, but they had done enough for the proverbial five thousand. And then some. The far corner of the room would have put a local off-license to shame. Crates of lagers, ales, ciders, soft drinks, cases of wine and spirits were piled almost to the ceiling, and still he could see people bringing more in through a fire door propped open by a keg of beer.

Mark looked at the food and drink and though it would take a crowd ten times the size of the one crammed in the centre to eat and drink their way through all of this. And it would take them until the weekend to do so. Someone thrust a can of Stella into his hand, but he didn't see who. He wasn't intending to drink, but with no car to drive, he didn't think it would matter now.

He made his way over to the mountainous tables of food. There was a three foot high pile of cheese sarnies covering half of one table; next to it sat a similar pile of ham sarnies. They were all cut in different shapes and sizes on different types of bread and piled up haphazardly. He imagined an army of workers in their own little kitchens this morning preparing all these sarnies. There were more piles of other flavours on different tables. He hoped that whatever was left would be taken to homeless charities or given away locally and not just binned off.

He picked up a couple of each of the ham and cheese sarnies and tried to find a quiet spot to eat them. One where he could have a look around the room and see if there was anyone he recognised as worth speaking to. He leant against a stack of lager and had a good look around, whilst munching through the sarnies he'd picked up. He found he didn't recognise a lot of the people in the room, and only vaguely recognised a lot more. He knew his father would have had a lot of acquaintances, and that he'd been estranged from that life for a couple of decades, and only been on the periphery of it for the last five, but he had thought he would know more of the people here than he did. Every person he glanced at had a drink in their hand. Even the kids seemed to have cans of something alcoholic in their hands, and no one seemed to bat an eyelid at any of it.

An older woman, with black hair, whitening at the temples, approached him. As with most women there she was smartly dressed in a dark skirt suit and plain blouse. She appeared not to be wearing any make-up, and had a ruddy complexion. The fact that her eyes were red would suggest she had gone without make-up knowing there would be tears, and therefore was avoiding the streaky make-up look. Mark didn't know her name; she had been one of the handful of mourners at the crematorium that he hadn't recognised.

She walked right up to him, "Hello Mark, I just wanted to give you my condolences."

Mark wondered if he should know who she was.

"I'm sorry; you have me at a disadvantage. You know who I am, but unfortunately I don't know your name."

The woman frowned, and it made her look ten years older.

"Oh. Of course m'duck, I don't suppose you would. I'm Shirley, I was a friend of your mum's for years, and by extension a friend of your dad as well. Especially so since your mum died."

It was Mark's turn to frown. That's all he needed, one of his father's floozies in his face. No doubt there would have been a whole host of them hovering around when his mother had died. That was another bitter memory. She had died nearly twenty years ago, having only just turned fifty. He had been on holiday abroad with his ex-wife when she had died. Back then there wasn't any easy way of getting hold of people if they were out of the country, no one really had mobiles, and if they did, they certainly wouldn't have worked in the Azores. He had gotten back from holiday to a number of terse answerphone messages, and an invite to his mother's funeral that had taken place two days before he had arrived back in the country. He hadn't spoken to his father for years after that debacle, and the fact they couldn't wait for a few extra days.

Shirley was talking again, but Mark wasn't listening. He had tuned it all out. He was watching the progression through the room of a couple of uniformed cops. A hole opened up in the crowded room to let them pass through, as if no one wanted to have the taint of touching the cops. A few words were exchanged, well, the cops would say something and then someone would shake their head. Then someone turned and pointed right at him. The cops

headed in his direction only for Stan, Bill, Cliff and a couple of others to form a line preventing them from reaching him. After a few heated words the line broke apart to let the cops through and those that had formed the line fell in behind the cops as they got to Mark.

“Are you Mark Taylor?” The elder of the two asked him. Mark nodded, and the copper continued. “We’re here because there’s some bad news. We understand it’s not the best of times, but there’s been a fire.”

Mark replied instantly, “Yes, I know, I saw the burnt out shell of the car at the crematorium. Your colleagues said they would be in touch tomorrow about it.”

The cops looked at each other uneasily before the older one started up again.

“Sorry sir, we don’t know anything about any car at the crematorium.”

“Then why are you here?”

“It’s about the fire at you deceased father’s house this morning.”

Mark stood there opened mouthed, shocked by what he’d just heard. One of his father’s cronies asked what happened as Mark remained unable to speak. The copper gave him a look before carrying on speaking to Mark. Mark meanwhile had noticed that the noise in the room had stopped. Moments before there had been the buzz of chatter, dozens of conversations taking place at the same time. Now the only voice in the room was that of the copper in front of him.

“A fire was reported at your father’s house at 11.52am by an unknown caller. The fire brigade arrived at 12.04pm and were faced by what they described as “an inferno”. They have now managed to put the fire out. However the house is now a burnt out shell. They are investigating the cause of the fire, but are declaring it suspicious, and have declared the property unsafe to enter by the general public.”

Mark still didn’t say anything, but there were others who were willing to ask questions, “Was it arson?” and “How could a fire rip through a house so quickly?”

The cops weren’t really in a position to answer those questions, deflecting those questions to the fire investigators. They did have additional questions of their own. Mark knew what was coming, it was understandable in the circumstances and it was something he had been thinking about since seeing the burnt out car earlier. With a second fire, those questions were going to be even more valid. There was far too much happening for it to be a coincidence.

“I’m sorry to have to ask this sir, but do you know of anyone who might have started the fire on purpose. Anyone with a grudge perhaps, any enemies?”

Stan jumped in on that immediately. “Take a look around you daft sods. Look at the amount of people here for the man’s wake; does it look like the turnout of a man with enemies?”

The copper didn’t flinch or back down. “It looks like the turnout for a man with a lot of friends. That doesn’t mean he couldn’t have had some enemies as well.”

Mark spoke for the first time since he had seen the cops crossing the room. “Yes, he probably did have enemies.”

The cronies all tried to jump in and interrupt, but Mark carried on ignoring them.

“He was well known around here, always was. I dare say he was well known by your lot as well. I know he wasn’t an angel. There must have been several people he pissed off over the years, but I never really knew him well enough to be able to say who they might be. It can’t be a coincidence that his house and car were burnt to a crisp on the same day, and at the same time he was being cremated. Someone is obviously trying to send a message. However, who from, and who to are a mystery to me. Perhaps some of his long term friends here might be able to give you a better idea.”

Mark had moved his arm to indicate the cronies that had gathered around as he spoke the last sentence. Yet as he was saying it they all evaporated back into the crowd.

“If there’s nothing else, I’m going outside. I want some space, and some time to take this all in.”

The cops let him go and watched him head for the still propped open fire escape, before turning to try and find out any of his father’s cronies to ask them some more questions.

Mark didn't stop moving once he got outside, he just kept on walking. Out of the community centre grounds, up Brighton Road, turning to pass the old Towers Hospital, then up past the golf course, over the top of the hill, down to the end of Gipsy Road, and then back up the hill into Humberstone village. He kept going, through the village, cutting across the park down to Scrafto Lane and then all the way up to his flat.

He opened the door and kicked his shoes off as he picked up the post. In amongst the bills was a scruffy envelope with printed words spelling out his name and address stuck to the front of it. The words looked like they had all been cut out of the Mercury. He opened the envelope and a single piece of paper was folded inside. Upon it, the words

“None of them were accidents.”

Glued to it. Well, no shit Sherlock thought Mark, before he wondered if the words meant more than just the morning's fires. Did it also mean his father's death wasn't just a random stabbing?

He checked the sheet of paper and the envelope, but there was nothing else written or stuck to them. It was an oblique message, was it trying to say something else besides they weren't accidents? He knew he should probably call the police about the letter, but he couldn't be arsed right now. He wanted some peace and quiet. Besides, they were supposed to be contacting him tomorrow about the car. And probably the house now as well. They would have more to talk about now.

He changed out of his suit into shorts and a t-shirt and flopped down on the sofa. He thought about putting the telly on, but at this time on a weekday there would just be a load of crap on. He didn't feel in the mood to watch anything he'd recorded. He picked up a newspaper and flicked through it, not really reading it, just going through the motions to pass a few minutes. Once bored of that he slung it across the sofa and closed his eyes.

Dilbert



27/09/2018

Epilogue

If you want to catch up on old issues, Drabbles I've had published, or the random scribbling from a bored mind on my blog then they are all available at <http://www.onetruekev.co.uk/> there are links to a number of older publications I have done in the past, with more of the old stuff being added as time goes by.

Pens are available in green or yellow if you ask nicely.

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