

# Flanagan's Running Club – Issue 88

## 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, wine, rum, port, Pepsi, or whatever), and enjoy the read.

## On This Day – 29<sup>th</sup> October

312 – Constantine the Great enters Rome after his victory at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, stages a grand adventus in the city, and is met with popular jubilation. Maxentius' body is fished out of the Tiber and beheaded.

1390 – First trial for witchcraft in Paris leading to the death of three people.

1863 – Eighteen countries meet in Geneva and agree to form the International Red Cross.

1929 – Black Tuesday: The New York Stock Exchange crashes, ending the Great Bull Market of the 1920s and beginning the Great Depression.

1969 – The first-ever computer-to-computer link is established on ARPANET, the precursor to the Internet.

1986 – British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher opens the last stretch of the M25 motorway.

Coronation Day (Cambodia)

Republic Day (Cumhuriyet Bayramı) (Turkiye)

### Births

1942 – Bob Ross

1947 – Richard Dreyfuss

1948 – Kate Jackson

1964 – Yasmin Le Bon

1970 – Edwin van der Sar

1971 – Winona Ryder

### Deaths

1618 – Walter Raleigh

1911 – Joseph Pulitzer

1924 – Frances Hodgson Burnett

1957 – Louis B. Mayer

### Number 1's

Number 1 single in 1964 – Sandie Shaw – (There's) Always Something There To Remind Me

Number 1 album in 2019 – The Foals – Everything Not Saved Will Be Lost - Part 2

Number 1 compilation album in 2001 – Various – Pepsi Chart 2002 (Using a crystal ball obviously)

## #vss365

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

He watched her polish the odd shaped #bead, before drilling a hole through it so she could add it to her necklace.

He asked her about the necklace, his final mistake.

"It's made of the fingertips of the nosy people such as you I kill when they ask me about this necklace."

#vss365

## Joke

A state trooper spied a car puttering along at 22 MPH. So he turned on his lights and pulled the driver over. Approaching the car, he noticed that five old guys were inside, and they looked wide-eyed and terribly pale. The driver pleaded with him, "Officer, I don't understand, I was doing exactly the speed limit! What seems to be the problem?" "Sir," the officer replies, "You weren't speeding, but driving slower than the speed limit can also be dangerous." "I beg to differ, Officer, I was doing the speed limit exactly: twenty-two miles an hour!" the old man said. The trooper, chuckling, explained to him that "22" was the route number, not the speed limit. A bit embarrassed, the man grinned and thanked the officer for pointing out his error. "But before I let you go, Sir, I have to ask... Is everyone in this car ok? These guys seem awfully shaken." "Oh, they'll be all right in a minute," the old man said. "We just got off Route 119."

## Drabble

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

### From Men To Monsters

As the burglars raided the house, I crawled into the space leading to the secret exit. Just as I'd done decades before as a child playing hide and seek. But the space was too tight for me now. I'd had far too many rich meals and alcoholic drinks over the years.

And I'd written off the monster as being my childhood imagination, but it was real and waiting in here as it had been when I was young.

Back then I'd rushed through the space and out the exit before the monster could get me.

I wouldn't escape this time.

## 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.

### Scratch That Itch

It starts with a tingle. It is there on the bridge of my foot, just behind the toes. And the tingle is fine. No one really minds a little tingle occasionally.

Then it turns into an itch. This makes it harder to ignore. An itch is definitely worse than a tingle. It is like a mewling cat. I try to ignore it. But it doesn't go away. It keeps on at me. Wearing away at my self-control. Compelling me into doing something about the itch.

It is keeping me awake. I was at the point of drifting off. Of being unconscious and unaware of any itch. But it caught me before I was away. I try rubbing it against the heel of my other foot. Rubbing it against the rough hard skin upon my heel for relief.

But it does nothing. The itch doesn't go away. If anything, it intensifies. And I change from the heel to using my toes. The toenails are long enough, strong enough, and sharp enough to scratch properly. There is a bit of contortion needed to get the correct angle of attack, but the scratching feels good. And there is now some relief.

Briefly.

The itch comes back, and it feels as if it has brought several of its friends with it. The area of the itch has spread. Contortion time again as toenails are repeatedly raked across the soft patch of skin on the bridge of my foot. The scratching is more frantic now. However, it isn't exact. It is a general area bombing raid. And unsatisfactory. It doesn't reach deep enough, no matter how hard the bulletproof nails are dug in.

It continues. Scratch, scratch, scratch, relief, itch, itch, itch, itchy, itch. Each time the itch returns it has intensified. To the extent I have to sit up in bed and reach down to scratch with much more accurate fingers.

It feels sticky. Not only has all the scratching released the histamines and made the itch worse, but the skin has been rubbed raw and there is blood, or pus, or something wet and sticky there. And so, I get up, wander through to the bathroom and place my foot in the bath and run cold water on it. Wash away the gore, wash away the excess histamines. And cool the burning sensation the itch has brought.

As the water runs onto the foot, numbing it with the coldness of the water, I reach for the medicine cabinet and grab a pack of antihistamines and pop one and swallow. And then another one. I go to put the pack back and stop and take a third one for luck. To calm it down from the inside as well as from the outside. I turn the tap off and dry my foot. The skin looks red and angry and there will be scabs come the morning.

I clamber back into bed and close my eyes and I drift off to sleep.

In the morning I awake, and the foot feels as if it is on fire. Everything down there feels sticky. I throw the quilt back and there is red everywhere. I lift my foot and let out a funny little squealing sound. I can see right through my foot. I can see the stained white bones of my metatarsals and between them to the chest of drawers behind.

Skin and flesh and muscle are gone. Worn away. Scratched into oblivion. The toes on my other are red, as are my fingers. Sleep wasn't enough to stop the itch, not to stop me destroying myself to stop it.

And still it itches.

## Leicestershire

### Granby Halls

Granby Halls was a popular live music, exhibition and sports arena in Leicester, England, also notable as the long serving home of professional basketball team, the Leicester Riders, from 1980 until 1999.

It was located in a triangle of prime land in central Leicester between the Welford Road Stadium (Leicester Tigers' home stadium), Leicester Royal Infirmary and Nelson Mandela Park and consisted of two halls, the main arena, and a skating rink. The site was used for various functions since its initial opening in 1915, when it was built as the training halls for Leicester's Army recruits during World War I.

The building was finally demolished in 2001 after standing dormant for three years. The site is now used as a carpark while the council are still deciding what to do with the land, which is on the market for £1.3 million.

The first Granby Hall was funded by private enterprise and opened in 1915. It was a Training Hall for young people entering war service. It was located adjacent to the present Leicester Tigers ground, and incorporated two underground rifle ranges and a swimming bath. Later, the second hall (originally the Empress Hall, designed as a skating rink) was acquired, and a number of peripheral buildings erected creating over 30,000 square feet of covered space.

Between the wars, the Granby Halls became a favoured venue for many different forms of public events. As well as an entertainment venue, they served in turn as a venue for political rallies, for the issuing of ration books, the sorting of Christmas mail, and for touring exhibitions. Then, in the 1940's, the trustees of the halls transferred their ownership to the Leicester Corporation, and the Granby Halls began a new phase of life as one of the Corporation's public venues.

Few changes were made to the fabric of the halls until the construction of the present one-way system incorporating Welford Road and Aylestone Road, which created an 'island' of land taking in the then Southfields College, the Rugby Ground, and the halls. The problem of access and the limited parking facilities nearby caused the Council to announce the closure of the halls.

However, their popularity and general 'usefulness' encouraged the Council to reconsider their plans and to develop the buildings. Several separate refurbishment schemes took place, each updating the Granby Halls' facilities to suit the changing demands of society, but none going so far as a major reassessment of whether the buildings were truly compatible with the changing demands of the community.

Leicester City Council opted finally to convert the halls into a sports and leisure centre, alongside similar facilities at Saffron Lane, Beaumont Leys and Aylestone, with facilities for a wide range of activities including the retention of the beloved skating rink. In 1980 they became the home of the Riders, Leicester's renowned basketball team, which practiced and played at the venue, bringing wider fame to the halls through satellite television until the buildings' final demise in 1999.

A remarkable variety of events have taken place at the Granby Halls. In the 1930's, they echoed to the sound of Oswald Mosley and his Blackshirt Movement. In their final years, they served as the location for the counting of votes in both Parliamentary and local elections, and the announcement of the winners and losers. Sir Harold Wilson spoke to his supporters at the halls, as did Sir Anthony Eden. The American evangelist Dr Billy Graham preached to the masses here, as did Cardinal John Heenan, the former Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster.

Local children who had lost parents in the Great War were cared for in the halls, and provided with food and entertainment.

From the 50's to the 90's, numerous pop groups and rock bands including the Rolling Stones entertained at the Granby Halls which served as an alternative entertainment venue to the De Montfort Hall. One of the most memorable and historic appearances was that of the jazz trumpeter and vocalist Louis Armstrong.

There were also various shows and exhibitions, including a motor show in 1972, which claimed to be the biggest such event outside the National Motor Show held then at Earls Court, and for many years in the 1970's and 1980's, the Home Life Exhibition was a regular annual event.

Perhaps their most famous role - certainly in terms of the number of people who were involved in the events - was as home to the annual convention of the Leicester Amateur Radio Society. From the halls went out innumerable messages from 'hams' as they made contact with others across the world.

The Granby Halls just failed to see out the Millennium. In their final years, the buildings took on an increasing air of neglect though they continued to be used by local sporting organisations individuals. The Leicester City Council, in their vision for the future provision of recreation and entertainment venues could not see a role for the halls, and in the late 1990's, they were demolished, along with St Margaret's Swimming Baths.

## **Sysonby**

Sysonby is now part of Melton district.

In 1870-72, John Marius Wilson's Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales described Sysonby like this:

SYSONBY, a chapelry in Melton-Mowbray parish, Leicester; one mile W of Melton-Mowbray r. station. Post town, Melton-Mowbray. Acres, 980. Real property, £1,920. Pop., sixty-seven. Houses, eleven. The manor belongs to Earl Dysart. The living is annexed to Melton-Mowbray. The church is good.

Sysonby Knoll was built as a country house in 1911 by the Thurman family of Riverside Farm, Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire, England. There have been a succession of owners, the most recent being the Booth family, who purchased the house in 1965 and converted it into a hotel.

The hotel has thirty en-suite bedrooms and a locally well-respected restaurant, serving lunches and evening meals as well as Sunday Lunch.

Various local groups meet at the hotel including the Melton Mowbray Rotary Club (Monday lunchtimes).

Sysonby was a hamlet just outside Melton Mowbray, and the house is close to the site of the settlement, which has now disappeared.

Sysonby was a settlement in Domesday Book, in the hundred of Framland and the county of Leicestershire.

It had a recorded population of two hundred and fifty-one households in 1086, putting it in the largest 40% of settlements recorded in Domesday, and is listed under three owners in Domesday Book. Land of Geoffrey of la Guerche. Households: thirty villagers. One hundred freemen. Twenty-seven smallholders. Four slaves. Two priests.

Land and resources: Plough land: forty-eight plough lands. Four lord's plough teams. 49.5 men's plough teams. Other resources: Meadow 104 acres. Woodland one \* one furlongs. Two mills, value one pound five shillings. Valuation: Annual value to lord: twenty-three pounds ten shillings in 1086; nine pounds ten shillings when acquired by the 1086 owner. Owners: Tenant-in-chief in 1086: Geoffrey of la Guerche. Lord in 1086: Geoffrey of la Guerche. Lord in 1066: Leofric (the noble) son of Leofwin. Other information: This entry mentions multiple places: Burton [Lazars]; Eastwell; [Eye] Kettleby; Freeby; Goadby [Marwood]; Kirby [Bellars]; Melton [Mowbray]; Sysonby; Wyfordby.

Land of Geoffrey of la Guerche: Households: four villagers. Two freemen. Land and resources: Plough land: 1.5 lord's plough teams. 1.5 men's plough teams. Other resources: Meadow ten acres. Valuation: Annual value to lord: one pound in 1086. Owners: Tenant-in-chief in 1086: Geoffrey of la Guerche. Lord in 1086: Rainer.

Land of Countess Judith: Households: one freeman. Land and resources: Plough land: one men's plough teams. Valuation: Annual value to lord: two shillings in 1086; seven pence when acquired by the 1086 owner. Owners: Tenant-in-chief in 1086: Countess Judith. Lord in 1086: Hugh Burdet. Lord in 1066: Healfdene.

St Leonard's Church, Sysonby.

Churchwardens Mr David Wilford and Mr Colin Moulds watch over our tiny church, tucked away at the bottom of Sysonby Grange Lane on the edge of Melton Mowbray, off the A6006 Asfordby Road. Services are only held occasionally and are special services conducted around three or four times a year.

The hamlet of Sysonby was mentioned in the Domesday Book under differing names, but it took its present name in 1552. Since that time, the hamlet and its residents have had a chequered history. All that remains of the hamlet is the little ancient church building, which is believed to have been built around 1344. It is of simple construction, with a small nave and a tower with one bell. It was restored in 1892 and since then many local people have contributed towards the upkeep of the church and churchyard. In 1925, in memory of the Dalgliesh family (a well-known and respected local family), a small side chapel was added. This now serves as a vestry and has greatly improved the interior of this lovely little church.

## **Life's What You Make It**

Excerpts from life writing.

### **On The Tracks**

It is amazing we all survived childhood. Seeing as one of our favourite playgrounds was on the train tracks.

Between Roseneath Avenue and the bridge over the tracks at Troon Way there were multiple gaps in the flimsy fences, and well-worn paths up to the train tracks. The one up the side of the bridge over the footpath through to Barkby Road has proper steps, and places you could sit by the side of line four and watch the trains go by.

And that was how it all started. We would watch the trains go by. Train spot. Get the engine numbers and mark them off in the little pocketbooks.

Two miles north of Leicester station on the Midland main line. Passenger trains up to Sheffield, Derby, and Nottingham. Cross country trains to Lincoln or Peterborough. Pulled by class 40 or class 45 diesel locomotives. No electric lines up there when we were kids (and still not electrified now).

There would also be the DMUs (Diesel multiple units), little two or three carriage trains, each carriage with its own number to try and note. And as time went on, we started getting the high-speed trains, the inter-city 125s (named for their top speed). Which they hadn't reached by the time they got to us going north, and which they were slowing down from when heading south into the station.

Lines three and four were for freight. Great long lumbering engines. Class 20s or even class 08s shunters trundling along.

Only spotting wasn't enough. There was more we could do. Cross the track there and back. Stand on the lines looking for the next train. Head down, ear on the metal rail, listening for the far-off vibration of the track which told us the train was on its way long before it came into sight.

As time went on, we played more on the side of the tracks, racing in and out of gaps in the trees and bushes which lined them. Knowing where the safe spots were to dive into when the trains were coming. So as not to be seen, and not to be hit.

But they could see us from miles away really. We could recognise the little transport police single units and disappear into the estate before they could pull up and disembark.

Of course, it had to end. The longest unsafe stretch ran from just before the Troon Way bridge to a spot about two hundred yards along where there was a gap in the bushes and a path down to the playing fields. That evening there were a dozen of us, all walking along this stretch alongside line one. The train came round the bend half a mile to the south.

Run came the call, and so we all did, along line one to make it to the gap in the trees. The last of us barely making it as the train sped by. In retrospect it would have been much easier and safer to just cross the tracks to the other side of line four and wait it out there, but when someone shouts run, a little kind of panic kicks in. The train was a lot closer than any of us would have wanted. We could feel the rush of air as it passed close by.

But we all survived so thought nothing of it. But the train driver wasn't as sanguine about it all. He must have phoned it in. We were all back at the pivotal point for our track play, the bridge over the stream, which we would go under as well, a big wide bank up to the tracks, and the fields behind across to the small woods and the estate beyond.

My brother made the call. Transport police was the cry. And he was gone, into the woods and beyond. Gef was gone as well. He was a champion sprinter and put the speed to effective use. He couldn't afford to be caught; we'd never see him again seeing as his dad worked for British Rail.

The rest of us were all still on the wrong side of the fence. I couldn't be bothered to run, but a couple did, only to not get very far. The transport police took our names, getting a fictional one and a non-existent house number on a nearby street from me.

However, the transport police were more interested in Raymond. They had seen him throwing stones at the passing train when they pulled up, and so they bundled him in the back of their car and drove off with him.

The rest of us headed back as well. Raymond, along with a couple of the others lived in the next street to me, and so half an hour later when we got back there (it wasn't a short trip to the train tracks), we edged up to the corner of the street and leant round to see down the street. The transport police car was parked outside his house. And we all ran off again.

Word got out to our parents about the train track shenanigans and there were strict instructions about not playing on them anymore.

On a trip back to Leicester recently I went back to have a look at the part of the line where we used to play. The fences are sturdy and high now, and the paths up to the track are no more. The bushes and trees have taken over, there isn't the slightest gap for kids to get up there now.

Probably for the best really.

## **Poetry Corner**

### **The Morning Mist**

Looming out of the mist the images come into focus  
Only for them to flash by the window and disappear again  
The train speeds on cutting through the early morning mist  
Backlit by the sun struggling to find a way through it

On the viaduct high above the valley below  
A river meanders through fields of green unseen  
Buildings eerily silhouetted come and go

Trees seem hazy, out of focus, ethereal  
Their leaves so green in sunlight are now cloaked  
As if covered by a thousand shimmering cobwebs

I sit fascinated by the ghostly glimmer flying by  
Whilst everyone else in the carriage stare at their phones  
A tunnel is entered and now everything out there is black  
My own reflection is what stares back at me

Emerging and the mist is no more  
Out here the sun has won and burnt the mist away  
And the view from the window isn't as interesting in the light of day

## **Did I Really Blog That?**

### **All Change**

I left off the last rambling tale with furniture arriving. This was followed up by going out to buy more stuff. A rug for under the new dining table, which matched one of the wallpapers in the kitchen (and subsequently an online order for a second as the first wasn't quite big enough for the chairs when the table is extending – that's been here over a week and is still in its wrapper). Also, some new jars for sugar and tea, which meant converting the existing sugar jar into a coffee one. For the first week after that, I was close every day to putting coffee on my cereals instead of sugar.

We were asked on the Saturday if we could be witnesses at a civil partnership ceremony on the Tuesday for Simon and Linda. Tom and Terri were going to do it originally, but Simon had gotten the days mixed up and had told them it was going to be on the Thursday, so when it turned out it would be the Tuesday, they were already booked onto a call to renew their child security checks. So, we were asked to step in. Being asked on the Saturday, with it being a Bank Holiday weekend meant that we said yes and would have to hope we had no meetings at 11 on the Tuesday morning so we could take an early lunch.

It wasn't only the witnesses that Simon had given the wrong date to. He had told Linda that it was on the fifth (Wednesday), and not the fourth. Therefore, she had booked the wrong day off work, and because they were so short staffed, she felt she couldn't change the day, and instead made up an emergency dental appointment to get the time off to go to her own civil partnership ceremony.

I thought it would be a fairly formal occasion, and so dressed appropriately, I put shoes on, a shirt and even dusted the suit off (I still didn't bust a tie out though). Helen was equally (if not more) glam, and we headed off.

When we got to Crawley registry office, the original witnesses to be – Tom and Terri, were stood outside. Their renewal call hadn't lasted as long as expected, but because names had been given before, we were still going to be witnesses. Then Simon and Linda turned up. In jeans and jumpers. Leaving us feeling slightly overdressed. Apparently, Terri had asked Linda what she was going to wear some time ago, and been told jeans and jumper, only to reply, no seriously, what are you wearing? Jeans and jumper came the reply. Possible information that would have been useful to us before getting ready.

I'd taken my camera to get photos of the event, but my shutter speed couldn't keep up. We were in and out of the building in 9 minutes. The registrar was "interesting," I couldn't pinpoint her age, but it was definitely older than us, and she had a deep gravelly voice that suggested she may smoke somewhere in the region of three hundred fags a day. And when it came time for Simon and Linda to sign the register, it was clear I was seated in a position where I couldn't take photos of them signing it, because the registrar was bent over in front of me in a too tight and too short skirt (which she kept trying to pull down), and so the only picture I might have got would have been one of her breakfast.

Back to work, and it was to be my last full week working from home, as I'd arranged to be back in the new (to me) Hove office Tuesday to Thursday each week. It would be just Monday's working at home. Something to look forward to. In that last week at home, electricians were supposed to be turning up on the Tuesday to install a load of new sockets all around the house, only for them to not have anyone due to illness, and so that got put back to Thursday to start the two-day job. Wednesday saw the charity shop come and pick up a load of the old furniture sat in the garden.

On our Friday off, not content with the electrician gouging big grooves in the walls, and the other new furniture and decoration in place, we headed into Crawley and bought an old gramophone cabinet for the dining room. We also ordered an old-style stereo to go in it which would be picked up Saturday. We rolled this into the house and went straight back out to Hayward's Heath to look in the second-hand furniture shop there. Where we found a new sofa and armchair to our liking. With the works at home, we declined the same day delivery option, and they would ring us to arrange delivery during the week.

It took a while to clean up all the plaster dust after the electrician had gone, and it was well into Saturday night before all the furniture was back in the places it came from. It was goof to not do anything on the Sunday.

I was just gearing up to log off Monday night and load the rucksack to take stuff to the office Tuesday morning when the second-hand furniture store rang and said they would be delivering Tuesday, but they would need some help as it was only a driver on the delivery route. Seriously? What kind of cowboy unit charges you £25 for stuff to be delivered, but then you have to help offload it all yourself? I had to scrap plans for office working on Tuesday and stay to help offload the new sofa.

It also meant we had to get the old one out. I'm not sure how they got it in initially, but to get it out we had to move the rest of the living room furniture and the stuff from the hall, and clear half of the bin area outside, and even then, it was a struggle.

The new sofa hadn't even arrived before someone was knocking on the door asking to take away the old one. Great I thought, until he said it would be £30. I'd have said no outright, cheeky bastard. But Helen said we'd pay £20, he countered with £25, and I said no. He knocked five minutes later to say he'd made some money from a neighbour and so would take it for £20 after all. And so, he did, and not even five hours after it had been dumped on the front it was gone. It seems to be the way of things in Crawley, put random rubbish out and someone will turn up and take it away.

Wednesday morning saw the first commute to Hove, and the first long drive in the new car for me. It's going to take some getting used to, after mainly having only really driven diesel cars, driving a petrol one leads inevitably to me stalling. A lot. Plus, on the first day, I wasn't actually sure of where I was going. I'd been to this office a few times but had only ever gone on the train. So, it was sat-nav on. And even then, I nearly missed the indicated turn off of the A27, and then lined up in the wrong lane for the roundabout. But as I crested a hill on the sweep down towards Portslade, you get the view over the continuous buildings along the coast and across the very blue looking sea and sky. It would have made a great picture, but it's a bit difficult to stop there with constant traffic around and no pull in places available. Once in the office it's a bit of a trek from parking out front to my allocated desk. It's a similar distance than if I'd have been walking from the station to the office. The screens are a lot smaller than the ones we have been using at home, and that were in the old office, and none of the desks had keyboards or mice. Fortunately, I'd got my wireless mouse with me, and after a bit of digging I'd found a keyboard.

I need to find a slightly different route home. There was a five-minute hold at the level crossing next to Portslade station, and then the hill starts at the traffic lights just beyond saw me stall numerous times and miss the lights more than once. I did take a different route last night, but it wasn't really intentional. I was supposed to be going round to Liam's. He'd given me the address, and I recognised the road name from when I'd looked at the map earlier in the day, but I was being hassled to leave the building at six, and so never got a chance to look at the map again. I hadn't brought my phone with me, and the sat nav in the car didn't want to recognise his street name, instead only wanted to send me to a similar street name in Worthing.

So, I headed off to where I thought it was and spent the next half an hour driving slowly around, up, and down trying to find his street. I had no joy, and he'd suggested parking north of Aldrington station, only for me not to be able to find that either, or after fifteen minutes even remember what it was called. I stopped to ask a couple of people for directions but must have grown a couple of extra ugly heads as they just looked at me bug eyed and scurried off. I ended up thoroughly lost. Looking at the map this morning, I drove right around his street, going parallel with it on both sides, and crossing over it at least once. Quite frustrating.

Have I mentioned recently that I don't like driving?

And so, it's Friday again and the weekly day off. Which means that it's another Ikea trip. Wish me luck.

## Story Time

### It's All In The Edit

Sam was excited, the old phone contract was up, and it meant she could get a new phone. She had seen the adverts for the new Google Pixel phone and its AI photo capability. Sam loved to take photographs, but she was terrible at it. people had heads cut off, or eyes closed, and there always seemed to be random people or detritus in the background that she hadn't noticed when taking the photos.

It was difficult to edit anything on her current phone and she had never got to grips with trying to use the stupidly complicated Photoshop to change the photos. But this new phone looked like it could do it all for here with a couple of clicks or taps on the screen.

Two days later Sam was unpacking her new phone, charging it, downloading all her apps and logging into them, personalising them all.

And then she took her first photo. A simple one. Her dining room table with a single pen sat in the middle of it. once taken she went and sat down on her sofa to play with the photo. She highlighted the pen in it and two taps later the pen was gone, and the photo just had the table in it. There was not even the slightest hint of there ever been a pen there. Nothing on the table to suggest a flaw. She was going to enjoy this.

When she went back to the dining room she wondered briefly where the pen had gone, but she assumed that she must have already put it back in the pot, even if she couldn't remember doing so.

The following day Sam went out for a walk with her new phone. Taking photos of buildings she had passed a thousand times before. Of trees, of nature, and of herself with different backgrounds. But she resisted playing with the photos whilst she was still out and about. She was going to save that task until she was back at home on her sofa. Back in the warm, back in comfort.

Although Sam enjoyed being out walking on these kinds of crisp late autumnal days, with the low sunshine only just creeping over the tops of the buildings and the trees. It was cooler than she liked, even if she was briskly walking. She was looking forward to being back at home.

Once there, after making herself a massive cup of tea, she curled her legs up under herself on the sofa and started to look at the photos she had taken.

Sam went through them slowly, deliberately, picking out little items in a few of them to highlight and remove. That single cloud above the church of St Barnabas. The graffiti on the wall by the side of the school. The dead pigeon at the base of the tree in the park. The man walking the springer spaniel in the distance in the woods. The little spot on her cheek in the selfie.

The process of the tidying up of the photos pleased her no end. Her photos were going to be so much better going forward. So much more Instagram friendly. Sam smiled at the phone in her hand. And when she got ready to go to bed that night she smiled again as she brushed her teeth. That spot on her cheek had cleared up as well.

Over the next week Sam took photos of everything she passed, and the more photos she took, the more confident she became with what she could highlight and tap away to edit the photos. No more graffiti strewn buildings. No more stray



animals or people in the background. Fallen leaves removed from the beautiful green lawns. No more blemishes on her face.

She didn't notice the headlines on the articles, or the letters in the local papers. The pleas on Facebook. People mysteriously going missing. Has anyone seen out pets? The council being praised for the graffiti removal, and clearing up the leaves so efficiently this year. There were always these kinds of stories, it didn't register that there seemed to be a lot more of them now.

It seemed there was a new appear for information launched every day. And Sam blithely skipped over them in the paper or simply scrolled straight past them on social media. Yes, it was sad, but there was nothing she could do about it.

Or so she believed.

On her way home from work on the Thursday evening Sam had stopped to take a photo of the lovely old Tudor timber framed building on the High Street. She always loved this building. The monochrome set of its black painted timbers and the bright white painted stucco plaster walls between the dark frames. The way it wasn't symmetrical, and how age had warped and twisted the timbers and made the windows and walls be at angles that no modern ticky tacky housing estate build would ever accept.

Either side of the old building were, if not ticky tacky exactly, more modern structures. Victorian red brick one side, and a concrete, chrome, and glass monstrosity the other. She never understood how councils could allow such cultural vandalism to occur.

But it wasn't going to happen in her photos. Sat as always, curled up in the corner of her sofa, Sam started to tap away at the pieces she didn't want in her photo. First to go was the woman in the red dress who had walked into shot at the last moment. Two taps and she was gone, only the white walls behind her remained.

Then Sam worked on the red brick building to the right. It was a bigger piece than she had removed before, a little bit trickier perhaps, but away it went to be replaced by the light grey of the clouds above it. Then the shiny office block was next. And ten minutes later Sam had the perfect photo she wanted of the Tudor cottage on the High Street. By itself. Unencumbered by modern life.

It made the main news at nine. How parts of two buildings on Crawsham High Street had just disappeared, leaving the remains structurally unsound and in danger of collapse. Emergency work to sure them up being hampered by the almost complete collapse of the Tudor cottage that sat between them. Destabilised by the disappearance of the more modern buildings either side, which were apparently help keep it upright.

Sam rushed to the High Street to look for herself. Sure enough, the buildings either side of the now collapsed Tudor cottage were cut off. Exactly to the point where they were at the edge of her original photo. The pieces she had removed from her photo were no longer there.

Horrified she took her phone out of her pocket and took a quick photo of one of the traffic cones which had been placed to stop the traffic passing the site. Three taps later the cone was gone from her photo, and Sam blinked in disbelief as the cone disappeared from the road in front of her at the same time.

A leaf on the ground in front of her was snapped, tapped, and removed. Both from the photo on her phone, and the ground at her feet.

What was happening. Surely this couldn't be real. How could items just be disappearing in real life when she removed them from a photo? And it began to sink in. She thought back to that first photo and the missing pen from her dining room table. To the spot on her face. And it all rushed in.

She could only think about all those stories she had skipped over or scrolled past in the papers and on social media. Going into Facebook she scrolled through the news feeds as she made her way to the twenty-four-hour garage to get another copy of the local paper.

In a state of shock, she linked each of the stories and disappearances to her altered photos. And dropped her phone as if it were suddenly a venomous snake before her.

It wasn't as if she could tell anyone, who would believe her? But she had to get rid of the phone. Ideally go and throw it as far as she could into the lake. But it was too late to make her way through the darkness to do that now, and she couldn't wait until the morning to get rid of the phone. Instead, she went around the back of the garage and dumped the phone into one of their big industrial waste bins.

And then she ran. Ran all the way home and locked the door behind her, curled up in her bed and cried, and tried to forget what she, and her phone had caused.

The homeless man had seen Sam at the bins throwing something away. He went to have a look; it was always worth a try. When he saw the gleaming new phone on top of a black sack his eyes lit up. He would get a lot of money for that in the morning.

## **Chapter and Verse**

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

### **The Talisman – Chapter 7**

When Hodson broke the cover of the trees, he found himself much nearer to the road than he had intended to be, so quickly turned around and headed back into the trees for cover. From the edge of the forest he checked out the road in both directions, happily noting that there were no travellers on the road. He had been walking for a couple of hours, and it would still have been early in the day.

The road wasn't much more than a broad path of crushed stones, weather beaten and unloved that ran in a pretty much straight line for the majority of its route. The land near the border was undulating, but there weren't any rocky outcrops that needed to be circled or large valleys to be negotiated.

Across the whole of the border area there were only a couple of deviations from the straight lines for the roads linking the villages, one that swung north and then back to the south-east around the Marble Forest, a curious piece of countryside that appeared from the outside to be a normal forest, with closely packed towering oaks. However up close the trees weren't oaks, they weren't even wood, they were coloured marbled pillars with all kinds of lichen and moss attached to them, and millennia of bird droppings adorning the pillars.

No one knew how the pillars had come to be like this, they extended deep underground and had root like tentacles connecting them all together just like a normal forest would be. There were many stories of how the Marble Forest had come into being though. Some said that they were carved from solid raw marble deposits found leagues to the south, at the Hollow of the Giants in Rakindom out the other side of Chardom originally, but long since part of it, and transported here and placed by ancient ancestors. Others said that the whole area used to be a marble outcrops and that the trees were painstakingly carved from the solid marble, again at a time in the distant past. A third theory was that they were old wooden oaks that had been spell cast by warlocks in the time of magic many thousands of years ago, and turned to marble when the spell cast went wrong, making them a permanent fixture instead of eradicating them from the landscape.

Truth be told it didn't matter how they came to be there, they were there, and as impressive as they might look, they were as eerie as hell close up, especially if one had the misfortune to be there as night fell. Travellers stayed to the road and looked upon the forest from afar.

The other deviation from arrow straight roads was over the River Nessian, just before you got to the town. Originally a bridge had stood over the river on the route of the road, but it happened to be at a kink in the river, and over the years the flow of the river had eaten away at the banks either side and the foundations of the bridge as it had widened its course at that point. Eventually the bridge had collapsed into the river, and been washed away downstream into the channel that separated Malimiland from Chardom to the south. With the river being much wider at that point now than it had been the people at the time just weren't able to construct a bridge big enough and stable enough to cross the river at that point anymore, and so had gone upstream nearly a league to a straight stretch of river, much narrower than the original spot, and built the bridge there, the road detoured up and back on either side of the river now.

Thoughts of the river made Hodson curse to himself, he had to get across the river, but there would be no way that the bridge near Nessianville wouldn't be watched if people were looking for him, it was the only sane crossing point for leagues in either direction, and would only need a single lookout to be able to see him coming up the road, or even across country to the bridge, as it was flat and virtually tree free there.

This meant that he would have to try and brave a crossing to the south of the bridge and the road. The banks of the river were steep and crumbling for most of the stretch down to the border, and the current ran fast at this time of year. There was little cover for an approach on either bank, which would cause its own problems. He thought of crossing the border and leaving it all behind, but as he did so his hand moved unconsciously to the talisman as it had on previous occasions. No, he would have to find a way to get across when he got there.

He started moving again, trying to stay a couple of tree widths inside the forest, which made the going heavier and slower, at this rate it would take him more than five days to get to Crawster, and he would be in ragged shape when he got there. Additionally he would need to find food along the way, he was pushing it to think that his meagre supplies were going to last for five days, let alone longer; he was going to need to eat more to keep going at a reasonable pace. The sun was bright today, and although the trees provided shade from the direct heat from it, the air was still and was getting warmer as the day progressed and the sun rose higher in the sky. He removed his outer layer, an old sheepskin

jerkin, and tried to stuff it into his pack, but it didn't quite fit, so instead rolled it up into a tube and stuffed it under his arm, it was a bit awkward, but it was better than wearing it in the heat of the day. He would be getting rid of it soon, but until he could change all his clothing, he needed to keep it for the nights when the temperature would drop, and he was sleeping outside.

Every so often he would look towards the road, trying to see how far away from the forest it was, and looking for anyone travelling along it. On his journey out to Bayleigh he hadn't seen many people whilst on the road at any point, on any of the days he had been travelling he would only pass two or three people going in the opposite direction, very occasionally he might pass another traveller going the same way at a slower pace. He might exchange pleasantries with them, but he would carry on again at his own pace. Twice he had been overtaken himself, both times by carts pulled by tired looking horses. They were tradesmen, moving from village to town to village, selling their wares or going to buy up goods needed for them to produce more of their own, in the past he had often tried to persuade them to let him ride along for a while, but over the last few years it had seemed that they were less willing to pick up strangers, people were concentrating on themselves more and more. He would also pass farm workers, out in the fields, maintaining their crops, or looking after their livestock, he might say hello if they were close enough, but most of them watched the people travelling past their farms warily, suspicious that they might be there to take something that belonged to them, rather than them just being strangers walking past them to get to another place.

So far on this day he hadn't seen a soul, for the length of time he had been walking and the distance he had covered it was unusual, even for an area of the Empire as remote as this was. He stopped, waiting for his breathing to lessen, his heartbeat to quieten, and then concentrated on listening to the sounds of nature around him. He was surprised how quiet the forest and surrounding land seemed, there was very little wildlife activity, or they were all being remarkably silent, apart from a few faraway birds calling to their mates, it was soundless. Without a breeze there was no rustling of leaves in the trees overhead, no swaying of the grass on the ground, none of the various little mammals that lived in wooded areas.

He felt alone, though at the same time he thought he felt a presence with him, something, or somebody close to him, shadowing him. Was it real, or had the events over the last nine days started to play tricks on his mind, jumping at shadows that weren't really there. After a brief pause, he carried on through the trees, slower than before, keeping his breathing slow and quiet, conscious of the noise his sandaled feet were making on the grass and ground beneath him. At this moment in time it sounded to him as if he were driving a herd of wild cattle through the undergrowth, though in the back of his mind, the fully sane part, he knew that he was not making enough noise to scare off even the most timid of woodland creatures. He was still listening to the sounds within the forest, and outside of his footsteps there really weren't many, though after couple of minutes a new sound started to trickle into his consciousness. At first it was a worry to him what else was out there, but as the sound became louder, he recognised it for what it was, the sound of water in a stream babbling along happily to its destination.

Soon enough he reached the stream, shallow and easily jumpable, it was a clear as it was possible for water to be, and he could see the bed of the stream with its silt bed with all the various shapes and colours of the stones that were scattered along its course. The water was just what Hodson felt he needed; he could get a wash, drink his fill, and stock up a bit in his water pouch for later. Although there were numerous streams in this part of the world, it never hurt to have a full pouch in your pack.

He took his sandals off and stepped into the water, which came up to his ankles, it felt cool and refreshing on his ankles immediately, taking its time to register to his feet. It felt for a few moments as if it were washing away some of his worries. He felt his body relax the longer he stood in the water, he dropped his sandals by the side of the brook, shrugged his pack off, placing it on his sandals, then added his rolled jerkin to the pile before sitting down next to it. This would be as good a place as any to stop for lunch.

## **Books**

After years of prevaricating, I have finally gotten around to self-publishing some books. Since the last issue of this I now have three books available. The first is the novel which spent many years available on the Inkitt website. "Where The Lights Shine Brightest", this is available on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1738539601> .

Next up is a collection of drabbles, three hundred and sixty six of the little hundred word stories, under the title of "A Drabble A Day Keeps The Psychoanalyst Away", this is available on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/173853961X> .

Finally, there is an autobiographical work, released under my alter ego of Kevin Rodriguez-Sanchez, which covers a two-year period in the early noughties when I lived in Manchester – "Five Go Mad In Manchester". Again, this is available on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/1738539628>

They are all available as paperback or eBook. And if you have Kindle Unlimited then they are available on there to read whenever. Please buy / read / leave reviews.

## **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.onetruekev.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.onetruekev.co.uk/frc.php> where all the issues are available.

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

Lots of stuff on my Medium page, clap, comment, or highlight any article. <https://medium.com/@onetruekev>

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://onetruekev.co.uk/Mutterings/else/> where pretty much everything I've written before is linked through to.

I've recently been submitting to Paragraph Planet and have had some pieces published there, they will be in the archive somewhere, one piece a month from me since June. <https://www.paragraphplanet.com/index.php>

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

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

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

I have two Mastodon accounts, one on the central server, and one on the Medium server.

Recently I've added accounts on Threads <https://www.threads.net/@onetruekev>

And BlueSky <https://bsky.spp/profile/onetruekev.bsky.social>

E-mail any ideas or suggestions to [kev@onetruekev.co.uk](mailto:kev@onetruekev.co.uk)

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