

Flanagan's Running Club – Issue 71

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. Details of how to sign up is in the epilogue.

There is no need to panic, there is no actual running involved, it is not a running club in that sense. The title is made up from extending the title of my favourite book – Flanagan's Run by Tom McNab.

So, sit back, grab a cup of coffee (or beer or wine or whatever), and enjoy the read.

On This Day – 17th May

1536 – George Boleyn, 2nd Viscount Rochford and four other men are executed for treason.

1536 – Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn's marriage is annulled.

1756 – Seven Years' War formally begins when Great Britain declares war on France

1990 – The General Assembly of the World Health Organization (WHO) eliminates homosexuality from the list of psychiatric diseases.

2004 – The first legal same-sex marriages in the U.S. are performed in the state of Massachusetts.

Children's Day (Norway)

International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia

World Hypertension Day

World Information Society Day

Births

1911 – Maureen O'Sullivan

1936 – Dennis Hopper

1956 – Sugar Ray Leonard

1961 – Enya

1974 – Andrea Corr

Deaths

1510 – Sandro Botticelli

2022 – Vangelis

Number 1's

Number 1 single in 2013 – Daft Punk feat Pharrell Williams – Get Lucky

Number 1 album in 1981 – Adam & The Ants – Kings Of The Wild Frontier

Number 1 compilation album in 1994 – Various – Dance Zone Level 1

#vss365

A short story in 280 characters or less, based on a prompt word on Twitter

It'd been days since he'd seen a building. The #church appeared through the mist beckoning him. It stood alone with no other buildings around.

Bright lights shone from inside, and it felt welcoming to him.

He entered, the lights went off and the door slammed behind him.

#vss365

Joke

A third-rate magician is doing magic shows on a second-rate cruise ship. The pay is good, the accommodation is comfortable, the food is excellent, and the two show a day workload is easy. The mainly elderly audience seem to enjoy his show which is unoriginal but has the polish of hundreds of repetitions. All in all, it's started out as a great gig except for one glaring issue. The captain has a talking parrot that he brings to every show. It has worked out how all the tricks

are done and gives away his secrets to the audience after every trick. "It's a fake water jug Squarrrrk!" "The rabbit is under his hat Squarrrrk!" "The girl is hiding under a trap door Squarrrrk!" Now the audience finds this hilarious. So instead of coming to see a magic show the crowds are coming to see him being humiliated by a parrot, two shows a day, 7 days a week. Utterly depressed and desperate, the magician struggles to find a spectacular new trick to wow the crowd and that the parrot can't work out. He eventually announces an elaborate disappearing trick involving pyrotechnics and a ring of fire, however the first night he tries it, he accidentally ignites a nearby gas line causing a catastrophic chain of explosions that causes the ship to break apart and sink almost immediately. The next morning the sun rises on an empty ocean except for a single piece of shattered lifeboat with the magician clinging to one end and the parrot perched at the other end out of reach. The magician glares at the parrot and the parrot stares back, but not a word is said. This goes on for a day, then another day. On the third day the parrot finally breaks the silence. "OK I give up. Where's the ship?"

Drabble

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

Who Cares If It's Haunted

They had tried to dissuade him from buying the house, telling him it was built over the top of an ancient cemetery. He had been told the house was haunted, and that was why it was so cheap. But he didn't care. He had been searching for this place for more than thirty years. He would have paid ten times the price they were asking for it if necessary.

He knew that buried underneath his new property was the grave of Eadwig, and that in that grave lay the long-lost treasure of Eadwig. It was worth tens of millions.

Random Items

Facts

A slug can stretch itself to eleven times its body length.

The Eurythmics only had ten top ten hits, but every one of them charted in a different position, meaning that they had hits that charted at 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 & 10!

The most by a male is only sixteen.

Thoughts

You can catch more flies with honey than vinegar, assuming you want to catch flies.

Television is called a medium because it is neither rare nor well done

Everybody is ignorant. Only on different subjects

Random Top Ten

The ten countries with the furthest distance between extreme points of the country.

Rank	Country	Distance between extreme points
1	Russia	Cape Maly Utrish (Black Sea) to Cape Lopatka (Kamchatka): 7,910 km (4,915 mi)
2	Canada	Border with Alaska (Arctic Ocean) to Baccaro Point, Nova Scotia: 5,010 km (3,113 mi)
3	China	Border with Afghanistan to eastern border with Russia: 4,970 km (3,088 mi)
4	United States	Quoddy Head, Maine to Point Arena, California: 4,662 km (2,897 mi)
5	Brazil	Border with Uruguay (Atlantic) to tripoint with Venezuela and Guyana: 4,382 km (2,723 mi)
6	Australia	Ningaloo, Western Australia to Cape Byron, New South Wales: 4,053 km (2,519 mi)
7	Chile	Tripoint with Peru and Bolivia to C. Froward (Strait of Magellan): 4,000 km (2,486 mi)
8	Argentina	Border with Bolivia to Dungeness Point (Strait of Magellan): 3,403 km (2,115 mi)
9	Mexico	Border with the US (Pacific) to border with Belize (Caribbean Sea): 3,335 km (2,072 mi)
10	India	Border with China (Karakoram) to Kanya-kumari (C. Comorin): 3,039 km (1,889 mi)

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.

Run Run Away

I was running away.

It is difficult to say exactly what I was running away from. At this exact moment that didn't matter. All that mattered was making it on to the coach before anyone realised, I was running away and they came to stop me, and to bring me back. I willed the queue to move more quickly, but it didn't. Time seemed frozen. But eventually I got on the coach, found a seat, and pulled the curtain so no one could see me sitting here.

Now I could contemplate why I was running. Why I was leaving everything behind. Leaving the only job, I had ever had. It's dull monotony, the sense of pointless ness of it all.

The coach was moving now, and my thoughts moved with it. as I fled from my family and friends. The constant bickering and disagreements. The constant recriminations. Then there was my wife. It would be difficult to say who would be the most relieved about my running, her or me. It might have been a good idea at the time we got married, but what is it that they say? Act in haste and repent at leisure?

There was no leisure, just a pock holed minefield of open hostility.

The coach stopped and I looked at the door with nervousness, half expecting that when it opened it would be someone I knew getting on. Coming up to me with a knowing look upon their face, and a patronising tone in their voice. 'Come on,' they'd say, 'you've had your little tantrum and some fun, it's time to go home now.'
No one I knew got on.

Instead, a woman came along the aisle and having looked at several seating options decided the one next to me was the best bet. I wasn't impressed. Why pick on me?

Only for her to make matters worse by starting to speak to me. To ask me questions. Trying to pass the time as the coach continued on to its final destination.

But I didn't want to speak to her. In fact, truth be told, I didn't want to speak to anyone. I never did. And as that thought crashed through my mind it dawned upon me.

I was running away, but it wasn't going to solve anything. It wouldn't matter how far, or how fast I ran; I would never escape the main problem.

Me.

I could never escape myself. I was the problem. I was the poison. I was the one constant in my life that caused everything else to turn to shit. I hated people. I hated everything. There was only one way I could sort this mess out, and that was to sort myself out.

And so, I did.

I got up, walked to the emergency escape, opened it, and jumped out into the oncoming traffic.

Leicestershire

Lyddington Bede House

Set in the village of Lyddington in Rutland, the Bede House is a Grade I listed building. It was built in the early fourteenth century, probably by Bishop Burghersh of Lincoln. The surviving building is in wonderful condition, but some signs are there of how much larger the building would have been in its prime.

The standing building, which has been set out to show the life of the Bedesmen that would have lived there, would have only been the chamber of the original building. The upper floor would have been the Bishop's private rooms when he was in residence, and the original buildings would have been considered as the Bishop's Palace.

The grounds to the east of the building would have held two much larger halls, two towers, one with a porch to the south side, and another services room beyond, making the site of buildings three times as large as what stands today.

Work on the buildings was done in four phases between the twelfth century, when a priest's house would have been here for the neighbouring St. Andrew's church, and the early sixteenth century before the reformation started.

The Domesday Book records that the Bishop of Lincoln held the land in "Lidentone." It was confirmed as church land by a papal bull in 1126. The Bishops of Lincoln were staying at a house on the site with regularity from 1154, and conducting business from it from the early thirteenth century, from which point it could be considered to be a Bishop's Palace. There are plenty of records mentioning the building all the way through the thirteenth century.

Bishop Burghersh extended the site, by getting a deer park approved by King Edward III. He then got permission to crenellate his palaces, including the one at Lyddington.

Building work took off again in the mid fifteenth century, with Bishops Alwick, Russell and Smith extending the site.

The house had to be surrendered to the commissioners in 1547 as part of the reformation. It passed through various hands before coming to William Cecil, Lord Burghley in 1600.

His son Thomas founded a hospital on the site in the same year called Jesus hospital for twelve poor men, two women and a warden. In 1601 'Ordynances' were set up for the governing of the alms houses in the building. They included provision for clothing the warden and brethren in blue gowns and black caps. It is from this the nearby road Blue Coats Lane got its name.

The men in the house were expected to undertake some handicraft when able. They were to attend common prayers three days a week and on holidays, christenings, and burials.

The men were selection by Lord Burghley himself, and they had to be over thirty years of age, of good character with an honest trade or professions, free of leprosy, lunacy, or the French pox. They had to attend prayers twice a day and there were a series of fines for all kinds of misdemeanours.

This alms house required a redevelopment of the site, and it cannot be said for certain what remains from the original structure, but there was some demolition and clearing, and sub dividing of the former Bishop's rooms.

The lean-to veranda was added in 1745 to provide shelter between the doors and stairs to the communal hall. The northeast end was partially rebuilt in 1767, with the end wall set on a new alignment and further buttresses were added to the churchyard elevation.

It continued to function as an alms house until the twentieth century. The site is now looked after by English Heritage.

The grounds around the Bede House show fishponds, which would have been used to maintain (by breeding) a readily available source of freshwater fish.

Frisby on the Wreake

Frisby on the Wreake is a village and civil parish on the River Wreake about 3.5 miles (5.6 km) west of Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, England. The 2011 Census recorded the parish's population as 557.

The toponym "Frisby" was applied by Danish invaders in the 9th or 10th century. It refers to the farm or settlement of the Frisians. The "on the Wreake" suffix was added later to distinguish the village from another Frisby, near Billesdon, about eight miles (13 km) to the southeast. "Wreake" refers to the River Wreake. The name of the river originates from a Danish word referring to the meandering nature of the river.

The oldest parts of the Church of England parish church of St Thomas of Canterbury are 12th-century. The building includes much 14th- and 15th-century work. The north aisle was rebuilt about 1820. The chancel was rebuilt when the church was restored in 1848. The church is now a Grade I listed building. The west tower has three bells. Hugh I Watts of Leicester cast the treble bell in about 1600. William Noone of Nottingham cast the second and tenor bells in 1711.

In the 18th century the parish priest agreed to marry couples from some distance away. This was at a time when wedding ceremonies were closely controlled by the church and state. It is likely that many of the marriages of couples from elsewhere went against the consent of close relatives. The number of weddings at the parish church increased substantially compared to earlier and later times and the village earned the later nickname of the Gretna Green of the Midlands.

When the church was founded the main road from Leicester to Melton Mowbray passed through the village, entering from Hoby with Rotherby to the south and leaving by Kirby Bellars to the north. The village was bypassed to the south when the turnpike, now the primary route A607, was built in the 18th century. The new road passes a Medieval wayside

cross that may have been a preaching place. The base and broken shaft of the cross survive. There is another Medieval stone cross in the village centre.

Frisby Mill was on the River Wreake and was working at the time of the Domesday Book in 1086. The mill was rebuilt several times, but fell into disuse at the beginning of the 20th century. The channels to divert the river water to the mill may still be seen in the fields to the northwest of the village.

Farming was organised on an open field system. Each landholder was awarded a series of strips in the three common fields. This ensured everyone shared the best and worst land. The remains of the strips can still be seen, more than a thousand years since they were first created. When the great fields were enclosed in the late 18th century, landowners were compensated by the award of blocks of land. The poorer owners often sold their holdings, which were usually very small, and consolidation into the present farms took place. The existing farms in the outlying fields were all created at this time.

Originally the village lands were all worked from homes in the village itself. The remaining farmhouses in the village are older than those outside the village. As in many other Leicestershire villages, the new, consolidated blocks of land were planted with hawthorn hedges, thus, most hedges between the Frisby fields are not more than 250 years old. Those by the roadside and along the parish boundary are likely to be much older, as these were the lines that marked the medieval limits of the parish and its fields.

Transport was improved by the opening of the Melton Mowbray Navigation in the 1790s and the Syston and Peterborough Railway in 1847. A condition of building the railway was that it should take over the canal. Frisby railway station served the parish until British Railways closed it in 1961.

Life's What You Make It

Excerpts from life writing.

Uilo John Gotta New Buckled Wheel?

I never drove until my late twenties, and I've never owned my own car. But my friend John got his first car pretty much as soon as he could. Now John is a lovely bloke, but he was never the sharpest tool in the box, but he is practically minded. He passed his test on the first go. And when he did, he got himself a black Fiat Punto.

He then used to drive everywhere, and I would often be riding shotgun. Usually as chief navigator, as good old John couldn't find his way out of a paper bag in which the bottom had fallen out of.

Thursday night was pool night. Not in the sense of swimming, but in the sense of whacking little coloured balls around some baize in the vain hope of them disappearing down little holes.

One such Thursday we had been talking to some girls in the pub we were playing at, and John said he would drive them home. They lived in the Beaumont Leys estate, so it was a reasonable detour out of our standard journey home.

In typical youth fashion, John was showing off a bit whilst driving, and was ignoring navigational advice. He'd decided to go down a random road that was a 'crescent' back onto the road he'd just turned off. So, a pointless detour. And, as he'd been doing for much of the trip, he wasn't paying much attention to where he was going as most of his concentration was on the rear-view mirror and the view back to the girls sitting in the rear.

He was going too fast, not paying attention and on the sharp turn at the midpoint of the crescent, and despite me shouting corner, corner, corner, corner in an ever-increasing volume, he ploughed into the very high kerb and buckled his wheel. Yes, he managed to buckle a car wheel.

John got out and went to the boot to get the spare. He got the jack out and tried to get it to work. To no avail. Until I, as Mr carless, suggested it might work better if he took it out of the plastic casing. He then started to jack the car up, with the jack in the middle of the sill of the open front door. Only for one of the girls to literally scream at him not to be so stupid he'd warp the frame, and to move it under the wheel arch.

Two hours after hitting the kerb, the wheel was changed, and the girls had long gone.

Poetry Corner

The Dream Holiday

A dream holiday is what we had always planned
Time away from here to somewhere children were banned
Nice weather, blue skies, history, culture, and good food and drink

A chance to take things easy, all without having to think
Sleep in if we wanted to, no need to be in a rush
Stay up until the early hours, giving the envelope a push
Relax, unwind, decompress, take long slow breaths and chill
Wander along the valley, or climb up to the top of the hill
But all it did was rain, hail, snow, and sleet
Every time we left the room, we came back with sodden feet
The food was disgusting, and the drinks were even worse
We were so ill we were just glad not to come home in a hearse
Everything that could went wrong, it was all in disrepair
Our long-planned dream holiday turned out to be a nightmare

Did I Really Blog That?

A Browse Around Blaenau

We haven't been on leave for that long and it's already getting tricky to know which day it is.



Turns out that for everyone else in our party on holiday it's Zip World and mountain biking day. Though obviously not for me. It's a reasonably leisurely start to the day. Breakfast brings the news that Ciaran proposed to Marta whilst they were in Cornwall the week before. He proposed to her at the top of a cliff, so there was a backup plan if she said no.



There are five in the car heading to Zip World, the other four are booked on the trip that has two long zipline journeys, and after taking a few before photos, I part company from them and walk the mile or so into downtown Blaenau Ffestiniog. I walk along with mountains to either side of me and into a small, old town that seems somehow stuck in a gentler age.



I don't mean that in a negative way. As I make my way to the train station at the heart of the town it looks as if everywhere is closed. (And unfortunately for some places it does look like they are permanently closed rather than it being a Sunday.) No shops or pubs are open, the only open place I pass on the way to the station is the small St David's church, where the local mother's union are departing in their Sunday finery.



I leave the main road and take the path to the bridge over the “mainline” station (five trains a day stop here and then head back the way they came) and wander down the steps onto the platforms of the Ffestiniog Heritage Railway. The bridge gives me a good view across the west of the town over the slate roofs across the valley to the mountains rising behind them.



Mountains that would have provided the very slate I see on those roofs. A small section of the locally mined slate that didn't make it out of the town on one of the multitude of railways that served it in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries.



Now there are two lines, the aforementioned “mainline,” connecting up to the rest of the national dysfunctional railway system at Llandudno Junction; and the Heritage railway that used to be the main tourist draw to the town before Zip World arrived.



The Ffestiniog railway is one of the most famous steam railways in the country, if not the world. But standing on the deserted station you might not know it. Covid has killed the station here in Blaenau for the year. There are trains running on the line, but they start at Porthmadog and run as far as Tan-y-Bwlch on a daily basis and as far as the loop at Dduallt once a week.



I remember this station vividly from a teenage family holiday. We were rushing to catch the steam train having come in on the mainline from Llandudno and had rushed over the bridge and into a carriage. 1985 was the year my hay fever reached its nadir. I could hardly walk more than a few paces without gasping for breath, so much phlegm from my ever-running nose had clogged my system up. Yet in that rush for the train, something caused me to have such a coughing fit that I sicked up a bag full of phlegm. Nasty. But after that I was able to breathe properly and enjoy the rest of the holiday.



The station is nicely decorated, yet still feels forlorn due to the lack of visitors. There was just one youngster with a travel bag nearly the same size as him sat on the platform waiting for a train that will never come and take him away through the tunnel under the mountain.



The sun has returned with a vengeance, and so I'm happy to find there is somewhere open in the town. A lovely little café opposite the station. There are some great slate built monoliths at the entrance now, a tribute to the materials that built the town, both physically and metaphorically. It is time for me to have a sit down and a drink and watch very little going by.



Once refreshed I'm back off wandering around the pretty much deserted streets of Blaenau Ffestiniog. It is fascinating how they have built right up to the hills and mountains and in any space they can. Build a row of terraced house, have a gap for a rock escarpment, and continue the row of terraced houses.



Opposite is a family whitewashing the stone walls of their house. Four of them working at the same time; two up ladders, one on the ground level and a fourth leaning out of an upstairs window to paint underneath them.



I pass a side street that has a sign for a level crossing. The sign has never been removed. I wander down to where there are still tracks embedded in the road and pavement, but the gates either side of the road are rusted and the lines beyond them are overgrown. It is now an extra place to park without fear of getting shunted out of the way by a train.



I carry on along the road out of town as far as what used to be a petrol station. It must have stopped being in use a long time ago, or if not then it is the cheapest petrol in the country by a long shot.



I turn and head back towards the centre of the town, diverting off up a road that just stops at the foot of a mountain.



There are some impressive buildings,



but I find myself fascinated by the almost uniform tops to three mountains behind this road. They look more like pyramids, something akin to what I'd seen years before in Mexico, than anything natural.



I find myself back near the station, passing a co-op which is doing a roaring trade as the only place open for miles, and I follow the signs to the leisure centre. In contrast to my day one trope, there isn't a sheep in sight. Instead, there are old stone buildings, solid but in the process of being renovated.



Take a step off the main road onto any side street and you get the views over the top of houses to the mountains surrounding the town. It doesn't matter which direction you walk in, there are breath-taking views.



I cross over a bridge, over what would have been the tracks to the now abandoned level crossing. To one side I can see the station, the end of the line in every respect now. To the other side it is difficult to tell there was a track there. Only the surrounding walls and remaining bridges tell you what would have been under the foliage.



I'm walking the back streets (not in an Edwin Starr soul sense mind you), just looking for that little gem and I'm not disappointed to find this large, impressive stone church.



Turning again I end up popping out between the Old Market Hall and St David's church.



I walk back past the closed shops, and back to the same café from earlier, getting an ice cream and a drink and then down to the station to get the train back to Betws.



There are big signs advising travellers to buy a ticket before travelling. Which proves a bit tricky, there isn't a ticket machine anywhere on the station. When the train comes in, I find the guard to ask about getting a ticket only to be told he doesn't have a ticket machine either, and so it's a free journey.



The train slowly leaves the town, turning to head under the mountain and remaining slate quarry through the tunnel I'd taken photos of on the start of my walk into Blaenau nearly four hours before.



The tunnel is longer than expected. A lot longer. It's five minutes before I see daylight again. I had a look around the train as it passed through the tunnel and think I'm the only passenger on it. Back in the daylight the train tracks follow the same valley that we had driven down on the way to Zip World in the morning.



When we get to the first station on the line we slow to a crawl, but don't stop, something that happens at another station on the route, and I wonder if these are request stops and you have to put your hand out like you would for a bus. There are some long bridges, or maybe they are tunnels. It gets me thinking if there is an official length at which a bridge becomes a tunnel. But it's not quite interesting enough to actually look it up.



Back in Betws I cross over the cast iron bridge and there is a mini steam train raring to go from the little station, but I'm not convinced the big bloke in the last carriage with a dog on his lap is on the right train.



I took a longer look around the old church next to the river. It's called St Michael's church, and its huge churchyard.



From the side of the churchyard there is the best view of the suspension footbridge.



The church itself is sadly closed, and furthermore, looking on the noticeboard in the lych-gate, it's no longer functioning as a church at all.



Meanwhile St Mary's on the main road is. On both counts, it's good to get inside a church for a change.



I'm not sure about the plastic Mary and Jesus statues outside it though.



I wander into one of the multitudes of outdoor shops and got myself some walking poles and tried them out walking to the far end of the town and back, giving my fatbit a chance to have a second celebration of the day as I hit twenty thousand steps for the day, and doing so made me think I deserved a second ice cream for the day.



I was going to stay in downtown Betws and start queuing for dinner seats at the Stables but found out the others had got back to the hotel early, so Helen picked me up and we used the pool and chilled for a bit before queuing for a while at Hanging Pizza. There was over an hour wait, but it was lovely pizza, and we sat out on the garden furniture at the hotel. As quick as we ate the pizza, the midges were eating us.

The pub was suggested, but it was Sunday night, and we are in Wales, and so they were all either closed for the day or were closing for the evening before we could get to any of them, so pubbing would have to wait for another evening.

Story Time

The Carnival

The carnival was in town.

And the locals felt the weight of mixed emotions it brought with it.

No one ever knew when it was coming. The first sign would be the dust cloud raised as the multitude of wagons, caravans, and animals made their way to the town across the dry bowl between the town and the gap in the mountains to the north.

They always came from the north. But no one knew where they headed after the carnival was done. They would disappear during the night without leaving a trace.

But taking more than was theirs if the stories were to be believed. This was what caused some of the mixed emotions. People would claim valuable items would disappear when the carnival was in town. And whilst the folks here loved the atmosphere and the showmanship the carnival brought; there were those who thought the carnival folk riff raff. The dregs of society. People not to be trusted with anything not nailed down. And so, some had a resentment towards the carnival folk; whether it be from jealousy of the seemingly exciting lifestyle, or the prejudice ingrained by generations before them.

My parents had a mantra of “enjoy the show but hide anything you hold dear.” As an excited child I paid no attention to such things. And now, as an adult, I didn't care for such talk. The carnival worked hard to give us days of entertainment, and they had a living to make.

I was probably in the minority of those here who thought the same way. One idiot mayor had tried to run them out of town nigh on twenty years ago. He refused to let them set up and had every business in town close until the carnival left. And the carnival had left, no arguments, no trouble. And the mayor celebrated.

Until the soldiers turned up a few days later. A reminder that the carnival is under the protection of the Emperor. Wherever it sets up is where they will be allowed to perform. With no interference.

We needed a new mayor the following morning, the old one was hung high on the creation cactus outside the town. It took months for the local wildlife to pick it apart enough for the bones to fall to earth. And as if it were a sign, the carnival arrived the next day.

No mayor of our town has ever tried to refuse the carnival since. Nor has any other town's as far as I am aware. Not that I travel much myself, and not a lot of news makes it back to us here.

The carnival set up, as they always do, in the town's hippodrome, which sits to the west of the town. And, again as always, they made far better use of it than we ever did.

It took them a day to set up, probably taking longer than they needed to, but it gave them the opportunity for some of the carnival folk to come into the town. Drum up some trade. Telling the crowds who followed their every move, or those who emerged out of every building to see them as they passed, what wonders were in store for them all to see. The rides, the stalls, the music, the plays, the circus, and the food.

It was the last of those that was the main reason for me to go to the hippodrome. And one food in particular. It is the only time I have ever had this food, and it had been nearly four years since the carnival was last here. I had begun to give up hope of ever seeing them again, and being able to taste the wonder of the food they called ice cream.

I have no idea how they manage to make it. How they keep it so cold. How they prevent it melting out here in the harsh heat at the edge of the desert. I would buy it all if we had a way of keeping it cool. But even underground and in the shade, it becomes liquid before my very eyes in less than an hour.

And so, I eat it as soon as it is served. Relishing that icy, creamy, sweetness. Over the week they are here I will come and eat any flavour they possess. I am here when they open the stall before noon. I return in the late afternoon, and again in the evening as the sky turns from light blue to dark indigo. I savour the taste, making the most of it, knowing it will be gone soon, and there will be years before it returns.

I have thought of asking to join their number, so I can learn the trick of how this sweet nectar is made, and so I can feast on its glorious sweetness every day of the year. But I have no talent that would be useful to the carnival folk. In fact, my talents would see me cast out by them, and if I were lucky, they might let me escape with my life.

Because, if I am honest – something I rarely am – it is not only their ice cream that makes me look forward to the carnival coming to town. Me visiting in the evening for ice cream is only a cover. I am there to see who is at the carnival. Which families are enjoying the spectacle this evening? Who is going to be away for hours enjoying all the fun of the carnival? And so, I know which houses are the ones that will be empty. The ones where I am not likely to be disturbed as I peruse their belongings and decide which valuable objects I can make off with.

I am not greedy. I won't take everything I can carry off with me. It would be too much for any family to bear, and it would make the crime obvious. Just taking the one or two items, so they may never notice, or when they do it is long after the items had disappeared.

It was why I was so glad to see the arrival of the carnival. Four years is too long to survive on the gradual sale of ill-gotten gains. To survive without ever having to do an honest day's work.

And if the thefts are noticed quickly, who are they going to blame? The carnival folk they have distrusted all of their lives. Or their respected, six-time elected mayor?

Chapter and Verse

A chapter from one of my completed books, works in progress, or novella length short stories.

The Matching Agency – Chapter 2 – The Mission

Penny was given the envelopes for the mission just after midday and she put them in her messenger bag and left the building straight away. She had toyed with the idea of not jumping to the first location, she could get the train to Maidstone directly from Victoria, but she would be cutting it tight with the times of the trains, and if there were any hold ups then she might be late to start, and there would be no way she would make it to all five addresses in the hour she had been given.

Instead, she headed for the tube station at Pimlico, and headed north on the Victoria Line until she got to Finsbury Park and then switched to the Piccadilly line to carry on toward Arnos Grove. The thing about being based in London was that it was a great starting point as there were literally hundreds of cities, towns and even villages that an exact match worked on scattered around it, some places had multiple matches. The downside was that they could be anywhere in its sprawling metropolis, there were a lot of streets that fell under the place name London. Once she got off the tube, she headed south, taking five minutes to walk to Maidstone Road, setting up the device with the first jump match details. Maidstone Road, London to London Road, Maidstone.

When she turned into Maidstone Road the device in her hand showed as live, and she went into her messenger bag and retrieved the glasses that completed the device set up. As she put them up to her face, she could already see London Road through them, overlaying the pavement and road in front of her. She focused the left lens until she was as close to the end of the road as possible and then moved the right lens slightly so she wouldn't be part of the wall of the first building's front garden, and then pushed the jump button.

Penny had gotten as far into the town centre as London Road went, and quickly walked to Maidstone West train station, knowing there would be a taxi rank there. She got a taxi out to the first address, Hereford Road, and ended up there about fifteen minutes before she needed to be. Penny checked the street out, noting the position of the house she needed to deliver to, and then she checked out the distance to her next jump off point. It was only a two-minute walk, which she was more than happy with. She stopped at a corner shop and got herself a bottle of water. All the while she did, a man in the shop just stared at her, and when she left the shop after paying, the man came out of the shop behind her and then leant against the shop window playing with his phone whilst seemingly looking in her direction.

Penny walked up to the first address and got the envelope out of her bag, and paused waiting for it to be time to post it and get the mission into full swing. When her watch showed two pm, she put the envelope through the letterbox and turned back to the street. She jogged back along the pavement passing the shop, and the man was still there watching her as she jogged past him. The attention felt a bit creepy, but it didn't matter, she'd be out of this town in less than a minute.

Her next drop was going to be in Leicester. She hadn't been back to her hometown in years, but knew the place fairly well from the twenty years she had lived there. The jump in and out points were fairly close to each other, and the envelope drop address wasn't a big detour between the two points, being a couple of roads up from the train station. She set up the jump details on the device and focused her lens on her glasses, again wanting to be right at the end of Maidstone Road in Leicester, as close to the drop address as she could get, and pressed jump.

She was jogging almost straight away, crossing over Sparkenhoe Street, and jogging across the other side into Prebend Street. She knew there would be little use in getting taxis in Leicester for this length of journey close to the centre, the one-way system was a nightmare, and she would be quicker on foot. As she jogged down Prebend Street, she got the next envelope out of her bag, and she hardly needed to slow her pace as she posted it through the door of the terraced house that was right there on the street.

She crossed over the road and headed to the corner to turn right and go down past the train station. As she approached the corner, she thought she saw movement out of the corner of her eye and stopped to look back up the street, but there was no one there. She shook her head and carried on jogging, making her way past the station, through the underpass and back up the other side before taking the first right into Northampton Street.

Upon arriving at Leicester Street in Northampton, she found herself facing a dead end, she had entered this jump from the wrong direction, and it confused her for a minute. She turned around and saw a road crossing up in front of her. She headed in that direction and carefully negotiated crossing the dual carriageway in front of her, before carrying on walking to the next envelope drop. As she walked, she was ringing the number for the local taxi firm.

Despite only living thirty miles or so away from Northampton for twenty years, she had never been there before and even with the maps available hadn't got a good lead on her next jump off point. She had dropped the envelope off within a few minutes, and was now stood waiting for the taxi, waiting a few more minutes before it turned up, time she couldn't really afford to lose.

When the taxi did turn up, she crossed the road in front of it to go for the passenger side front seat. As she got in, she noticed a man standing in a doorway, pretty much opposite where she had been waiting for the taxi. The man looked familiar to her, and she struggled to place where from as she gave the taxi driver the address she wanted. The taxi driver laughed when she said it and she could have kicked herself when she found out why. The car pulling up less than a minute after setting off, her jump off point had been a few streets down, parallel to the one she has just posted an envelope in. She paid the man whilst being apologetic, explaining she had never been to Northampton before.

Penny had an uneasy feeling as she prepared herself to get to location four. She suddenly had a sensation that she was being watched or even followed. It dawned on her that the man she had seen across the road, stood in the doorway of the house as she had gotten into the taxi was the same one that had been hanging around in and outside the corner shop near her first drop off point. This was despite the fact that she knew that couldn't be possible.

She set up the jump points and focused the lenses; she took a bit longer doing this for her next jump in point. There were lots of people around; Northampton Street in Cambridge was right in the heart of the various university colleges, close to the Backs and the River Cam. She found a hole big enough for her to drop into and pressed jump, arriving on the pavement and just missing walking straight into someone on their phone. The fact that they were looking at their phone instead of straight ahead being one of the reasons she had chosen that spot.

She flagged a taxi down, having been confident that there would be a number around this part of the city, and jumped in giving the driver the address she needed. The taxi journey took longer than she had hoped, making slow progress along Queen's Road, only picking up the pace once they turned off. At Dane Drive, she got the taxi driver to wait for her as she jumped out and posted the envelope. She gave the driver the road name for her next jump off point, and found herself going back the same way they had come, and that the journey didn't take anywhere near as long as the one had out there.

Even so, as she struggled with her purse sorting the fare out, she glanced at her watch, the first time she had really done so since the start of the mission, and saw she only had fifteen minutes to go, so she was up a few on what had been planned. Not only that, but looking in her purse she had committed another rookie mistake in not having enough cash on her for the next taxi.

She got out of the taxi and started to set up the device for the next jump. Again, she had that feeling that someone was watching her, and she looked up from the device. There at the end of the road, walking in her direction was what appeared to be the same man she had already seen twice today. She quickly set the device and twisted the lens on her glasses, so she wasn't in the middle of the road and pressed jump.

She was now in Derby, somewhere on Cambridge Street, and spent the first few seconds checking there were no signs of the man. Then she looked at the nearby houses for their numbers, she hadn't taken the normal time to set herself and the position in the jump arrival road and didn't know where she was in relation to where her pre-booked taxi was due to be. When she did get her bearings, she found that almost typically she was at the wrong end of the street.

She ran down the street and a taxi was parked on the other side, and she crossed the road whilst gesticulating at the driver, shouting "For Penny?" at her. The driver nodded her head and Penny got in the passenger seat, confirming the address, but also asking for a cash point. The driver pointed out of the passenger side and there was one sat on the wall outside of the Co-op she had dismissed as she'd run to the taxi. She drew out a hundred and jumped back in the taxi to head to the final drop off.

Half of the route was dual carriageway and it looked as if she'd make it with a couple of minutes to spare, right up to the point where they turned in to Normanton Valley Road. Traffic was at a standstill, and after a minute Penny said for the driver to drop her there, and she paid the driver.

Penny got out of the taxi and sprinted up the road, she had nearly got the address she needed when she looked up and saw the man again. He was stood in the middle of the pavement watching her as she ran towards him. She moved to the side to go past him, but at the last moment he stepped into her patch. She swerved to her right, stepping into the road, just brushing him as she passed him, and continued to the address without looking back.

She posted the last of the envelopes through the door and looked at her watch, cursing to herself. It said 15.01; she had failed to get all of the envelopes posted within the hour by a minute. She didn't know what that meant for the mission, but she doubted it was good. Whatever the outcome of failing would mean for her she didn't know, and she didn't know what impact the failure would have on the people who have tasked the mission to the Agency in the first place.

As it stood, she didn't care. She was now certain that she was being followed, certain that she had seen the same man in four of the five locations she had been in to drop envelopes off. She had nearly run straight into him only a couple of minutes before as she had run up the last part of the street to this final address. He had been stood in the middle of the pavement watching her run towards him, and he had deliberately moved across her path.

Penny looked back down the street to where he had been, only to find there was no one there. Was the man hiding in a doorway again, surreptitiously watching her, waiting for her to move on again? She walked back in the direction of where he had been stood, and got her phone out, scrolling through the numbers until she got to the one for the taxi company, she had used to get her to this road in the first place. She had got back to the point where she had had to swerve out onto the road to avoid bumping into the man when the taxi firm answered.

She loudly gave the location she was at, and then her destination as London Road, she wasn't intending to use that as a jump off point, she would end up splicing herself if she did, but she could hope that if the man was around listening and could hear her then he would set off there and hopefully splice himself all over London.

She knew that there was no straight route back to London from Derby, it was a two-jump route back to the Agency, and she would give the taxi driver the correct address when she got in the cab.

There was always the possibility that the man knew full well where she was going back to anyway, and that he had already left to get on his way back there to await her arrival. The thought of it made her shudder.

A couple of minutes later the same taxi she had got out of earlier pulled up, it had taken it that long to get up the road, but during the time it had taken there had been no further sighting of the man. She got back in the taxi and told the driver she had changed her mind, could she take her to Norwich Street instead of London Road, there was something she needed from there.

Penny spent the entire taxi journey on edge, trying to look out of both sides of the car at the same time to look out for the man, but thankfully there was no sighting of him at any point. When the taxi pulled up on Norwich Street, she got out after paying the driver and looked around before pulling out her device and glasses. She entered Derby Street, Norwich into it and focused her lenses, finding a nice, shaded spot to jump into.

She had jumped into a small industrial estate, and made her way slowly down the road, keeping in the shadows as much as she could. She stopped at a coffee shop to get a drink and try and calm her nerves, sitting in the back corner with an eye on the door. After drinking the coffee, she carried on her way, making it over to London Street ready for her last jump of the day. It was busier than she had expected, realising she was later than she had planned to be, but she had been making sure there was no signs of the man that was stalking her.

She entered the jump details into the device and fiddled with the lenses for the last time today, jumping into Norwich Street, just behind Sainsbury's head offices on Holborn, in the centre of London. She arrived in a doorway having moved the right lens as far across the street as she could. She sank deeper into the doorway and peered out at the street looking for any movement. After a couple of minutes during which a couple of women had been the only people that had walked by, she moved out from the doorway and headed around to the other side of the block she was on, up onto Holborn.

She positioned herself under the scaffolding near Chancery Lane tube station waiting for a bus. When the first number 25 pulled up, she waited until the last moment and then jumped on, swiping her oyster card on the reader. She went to the buggy / disabled area opposite the centre set of doors, as she felt from there, she could keep an eye on all of the doors, she had a direct line of sight to the centre and rear doors, and the CCTV screen showed the front door on a loop with other images on the bus.

Each time the bus pulled up at a new stop she stopped breathing as she watched the people getting on the bus, making sure that none of them were the man that had been stalking her today. When the bus got to Hollies Street she got off with the rest of the remaining passengers and made her way back along Oxford Street to Oxford Circus, using doorways and windows to look all around her.

She rushed down the set of stairs into the tube station and made her way down to the Victoria line, not going through to the platform until the train was pulling in. She got a space in the corner of the carriage and stood looking down the carriage, as far as the crowds on the train would allow. When the train pulled into Pimlico she was about to get off, but changed her mind at the last second and stayed on, before getting off at Vauxhall instead. She walked up to Lambeth Bridge and crossed over the river and into Horseferry Road, heading for Vincent Square passing both the MI6 and MI5 buildings in the process. She certainly felt an affinity to the work they did at this moment in time.

As she made her way across Vauxhall Bridge Road and then Belgrave Road, it suddenly made sense to her why the Agency had made their base in this area, pretty much every street in this vicinity contained a place name. They could step out of their office and be straight into a mission in minutes. She walked slowly around the streets around the block

her office was in, checking out as many doorways and basements as she could before wedging herself in a doorway of a side street overlooking her building and waiting.

Medium

A lot of my blog posts were also get published on my Medium account, especially ones that are picture heavy, as there are no hosting costs to store all the photos there, the link is <https://medium.com/@onettruekev>. A lot has gone onto this site over the last year, and it would be good if you are on there looking at my work if you could register and become a standard member – it's free for the basic member level, but it allows you to follow me on that site and allows for claps and comments to be made on pieces. Anything to help with profile raising is much appreciated.

As a user with over one hundred followers, more recent posts are on what they call the metered site, so full members of Medium who read or like my posts generate me money, which is good. It also means I become part of their referral scheme. So, if you are not a member, and are considering [subscribing to Medium](#) if you do so through that link then you will be supporting my writing and you may also discover lots of other great writers, posts, and articles, including those I have already published [here](#).

Epilogue – Where To Find More Of My Writing

To get people to sign up, point them in the direction of my website's homepage of <http://www.onettruekev.co.uk> scroll down past the menu and then enter their e-mail address and select whether they want Flanagan's Running Club or blog post updates or both and then hit submit.

If you want to catch up on old issues, go to the website at <http://www.onettruekev.co.uk/frc.php> where all the issues are available.

For blog posts go to <https://onettruekev.co.uk/Mutterings/> which will have the most current post and the ability to scroll back in time.

There are various short story competition entries on my Reedsy prompts page at <https://blog.reedsy.com/creative-writing-prompts/author/kev-neylon/>

For all previous works including the old Surerandomality pieces go to <https://onettruekev.co.uk/Mutterings/else/> where pretty much everything I've written before is linked through to.

Then there are my books. Nothing published yet, but I have one full book available online, it's called "Where The Lights Shine Brightest." 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>

I have had a number (seventy-three) of Drabbles published on the BookHippo web site, and they can all be found at <https://bookhippo.uk/profiles/kevin.neylon/drabbles>

I've recently been submitting to Paragraph Planet and have had some pieces published there, and they've set up a author link to what is on there by me, it is on the M to Q page https://www.paragraphplanet.com/authors_m_q.php

You can also follow me on Twitter, where I will occasionally put up some micro fiction or micro poems, my Twitter handle is @Onettruekev – <https://twitter.com/onettruekev>

You can also follow all my writing on the Facebook page Onettruekev which is at <https://www.facebook.com/Onettruekev-102649357993650/>

And also, now on LinkedIn at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/onettruekev/>

E-mail any ideas or suggestions to kev@onettruekev.co.uk

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