

Flanagan's Running Club – Issue 75

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 September

1787 – The United States Constitution is signed in Philadelphia.

1849 – American abolitionist Harriet Tubman escapes from slavery.

1920 – The National Football League is organized as the American Professional Football Association in Canton, Ohio.

1976 – The Space Shuttle Enterprise is unveiled by NASA.

1978 – The Camp David Accords are signed by Israel and Egypt.

1983 – Vanessa Williams becomes the first black Miss America.

Australian Citizenship Day

Heroes' Day (Angola)

Operation Market Garden Anniversary (Netherlands)

Teachers' Day (Honduras)

Births

1929 – Stirling Moss

1942 – Des Lynam

1960 – Damon Hill

1966 – Doug E. Fresh

1969 – Keith Flint

1990 – Pixie Geldof

Deaths

1985 – Laura Ashley

1996 – Spiro Agnew

Number 1's

Number 1 single in 1987 – Rick Astley – Never Gonna Give You Up

Number 1 album in 1977 – The Supremes – 20 Golden Greats

Number 1 compilation album in 1990 – Various – Megabass

#vss365

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

He had a lot of books, but he had never been a #biblioklept, he had always paid for them. He hadn't even noticed he was doing it. He'd picked the book up and started reading, and got so engrossed that when his exasperated wife said it was time to go, he took it with him.

#vss365

Joke

A cowboy on a long journey stops at a small town to wet his throat he ties his horse up outside the saloon and enters... The town's folk eye him uneasily, but he makes his way to the bar and orders a beer. The bartender opens his beer and sets it down on the table. "I'd be careful if I was you. Town's folk don't take kindly to newcomers, they give em a hard time. And that's what you are is a newcomer." "Is that so?" The cowboy lazily says as he rests his head on his fist and sips his drink. The bartender turns around rolling his eyes. The cowboy stays a good ten minutes finishing his drink, then walks back outside to carry on his journey, but when he gets out there, he finds his horse to be missing. The

cowboy storms back into the bar, draws his pistol, and fires it into the ceiling. The cowboy says, "Alright, which one of you sidewinders stole my horse?" The town's folk looked between each other and then back to the cowboy. You could hear a pin drop. "Well, nobody knows. Alright, well I'm going to go back to that bar and have myself another drink. If I finish that drink, go back outside, and my horse still ain't there, I'm gonna have to do what I done in Texas. And I don't like having to do what I done in Texas" The cowboy, true to his word, goes back to the bar, drinks another beer, goes back outside, and like magic his horse is back. The cowboy gets back on his horse like it never left and begins riding out of town. That's when the bartender runs outside and calls out to the cowboy, "Excuse me, sir! I gots to know, what'd you have to do back in Texas?" The cowboy turns around, looks at the bartender and said, "I walked home."

Drabble

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

Old Man Murphy

A ghost he scoffed. There is no such thing. Only a weak-minded fool would believe such utter nonsense. It is just a tale to scare little children with.

His diatribe continued. It lasted for a good (more like bad) twenty minutes before he ran out of breath and his over acted sense of faux outrage.

The funny thing was, of all the people in the room, only I could see and hear him. The rest of our family couldn't. They may have believed in ghosts themselves, but they couldn't see the ghost of Old Man Murphy in their midst.

Random Items

Facts

A blue whale's tongue weighs more than an elephant

Armadillos are the only animals besides humans that can get leprosy.

There are more Barbie dolls in Italy than there are Canadians in Canada

Thoughts

If money doesn't grow on trees, then why do banks have branches?

At the end of the game, the pawn and the king go back in the same box.

All men die. Not every man really lives.

Random Top Ten

The ten capital cities which are closest to Madrid, Spain.

Rank	Capital	Country	Distance
1	Andorra La Vella	Andorra	494 km
2	Lisbon	Portugal	504 km
3	Algiers	Algeria	714 km
4	Rabat	Morocco	761 km
5	Monaco	Monaco	991 km
6	Paris	France	1,052 km
7	Bern	Switzerland	1,153 km
8	London	United Kingdom	1,263 km
9	Tunis	Tunisia	1,272 km
10	Luxembourg	Luxembourg	1,281 km

Flash Fiction

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

The Daughter

I was dressed in a completely inappropriate shade of pink. But I didn't know that. I thought it was a dark grey, with me being colour blind I do that sometimes. Of course, nobody said anything to me, they just assumed I was being me with my usual extravagant dress sense. But I didn't do it on purpose. They were all shades of grey to me. And not just fifty of them.

There was the one woman at the funeral who did take issue with my bright pink suit. She came storming up to me after the ceremony. Well, storming might be a bit of an exaggeration. She kind of weaved past imaginary obstacles in my general direction before pouring out a stream of slurred obscenities about my outfit, my sexuality, and my blatant disrespect for the dead and other mourners, questioning what kind of moron wears a bright pink suit to a funeral.

I responded with "the kind that is colour blind and who everyone else is too polite or too timid to tell me what I'm wearing." "And besides, from what I know, it would be totally appropriate to the memory of Quentin."

The wind was taken out of her sails somewhat, and although the slurring continued, it wasn't full of angry invective anymore.

She introduced herself as Caroline. It turns out she is Quentin's daughter. Which was a surprise to me as I was under the impression, he only had the one son. As I spoke to her during the day, I found out she had been estranged from the family for nearly twenty years. And so, whilst I'd known them for fifteen years, it was after she had disappeared into the ether. Edited out of their family history and never mentioned once in all the time I'd known them.

When she was barely out of school, instead of heading on to the expected college and university education, she started taking up a lot of bad habits. Smoking and drinking at first, moving on to ill-advised man choices, and then drugs. Which led to stealing from the family to pay for her burgeoning habit. The family gave her an ultimatum. Get clean or get gone. And so, she went. And at seventeen she found herself in a Manchester squat with a whole host of other undesirables.

It took her many years to get out of there. Eventually moving in with a man twice her age when she was in her twenties, and he helped her get clean, get some self-respect, and get a job.

She was remarkably candid as she told me about her life as we sat at a table in the corner of the pub. The wake got gradually noisier, and more booze sodden around us.

Her mother and brother never came over to say a word to her, although they often glanced over in our direction looking nervous. To me it didn't look like a reconciliation was on the cards.

She carried on and told me she had moved back to live locally a few months ago. She had seen the funeral notice in the local paper. If not, then she might never have known her father had died. No one had tried to contact her about it, but she said, why would they change the habits of over half her lifetime.

Caroline told me why she had come back. The man who had gotten her out of the squat had become a strange man over the years. He was more controlling, and she had felt more trapped than ever, and had been looking for a way out for years.

I asked what the catalyst had been for her to finally leave. It has to be said it wasn't the answer I was expecting.

She had woken up one morning to find him next to her in bed stroking his penis through the hole in one of his old socks. Then she clarified that it was a hole in the heel of the sock and not the bit you put your foot in.

I said none of my socks had holes that needed mending in them, and she laughed, before leaning over and stroking my penis and suggesting it was time she got me out of my inappropriate pink suit.

Leicestershire

Currys

Currys is a British electrical retailer operating in the United Kingdom and Ireland, owned by Dixons Carphone. It specialises in selling home electronics and household appliances, with 295 megastores and 73 high street shops. Smaller shops also trade under the Currys Digital brand in the United Kingdom, which was introduced to rebrand all former Dixons shops in April 2006.

Dixons shops in Ireland followed in August 2008, without the Digital suffix. Many of its physical shops in the United Kingdom now trade under the combined Currys PC World brand.

Currys was founded in 1884 by Henry Curry (born in Leicester in 1850), when he started to build bicycles full time at 40 Painter Street, Leicester, England. He opened his first shop in 1888, at 271 Belgrave Gate, Leicester. In 1890, he moved to larger premises at 296 Belgrave Gate, then in 1900 to 285–287 Belgrave Gate. There was an unrecorded fire in one of the shops in 1891.

The company was put on a proper financial footing in 1897, when Curry formed a partnership with his sons, calling the company H. Curry & Sons. The business continued to grow and floated on the stock exchange in 1927.

By this time, the shops sold a wide variety of goods including bicycles, toys, radios, and gramophones. Currys pulled out of cycle manufacturing in 1932, when they closed their Leicester factory, but continued to retail bikes (badged as Currys) until the 1960s.

Meanwhile, particularly under the directorship of family member Dennis Curry between 1967 and 1984, Currys underwent considerable expansion becoming a major high street supplier of televisions and whitegoods (refrigerators, washing machines and other domestic appliances); by 1984 Currys Group PLC (Currys) was a chain of 570 shops, twice as many as the company which was then to acquire it.

Currys was taken over by Dixons (now Dixons Carphone, owners of the Dixons electrical products retail chain) in 1984, but maintained its separate brand identity. In April 2006, DSG announced that its Dixons shops (except in Ireland and in duty free areas in airports) would be rebranded as Currys.digital, making a total of 550 Currys shops in all.

However, in August 2008, the Dixons shops in Ireland were rebranded as Currys, similar to the move in the United Kingdom, but without the ".digital" suffix and with a new Currys logo. Before the Dixons rebranding, the chain contained only a few small-town centre shops compared with its much greater number of large out of town megastores.

These shops are generally split into four main departments: computing, home entertainment, major domestic appliances, and small domestic appliances. The shops are a mix of display products and self-service sections. On 17 January 2007, group chief executive John Clare announced that when the leases on the remaining 'Currys High Street' shops (not the rebranded Currys.digital shops) expired, it would be unlikely that they would be renewed: thus, the shops will be closed at the earliest opportunity.

Dixons Retail began a trial combining Currys and PC World shops in January 2015, and in August declared it to be a success. A number of shops have since been combined, with their shop formats merged into one. In some cases, this has also involved the physical knocking together of some shops which were adjacently located. All advertising for the electronics side of both chains has now been merged.

During the Dixons Carphone Christmas 2015 to 2016 results update to shareholders; Sebastian James, group chief executive for Dixons Carphone, revealed that over the following financial year the three in one shop format (shops featuring Currys, PC World and Carphone Warehouse branding under one roof) would be rolled out across the company's entire portfolio on the United Kingdom and Ireland.

The programme is expected to generate around £20 million of incremental annual earnings, due to recurring costs savings as a result of removing property from the portfolio.

In December 2011, Currys opened a new high end concept shop named "Black". The new shop stocks high end ranges, and is laid out in a more fashionable way including mannequins and 'collection' displays. The new branding and layout aims to attract more female shoppers, whom research shows feel alienated in the larger shops.

Sproxton

Sproxton is a village and civil parish within the Borough of Melton in Leicestershire, England, close to the border with Lincolnshire. It has a population of 480, rising to 658 (including Coston, Saltby and Stonesby) at the 2011 census. It is in the Framland deanery.

The village and civil parish are not coterminous; the parish includes the villages of Sproxton, Saltby, Stonesby, Bescaby, and the former RAF Saltby. The River Eye runs through the parish. Nearby places are Waltham on the Wolds, Croxton Kerrial, Coston, Buckminster, and Skillington (in Lincolnshire).

The Viking Way runs close by. The nearby Sproxton Quarry is a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

There is the parish church of St Bartholomew, extended and restored in 1882 by architect Henry Woodyer, which is a Grade II* listed building. There is evidence of Norman building in the west wall of the south aisle and the west tower is thirteenth century. The top part of the tower was rebuilt in the restoration of 1882. There is a Saxon cross in the churchyard - the only complete one in Leicestershire.

A post mill stood at Sproxton. The mill was rebuilt in 1889 after it blew down and killed the miller. Wakes & Lamb of Newark rebuilt the mill using materials from the old mill and from one at Castle Bytham. It was wrecked by the gales of March 1916, but repaired. By 1920 it was out of use and was demolished in 1949 when owned by Mr T.A. Mount.

Quarrying for iron ore was carried out at Sproxton from 1925 to 1973 and for limestone from 1965 to 1969. The stone was taken away by a railway, construction of which was started in about 1922 by the Great Northern Railway. The line was an extension of the branch from the main line at High Dyke to Stainby. The terminus was on the east side of the Sproxton to Saltby road. It was planned to extend the line to Waltham Station, but this extension was never opened.

The first quarry was for iron ore close to the road between the railway and Sproxton Church and worked its way eastwards until 1961. The quarry was extended eastwards and southwards between 1965 and 1968 but for the getting of limestone rather than iron ore. A second iron ore quarry operated on the south side of the Skillington road between 1961 and 1973, again working eastwards.

A further iron ore quarry was worked on the north side of the railway between 1962 and 1963 again working eastward from the Saltby road. The ore was taken to the railway by standard gauge tramways, worked by horses from 1925 to 1928, then by a petrol engine locomotive and from 1931 by steam locomotives. From 1961 some of the ore was taken to the railway by lorry and from October 1963 the last of the tramways was abandoned and all of the stone was taken to the railway by lorry. Steam quarrying machines were used until 1940 when electric and diesel machines were introduced.

Some of the quarried area has been restored for agriculture (in places it looks hummocky). Some has been forested and the final gulleys and the limestone quarry remain. There are still traces of the railway and tipping dock close to the quarries.

There are about eighty houses in the parish and some of the usual services. There is a pub, The Crown Inn, but no village shop and no Post Office. There is, however, a letterbox on what was the post office until 1999 and a bus stop at which buses stop somewhat infrequently.

Wandering about the village will soon bring to your notice, nearly opposite the pub, a small memorial garden. This was the site of the Methodist Chapel until 1997 when it was taken down, stone by stone, and shipped off to Baker University in Kansas where. There is a school building, which is now used as the village hall. Primary school aged children usually go to Croxton Kerrial, which is about three miles away, but some parents choose to send their children to Buckminster.

Life's What You Make It

Excerpts from life writing.

Number Thirteen

When we were kids, living at number fifteen, number thirteen was the living museum of Winnie. They were terraced houses built in the early years of the twentieth century, the street growing in length between being started in 1902 and being finished in 1911. Number thirteen was a bit of a wonder to us. It seemed just like those example rooms of how people used to live that you see in museums now, and Winnie was its curator.

She was old, and as young kids that made her seem even more ancient than she was. She had never married and had looked after her ailing father for many years before my parents had moved in next door. Her father died in his nineties having lived much of his life in the house.

And during that time nothing had been modernised. The kitchen had its old stone sink still in situ, along with a washboard and a mangle. The front room was laid out like an Edwardian parlour, and looked as if its furniture and décor has never been altered. The middle room was cluttered. A dark wooden table dominated the centre of the room. An upright piano sat on one wall bookmarked by two grandfather clocks. An old black and white TV sat in an alcove to the side of the coal fireplace. It was plugged in using the old round pin plugs.

Yet despite the rest of the antiquity around her, she had a telephone, something we didn't have at home until I was in my twenties. And as kids we knew the number of it so we could ring and leave a message if we were going to be late. She had a spare key to our house in case we ever needed one, and that was fine at first, and whilst we were younger children. But as time went by, she became more intrusive with it. If we were doing something and didn't answer the door, she would let herself in. We got to the point where we had to lock the entry gate and put the catch on the front door to stop her just wandering in.

And then there came the time when I was seventeen, and it was the first year I didn't go away with the family on holiday for the July fortnight. By which point Winnie had become a lunatic. It had been mentioned to her at some point that I might be going away for a couple of days with friends. So, I woke one morning at 7:30 to find Winnie standing over my bed asking when I was going. And then she would be standing at her front window noting my comings and goings. So, drastic action was required.

First up was the car battery I managed to borrow and that I fitted wires from up to the Yale lock. Just enough of a shock to put her off using her key. Not to be deterred, she would be at the letterbox trying to get her head through it to see into the house and call out. I thought about adding further lines to the car battery to hook it to the letterbox as well, but that wouldn't fair on the poor postman. So instead, I got a piece of card and hung it at the correct height so it would be all she could see when she looked through the letterbox. The message I'd written on the card of, "Fuck off you nosey bitch" might seem a bit of a harsh thing to say to a pensioner, but it really wasn't in this case.

I took to garden hopping to get in and out of the house. I'd go to the bottom of the garden and up on to the dividing brick wall between us and the next street, and drop down into the long alley eight doors down and out through their entry into the next street. And I would come back in the same way. With our entry gate locked and the key to the front electrified Winnie couldn't get in and she couldn't work out how I was managing to get in and out without her seeing me, and the rest of the fortnight was peaceful.

Not long after I had moved out of home, Winnie began seriously deteriorating and she would often appear covered in soot as she had burnt through another pan or kettle on the old gas stove, or had set another tea towel alight. My parents were worried that she would burn the house down and take theirs with it. It was somewhat of a relief to them when she died.

Personally, I think Leicester City Council missed a trick afterwards though. They spent months and tens of thousands of pounds bringing the house up to a standard where people could live in it. They would have been as well off turning it into an Edwardian House museum and charging visitors to go in and see it.

Something which would have been much better for my parents as well. Instead, they let the tossers who bought the house from the council to move in and then build an illegal two-story extension the full length of their garden, and in doing so blocking out all of the light to my parents' garden. And one of the main reasons they moved away from Leicester.

Poetry Corner

Don't Touch That Dial

Has the world gone totally mad?
Every man for themselves it would seem
Turn on the news and turn it back off quick
The constant stream of misery and woe is too much
Tax cuts for the rich
Benefit cuts for the poor
Energy price crisis it screams
Caused by one war or another
The value of the pound drops like a stone
Aided by bankers betting on it to do so
It's not as if you can protest against it
Silently holding a sign will see you arrested
Fascist totalitarianism rising everywhere
Mussolini reborn as a female Italian prime minister
The so-called leaders of the free world
Says you can be free, but only to shoot guns
Women's rights trashed by fundamental Christianity
Whilst non-ironically slating Islam for the same thing
Climate change action is only paid lip service
Whilst billions are spent on rockets into space
With the sole goal of crashing into an asteroid
As if playing real life eighties arcade games
Banning books because they don't confirm your world view

With every stroke fiction is being made fact
Predicted dystopian futures becoming present day reality
The four horsemen of the apocalypse have been and gone
And have left us behind in our own filth
All that is left is for the aliens to turn up
Not to conquer us of course, no one wants this mess
They will only come to be the spectators
As we destroy ourselves and the world explodes

Did I Really Blog That?

A Few Random Observations

With picture laden travelogues and Crawley Town match reports being a main focus there hasn't been any random blogging recently. Not to worry, random blogging is back.

I'll start with sprinklers, or any random way of soaking people. I had been dreaming of this kind of thing before the sprinklers at Crawley Town came to life at some point in the second half of a recent game. It was originally about the noisy youths who sit drinking, shouting, and generally being noisy twats late at night / early in the morning in the park at the back of the house. I was thinking what a great deterrent a remote-controlled sprinkler system would be. If they suddenly got soaked every time they got a bit rowdy, then perhaps they'd fuck off somewhere else. Then there is the water feature in Queens' Square in town. It doesn't seem to be on very often, and I always see people walking across the area where the little jets are. Imagine being in one the building surrounding the square and having a little button you could press as people are walking across the square, and suddenly they are surrounded by water jets. There is a reason they don't let have these things.

Writing group is back, and this means a Maccy D's breakfast is back as part of the routine. And that means a few minutes watching people. On the way in last weekend, I saw a bloke wearing a uniform and hi-vis gilet over the top. On the back of it were the words "Civil Enforcement Officer." Which of course brings me to ask the question, are there rude enforcement officers? Because I'm fairly sure that kind of job would be right up my street. "Excuse me sir, could you move your car please?" "Why?" "Because you've parked like a cunt."

Next up was I saw a little boy bend down and pick up what looked to be a stick from something like a Chupa Chups lolly. I did think he was going to put it in the bin. But no, he decided his mouth was a much better place for it. His mum didn't, she yanked it out of his mouth with the kind of hand speed that boxers would die for. And then the berating started. Which is fair enough, but the funny thing to me was the fact that the dad had a look around to see if anyone was watching before sidling off with the little girl of the family, so they were out of the beratement zone.

The stream of delivery drivers collecting orders is never ending. One of them did catch my eye as he left with an order. He had a Deliveroo jacket on but was carrying a Just Eat heat bag. I couldn't see where he was parked, but it wouldn't have surprised me to see him jump into his Uber car.

The drive to and from work continues to be a source of much "what the fuckness"? I could take any day and fill it with a litany of imbecilic driving, but I'll pick yesterday as a general example. I hadn't even gotten out onto a main road before it started. The picture / diagram below will help with what I'm trying to explain. I was stopped at the traffic lights at the bottom of Southgate Drive waiting to turn onto Southgate Avenue to head for the A23 (the red x). On Southgate Avenue waiting at traffic lights were cars who would be turning right onto Southgate Drive (the small yellow arrow). Then a BMW in the straight on lane who had green lights (the big green arrow), slows, puts their indicator on (a shock, I didn't know they worked on BMWs) and stops to wait for anything heading north to pass. I thought they were just being impatient and were skipping the queue in the filter lane to turn into Southgate Drive. But no, why do that when they can instead do a U-turn.



On the way home I had a much more up close and personal insight into piss poor BMW driving. Just after Hickstead the A23 changes from two to three lanes, and there is a feeder lane onto the A23 which forms the third (and new inside) lane. So, as I'm coming to the merge point doing my usual sixty, a BMW comes up the feeder lane, and despite the lane in front of them being clear they automatically come across into my lane, totally ignoring the fact I'm already there. Beeping has no effect and I have to slam the brakes on to avoid being pushed across into the ten-ton truck in the outer lane, and the poor sod behind me nearly crashes into the back of me. Meanwhile the BMW is flashing their hazards as if they are saying thanks for letting them in. It's probably a good job I don't have some kind of James Bond-esque machine guns built into my headlights.

Beware! Moron Wagon.

Story Time

The Hollow

"You'll never be content."

I didn't know whether the words were supposed to be a prophecy, a curse, or just a bitter outburst. It was difficult to tell when you were dealing with a terribly upset witch. I should have known better by now. Dating witches never turned out well. Breaking up with them always turned out badly. And it was always me that did the breaking up. I suppose there was some truth in the statement. I wasn't content. That's why I broke up with Selda. And Ezzie before here, and Lileth before that. I tried not to remember any of the names before that. And I hoped they tried not to remember mine. It was better that way. For all concerned.

Not that they could hurt me. At least not with their magic. A dagger to the chest, or a hammer to the head were always a possibility. A poisoned drink, or a pillow over my head whilst I slept would work as well. But the one thing they were feared for, the thing that kept most people away from them – their spells – didn't work on me. I was immune to magic. As far as I was concerned it didn't exist. Not only did it not work on me, I couldn't see its effects on anyone or anything else.

There was a term for us. The Hollows. Not the freaks, as any with magic would call us. There were far less of us than there were witches, or wizards, or prophets, or spellcasters, or seers. And as such we were highly sought after. As we should be. Anyone who could just walk through a spelled door, or not be enchanted at the drop of a magic hat was worth their weight in gold. And most of us had more than our weight in gold by the time we were much more than children. I didn't need to work again for the rest of my life.

If I'm honest, being a Hollow is what attracted the witches to me. It's not as if I'm a looker. I'm what you might kindly describe as plain. As is fitting a Hollow I suppose. They are unremarkable in all senses. The only people who really are. But it is a strange world that has made out being so unremarkable so remarkable to everyone else.

The witches see it as a challenge. They can't believe it is possible for someone to be immune to their magic. They always want to test the theory out, see if it is real, and so they try out their powers, and try to prove that they are superior to the other witches who have met Hollows before.

And they would fail. Every time. Some of them would get angry about it, and I would laugh, and they would become madder. But they would persevere. I wouldn't. I get bored, and so I break up with them and they become incandescent. They would cast at me full of anger, and it would have as much effect on me as any of their previous spells.

It's best not to think about the collateral damage. The poor sods who were too close to me when the spells were cast. The ones within the range of the wash as it just flowed around or through me. (I'm not sure how it works and whether it acts as if I'm not there at all, or as if I'm an impenetrable lump of matter.) those who had their flesh sloughed off their bones. The ones burnt to a pile of ash in seconds. Those disfigured horribly who would forever scare anyone who saw them. And the final poor bloke who had the misfortune to see his dismembered penis slide out of the bottom of the leg of his trousers and thinking it was a rodent stamped on it. I was just glad Selda hadn't tried to spell me, and that there would be no accidental carnage this time around.

I suppose I should feel guilty about the poor misfortunates, but I don't. I don't feel it is my fault. The witches are taught from an early age about controlling their casting. To take the emotion out of it. and yet they still do it. They are the ones killing and maiming innocent passers-by. They should be locked up and have their magic bound. But it doesn't happen. The magistrates are afraid of them. I've lost count of the number of times I've been censured for provoking witchcraft. Only for the same magistrates to then come to me to act on their behalves in cases where they need to circumvent magic. I've refused a number of them, depending on their level of censure and condescension. The magistrates being just as bad as the witches in not getting their own way. They are supposed to be intelligent and rational men.

Yet one of them had severely censured me, only for the next sentence out of his mouth to be an order to work for him on a matter of an illegal prophets' coven. I refused, calling him an unprincipled hypocrite. For which he decided to throw me into a prison cell until I agreed to do what he wanted. Not wanting me to escape he put me in a special cell with three different warding spells on it. I wasn't quite sure what part of me being a Hollow he didn't understand, but with no physical lock I just walked out of the cell and kept walking. The magistrate found another Hollow, and I found another place to live.

As I have many times in my life. Mainly out of choice, but a few times out of necessity.

I had a lot of money, but few possessions. Only what I carried in my packs. I had always been this way. I suppose it is the lot of a Hollow. But now perhaps, it was time to stop moving. To have my own dwelling. And to hide away from witches, and magistrates. Move to somewhere I wouldn't be known as a Hollow. Live a relatively normal life.

The words Selda had screamed at me as I left came to mind again. Would I be content with a new life? With no drama, my own dwelling, and possessions, and living by myself? If I weren't content living in a dwelling full of possessions with witches over the years, would I be by myself? I didn't think it was a prophecy, and I doubted it was a curse. I don't even think it was a bitter statement from a scorned witch. If I'm honest I think it is just true. I'm not going to be content. It's just one of those things.

I kept walking, leaving another town. I was going to head southeast towards the Great Sea, an area I hadn't really spent any time in. where no one knew me, or that I was a Hollow. It would take several long days of walking to get there, or longer if I didn't walk from dawn to dusk. I was in no hurry though. No task awaited me. No one waited for me. I could wander the whole of the Empire if I wanted to. And suddenly that thought appealed to me, and I smiled as I walked down the sandy road.

It was only mid-afternoon when I saw a village on the horizon. It might have taken another hour or so before I got there. It would be a good place to stop for the night. If the inn had room of course, not always guaranteed.

But the inn was nearly empty. I got myself a room and then went back and sat in the main hall of the inn and drank ale. Lots of ale. It was late in the evening when a man came and sat at the table I was at. I raised my eyebrows, as it was strange behaviour. There were lots of tables in the inn, and pretty much all of them had no one sat at them. I was about to object to him sitting at my table when he spoke first.

"Are you Sebastien Willow?"

It would appear that just walking away wasn't as easy an option as I had hoped. I didn't know the man, but I saw no benefit in lying to him.

"I am, who wants to know?"

"Selda wanted me to give you a message. You may never be content, but she needs to be."

And with that he had a dagger in his hand, and the end of it was stuck in my chest. The witch's magic couldn't kill me, but a hired hand could. As my life drained away, blood covering the hilt of the dagger and the arm of my assassin, my final thoughts were to why Selda was the first witch to have thought of an assassin instead of magic. I suppose it would explain why she had not cast a spell at me as I told her I was leaving.

She had had a more circumspect and successful way of dealing with her ire towards me. And I certainly wasn't content with dying.

Chapter and Verse

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

The Talisman – Chapter 4

Since that night, Hodson hadn't frequented any inns for their ales, and had made sure that the scarf was in place around his neck at all times he was likely to be in company. He had walked almost the entire length of the border between Malimiland and Chardom in this time, and was sat in a dark corner in the inn at Bayleigh, the last of the villages near the border to Chardom, before it became the border to Druzistan to the West, with the inhospitable mountainous land across to border, and the even more inhospitable inhabitants, he had been across the border into Druzistan once, an experience he vowed never to repeat.

He was now at the point where he had to make his decision, did he go over the border into Chardom, and forget all about his life in Malimiland, as he had originally planned, and in doing so forego any way of finding out about the talisman

around his neck, or did he wander back through his homeland to the capital he had left years ago, to try and find out just what the talisman was and why it had attached itself to him?

He finished the cup of ale in front of him, the only one he had partaken in that evening, and slowly and deliberately made his way back to his room, avoiding making eye contact with any of the other people in the inn's main room.

Once inside the room he jammed the chair under the door handle as he had done every night since the incident in Waspick, took off his sandals and got into bed in his clothes, he was now sleeping in a state of readiness, and figuratively with one eye open, just in case there was another incident.

He was glad that he was ready, as at some point during the night he woke to the sound of numerous foot falls, and an undertone of whispered voices coming from the corridor outside his room. As he swung his legs out of the bed and down to his waiting sandals, he could hear someone trying the handle on his door, and the scraping of a key into the lock as whoever was out there in the dark tried to make their entrance into his room.

Hodson wasn't waiting around to form a welcoming committee for his nocturnal visitors, he had his sandals on, and his pack was over his shoulder as he made his way to the window and the alternative way out of the room. He had just opened the window when the key had finished turning and the door handle was pushed down quickly. The door moved slightly before bouncing back into place, the chair under the handle doing its job in preventing a quick entrance into the room from whoever was trying to get in. Hodson was through the window and dropping the ten feet to the ground before the second attempt on the door, it sounded as if it had had as much joy as the first one, but the voices had seemed to get louder.

Various pikes and shields were piled outside the front door of the inn as Hodson sneaked past, meaning it was militia trying to get into his room. How had they managed to catch up with him, and why? Was it the melee in the town square at Nessonville, or the incident with the potential thieves at Waspick that had brought them here, or indeed was it another option that he didn't know about and therefore hadn't considered. The only thing for certain was that he wasn't going to wait around to have a conversation with the militia about it. First up, he didn't think the chances of anyone in the militia being able to hold an actual conversation were too high, and secondly, out here at the border, they were in the habit of beating suspects to death before thinking about asking questions.

As Hodson silently fled into the dark countryside he could hear the sound of splintering wood as the chair that had possibly saved his life came to the end of its own, and the militia rushed into the now empty inn bedroom. The wind from the village carried the sounds of angry voices through the night to him. They weren't comforting sounds and they weighed upon him nearly as heavily as the damn talisman around his neck did.

He made his way into the woods, and found a large spruce tree that had numerous low boughs that he could clamber into and hide away from the world for the rest of the night. Even with his mind racing he managed to fall asleep not long after, glad of the chance again on this night.

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/@onetruekev>. 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](#).

And if you do read, if possible, clap for it, highlight any of it, and make a comment, even one word. All these things boost the article.

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.

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.

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, 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 Twitter, 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/>

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

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