

Flanagan's Running Club – Issue 77

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 November

887 – Emperor Charles the Fat is deposed by the Frankish magnates in an assembly at Frankfurt, leading his nephew, Arnulf of Carinthia, to declare himself king of the East Frankish Kingdom in late November.

1858 – Modified Julian Day zero.

1968 – Viewers of the Raiders–Jets football game in the eastern United States are denied the opportunity to watch its exciting finish when NBC broadcasts Heidi instead, prompting changes to sports broadcasting in the U.S.

2019 – The first known case of COVID-19 is traced to a 55-year-old man who had visited a market in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China.

International Students' Day

World Prematurity Day

Births

1925 – Rock Hudson

1944 – Danny DeVito

1960 – Jonathan Ross

1960 – RuPaul

1966 – Sophie Marceau

1981 – Sarah Harding

Deaths

1558 – Mary I of England

1796 – Catherine the Great

2006 – Ferenc Puskás

Number 1's

Number 1 single in 1966 – Beach Boys – Good Vibrations

Number 1 album in 1977 – Sex Pistols – Never Mind The Bollocks, Here's The Sex Pistols

Number 1 compilation album in 2006 – Various – Radio 1's Live Lounge

#vss365

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

They were stuck in traffic again, it was always the case when they travelled this way, moving a few yards and stopping again. Crawling along until they got to the hold up. This time it was an overturned tanker full of preserve. What you could call a proper traffic #jam.

#vss365

Joke

A man with a 25-inch-long penis goes to his doctor to complain that he is unable to get any women to have sex with him. They all tell him that his penis is too long. "Doctor," he asks in total frustration, "Is there any way you can shorten it?" The doctor replies, "Medically son, there is nothing I can do. But I do know this witch who may be able to help you out." So, the doctor gives him directions to the witch. The man calls upon the witch and relays his story. "Witch, my penis is 25-inches long and I can't get any women to have sex with me. Can you help me shorten it?" The witch stares in amazement, scratches her head, and then replies, "I think I have a solution to your problem. What you have to do is

go to this pond deep in the forest. In the pond, you will see a frog sitting on a log who can help solve your dilemma. First you must ask the frog, will you marry me? Each time the frog declines your proposal, your penis will be five inches shorter." The man's face lights up and he dashes off into the forest. He calls out to the frog, "Will you marry me?" The frog looks at him dejectedly and replies, "NO!" The man looks down and suddenly his penis is 5 inches shorter. "Wow," he screams out loud, "This is great!!" But he is still too long at 20 inches, so he asks the frog again. "Frog, will you marry me?" the guy shouts. The frog rolls its eyes back in its head and screams back, "NO!" The man feels another twitch in his penis, looks down, and it's another 5 inches shorter. The man laughs, "This is fantastic." He looks down at his penis again, 15 inches long, and reflects for a moment. Fifteen inches is still a monster, just a little less would be ideal. Grinning, he looks across the pond and yells out, "Frog, will you marry me?" The frog looks back across pond shaking its head, "How many times do I have to tell you? NO, NO, and for the last time, NO!"

Drabble

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

The Innkeeper

There was something amiss about the innkeeper. It was suspicious just how many people went missing having stayed at the inn. No one ever saw or heard from them again, but many came looking.

But Cara was determined to find out and so she hid away as the innkeeper locked up. She watched as the innkeeper went to a guest's room and reduced them from a person to a spirit and captured them in a bottle.

Only for the innkeeper to find her watching him and do the same to her, adding her to his ever-expanding collection of spirits.

Random Items

Facts

The first ever Greyhound race in this country took place at Belle Vue in Manchester in 1926.

The letter "J" does not yet appear anywhere within the periodic table of the elements.

The Benin national football team are known as the Squirrels. (That'll explain why they're crap at football)

Thoughts

Age is a very high price to pay for maturity.

If you look like your passport picture you probably need the trip.

The tongue weighs practically nothing, yet so few people can hold it.

Random Top Ten

The ten largest islands on Earth by size.

Rank	Island	Sq Miles
1	Greenland	836,300
2	New Guinea	303,476
3	Borneo	287,001
4	Madagascar	226,658
5	Baffin Island	195,928
6	Sumatra	182,812
7	Honshu Island	88,016
8	Victoria Island	83,896
9	Great Britain	80,823
10	Ellesmere Island	75,767

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.

It's Coming Home

It's coming home.

That's what they said. But as with so many of the Willurian government's promises, it didn't happen. And now, twenty-six years down the line it still hadn't happened.

It has to be said that when they originally promised to bring it home, I was a child. I didn't even know what 'it' was. I didn't understand why there was such a big fuss about bringing it home. And I was a bit hazy about just where this home was. I thought they would be coming along and placing this 'it' down in our living room next to the fireplace. That was what I understood by home. I didn't realise it was a more metaphorical home they meant. Of course, as a child I couldn't even pronounce metaphorical, let alone know what it meant.

I suppose I should try and explain what 'it' is. We are Willurians. Our planet was founded in the twenty third century of common time. A group of like-minded individuals commandeered a spaceship and flew to this planet and claimed it as their own. With them they brought what is known as the folio. The folio is the 'it'. It is a computer with a single use. It contains the complete works of William Thackery Makepeace.

The Willurians are the religious followers of the cult of WTM (as some of us more lazy citizens prefer to say and type). They say there used to be these things called books made out of something called paper. I have no idea what either of those things are, but they are held in high esteem by our High Priestess Council. The folio computer is the computer version of lots of these so-called books. It was considered the one true computer.

And yet they let it slip away. Perhaps they grew complacent. Perhaps they thought no one would care about a planet of people obsessed by a writer from a millennium ago.

But someone did, even if not on purpose. It came to one of our great publishing days in the calendar. When the one true computer would be wheeled out in front of the gathered masses and the lucky high priestess would read from the work of WTM that had been published on that day at some point in the dim and distant past.

Only for the council to go into the holy room it was stored in and find the room empty. The one true computer had vanished.

This had been long before I was born, or my parents had been born, or even my grandparents. It had taken many centuries for the Willurians to find out what had happened to the one true computer.

A passing bandit had stolen it. Thinking it was just a computer, one he could sell on. And being unable to use it for anything apart from reading the works of WMT he had dropped it into the first junk shop he could find on the next planet he planned to rob.

I suppose we should have been grateful he didn't just eject it out into space as he might any other random detritus.

An ex-Willurian had seen it in this junk shop decades later and suspected it might be the missing one true computer. He tried to buy it but didn't have enough credits and so it remained where it was. But word about it got out. Some sharp individual picked it up and so began the long-drawn-out process of it making its way back to its rightful home on our planet.

Twenty-six years ago, the government had reneged on the deal to buy it back, baulking at the cost and demanding the stolen property be returned gratis. They went to the intergalactic courts to try and recover it. The case went on for just over twenty years before the courts made the decision that it should be returned to the Willurians. But at a price. The Willurians had to compensate the galaxy for the price of the commandeered spaceship all those centuries before. The next few years saw an appeal. The Willurians eventually agreed they would pay the cost indicated. Rumour is they accepted only because the appeal court had suggested charging them for taking the planet we live on without permission as well.

All in all, it was a much higher price than the government had originally agreed to pay twenty-six years ago. I'll guarantee you that will be getting added to our tax bills.

The government say they have the money now, and that the handover of the money for the one true computer was going to take place tomorrow. If they can be trusted to pay, or to tell us the truth that it.

Leicestershire

Sauvey Castle

Sauvey Castle is a medieval castle, near Withcote, Leicestershire, England. It was probably built by King John in 1211 as a secluded hunting lodge in Leighfield Forest. It comprised a ringwork or shell keep, with an adjacent bailey; earthwork dams were constructed to flood the area around the castle, creating a large, shallow moat. The castle was occupied by the Count of Aumale in the early reign of Henry III, but it then remained in the control of the Crown and was used by royal foresters until it fell into disuse in the 14th century. By the end of the 17th century, its walls and buildings had been dismantled or destroyed, leaving only the earthworks, which remain in a good condition in the 21st century.

Historians are divided as to when Sauvey Castle was constructed; most suggest that it was built by King John in 1211 when he acquired the surrounding lands, although some sources argue it was built during the reign of King Stephen, between 1135 and 1153. The castle was located in a secluded part of Leighfield Forest, part of the wider Forest of Rockingham, and, if built by John, was intended for use as a hunting lodge. Its name in Norman French was *Salvéé*, meaning "dark island".

The castle lies on raised ground along a valley, with two tributaries of the River Chater running past it to the north and south. It comprises an oval enclosure 60 by 40 metres (200 by 130 ft.) across, variously described as a shell keep or a ringwork, separated by a deep ditch from a rectangular bailey to the west, 100 by 70 metres (330 by 230 ft.) in size. The bailey had a guardhouse at its north-east corner, overlooking the entrance. Buildings were constructed around the south side of the enclosure, with a chapel in the middle. The castle was built largely from stone, with a curtain wall around the enclosure.

A ditch was cut along the western site of the castle, between 20 metres (66 ft.) and 60 metres (200 ft.) wide, and an earth bank, or dam, 6 metres (20 ft.) high was built to the south-east; these allowed the area around the castle to be flooded, forming a large, shallow lake or moat. A similar design of moat can be seen at Ravensworth Castle. Fishponds were constructed as part of the complex, linked to the moat.

The first records of Sauvey Castle date around 1216, during the First Barons' War, when the government of the young Henry III ordered the royal castle to be surrendered to William de Fors, the Count of Aumale. The count established a power base in the region, but in 1218 William Marshal, the regent, ordered him to return it to the Crown; the count declined. Further demands followed until, in 1220, royal forces besieged and took the count's castle at nearby Rockingham. In a face-saving solution, the count finally returned Sauvey to the King, supposedly of his own free will, in exchange for the cancellation of any debts that he might have owed to the Crown.

The castle was occupied by royal foresters during the 13th century; usually the keepers of Leighfield, and the castle carried with it the rights to the neighbouring manor of Withcote. In the mid-13th century, the castle carried a small "farm" - an annual fee owed to the Crown by its holder - of £3. In the 1240s Henry III ordered the sheriff of Leicester to build a timber chapel in Sauvey Castle, using wood from Rockingham Forest and reusing stones from a collapsed stable.

After 1246, the castle declined in importance, although during the instability and revolts of 1258, Henry III ordered Sauvey to be used as the shrieval, or sheriff's, castle for the counties of Leicestershire and Warwickshire, which lacked their own shrieval castles. In 1289, the keeper of Rockingham Forest removed stonework and lead from the property, for reuse at Rockingham Castle.

The castle was last referred to in active use in 1316, after which it was probably allowed to decay; further stonework was taken by the keeper of Rockingham Forest in 1373, by which time the castle had probably been abandoned. By the 15th century, Sauvey formed a subsidiary property of Withcote manor - a reversal of the old land holding pattern. Its structures had mostly been dismantled or destroyed by 1622 and had gone entirely by the end of the century.

The site is protected under UK law as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. It remains in a good condition and Historic England regard the castle's earthworks and moat design as distinctive, with "few parallels nationally".

Wistow

Wistow is a hamlet and deserted medieval village in the English county of Leicestershire, and lies seven miles south-east of the city of Leicester in the valley of the River Sence. Since 1936 it has included most of the former civil parish of Newton Harcourt which is a chapelry of Wistow. The population of the civil parish at the 2011 census was 256.

The village was named as *Wistanestou* in the Domesday Book and is thought to derive from *Wigstan* (OE male personal name) + OE *stow* 'a holy place'; 'The holy place of Wigstan'. It is thought to be the site of the martyrdom of Saint Wigstan, a Mercian prince. Wistow was part of the royal multiple estate of aet Glenne (Great Glen).

St Wistan's Church: The present structure, which dates from the 12th century, was enlarged c. 1300, again altered in the 14th and 15th centuries, and remodelled in the 18th century. The church of St Wistan consists of nave and chancel under one roof, south porch, west tower, vestry, and north chapel. It is built of rubble, chiefly ironstone, with some limestone dressings, and lead roofs. It is a Grade II* listed building.

Wistow Hall, which may be built on or near the site of the earlier medieval house, retains the form of a large house of early-17th-century date. It consists of two stories with attics, built of red brick with stone dressings and now completely stuccoed on all sides. The original plan appears to have been H-shaped consisting of a central hall between two cross-wings which extended westwards to enclose a rear court. Then, as now, the principal front faced east with a central entrance, while the south wing contained the parlour rooms and the north wing the kitchen and service rooms. The map of 1632 shows the house with its H-plan having two three-storied tower-like features with pyramidal roofs standing at the front of each wing on their outer sides. Formal gardens are also shown to the south and east of the house.

During work on the house in 1960 certain early features were exposed; these included stone dressings in the rear wall of the hall marking the position of a large lateral chimney stack, and a blocked north window and quoins in the existing west wall of the house apparently surviving from a former south extension of the kitchen wing. The first-floor rooms in the north wing have reset panelling of the 17th century and more of a similar date is preserved piecemeal in the attic rooms. One stone doorway with a Tudor head remains in the side wall of the south wing. The multi-gabled appearance of the house with finials, kneelers, and large lateral stacks remained more or less unaltered until after the end of the 18th century.

Little work appears to have been done to the house between 1783 and 1814. In 1814, the building was in poor condition and subsequently underwent a drastic remodelling: this involved removing the gables on the north, south, and east sides and substituting hipped slate roofs with dormer windows set behind a tall parapet. A large glass hot-house was added at the south-west corner of the house in 1819 which has since been demolished. Later in the 19th century the same side of the house received two semi-circular bay windows, the work of the second Sir Henry Halford, who was also responsible for laying out a small formal garden. The rococo decoration in the south wing is probably of this period. In 1912 and the following years the balustrade and parapet were removed, and additional dormer windows were provided, and in 1960 parts of the house were converted into five self-contained flats. The interior has few features of distinction, but the fine wrought-iron staircase balustrade built in the inner hall by Sir Charles Halford is similar in design to the wrought-iron gates of the Halford chapel in the church.

Nowadays Wistow is notable as the location of a rural crafts and garden centre and of a maize maze.

Administratively, Wistow forms part of the civil parish of Wistow and of Harborough district, although the adjoining country park is in Blaby.

Life's What You Make It

Excerpts from life writing.

The Manchester Meet

I was early. I was always early. I had a mortal fear of being late. I would rather be an hour early than one minute late. I'm nervous about this. I pace up and down outside Oxford Road station, I can't stand still. I could do with a cigarette, just for something to do, but I gave up a few years ago, and I'm not sure being caught smoking would give the right impression after all these years.

I hadn't smoked when I was younger, so my parents would have never seen me with a cigarette. Seven years down the line, when I'm due to see them for the first time since I disappeared off the face of the Earth as far as anyone, I knew from my old life was aware. Such was the shambles my married life had become; I was prepared to cut myself off from everyone one I knew and loved and run away and hide in Manchester.

And now I'm back in Manchester to meet my parents. I'm back in Manchester two years after moving down to Crawley due to work. I've come for a weekend away with some colleagues from work. It was a heavy first night last night, Thursdays were always messy in Manchester, and as I left the apartment we are renting for the weekend, everyone else is still in bed.

My parents had moved to Morecambe whilst I still lived in Manchester. I just didn't know it until after I'd moved to Crawley, so Manchester is now a neutral ground for us. I don't know what to expect. How will they look? My brother – who tracked me down – says my dad has prostate cancer, and although he is living OK at the moment, it's not curable. I don't expect any issues with meeting my dad. My mum is a different kettle of fish entirely. She was always highly strung and unpredictable. Larry says she has calmed down a lot in the last few years, almost as if she has had to be able to deal with dad's condition.

As I pace around, going back and forth wearing out a line in the pavement around the crescent of the taxi rank, there is a sense of trepidation, and I look at my watch for the umpteenth time since I got here. Their train should have been in a couple of minutes ago, but as is the way of things it is late. More nervous minutes for my mind to run away with me.

And then the train arrives, and I start to scan those getting off and making their way towards me at the exit. My heart is racing as I see an old couple who may be my parents, but they aren't. I see two more possibilities before the platform completely empties and no more passengers make their way to the exit. I wander into the station and look around and there is no sign of anyone else. I rush back out of the station and look around somewhat frantically for anyone who looks like the image I have in my head of my parents. The taxi queue is gone; no one is at the bus stop for the free city centre shuttle buses. They haven't turned up.

Do I blame them? I made no attempt to contact them over the years. Not even to let them know I was safe and alive. No cards for Christmas or birthdays. No phone call. Have they written me off as the bad job I had been? Then I think has something happened to them. Has my dad had to go to hospital? It's only two days since we finalised the meetup, but has he taken a turn for the worst. It's not as if they have a mobile, I can ring. Not that I can ring anyone without going back to the apartment to pick my phone up.

I didn't think I'd need it. Damn, I'm shaking. No cigarettes, I could do with a drink, but it's not even 10am yet. A fry up at the corner house will have to do. I could do with more stodge to soak up last night's overindulgences. Walking around the club swigging from a bottle of champagne seemed such a great idea at the time. On top of the whiskey, beers, and vodka / red roosters it wasn't my finest idea ever.

And so, I eat one breakfast and order another. The waitress looks at me with barely concealed loathing and disgust. I know she is taking one look at me and thinking one breakfast is more than enough for you, you fat bastard. I should probably agree with her assessment, but don't give a shit.

I'm shovelling the last of the sausages into my mouth whilst staring off into the distance when I see them. My parents are walking out of the station. I leave twenty quid on the table and rush for the door. Perhaps the fifty percent tip will cheer the judgemental bitch of a waitress up.

I catch up with my parents. They had missed their train and caught the next one anyway. They had come to Manchester, not expecting to find me there, just hoping they were lucky.

I think we all were.

Poetry Corner

The Memory Collector

The memory collector is coming today
They won't leave until they get their way
Taking a memory from out of your head
A memory you won't get back until you're dead

There is no telling what they might take
Something lovely or that horror that keeps you awake
A precious day spent with family or friends
Or a monotonous day at work that never ends

The annual ritual is one we all bear
We can't stop it and it just isn't fair
Taken away from us and stored in the tower
And given to the overlords to keep them in power

But we have been in training for the last year
Our minds have locked away all we hold dear
A single memory will be all they can extract
The same one from all of us who made the pact

In fact, it's not a memory at all
But a vision we've decided to recall
Of the overlords' tower crumbling to dust
And their metal bodies falling all covered in rust

Did I Really Blog That?

A Night At The Apollo

Although all the talk at the moment is about the fiftieth anniversary of Apollo 11's Moon Landing, this night at the Apollo had nothing to do with that at all.

What it did have everything to do with was great songs, sung well by great singers. It was at the Eventim Apollo, formerly sponsored by numerous companies, it was the Hammersmith Apollo, and before that the Hammersmith Odeon, and if we go all the way back to when it originally opened in 1932 it was the Gaumont Palace.

It is a magnificent example of an Art Deco building, with original features both inside and out, and it thoroughly deserves its Grade II* listed status. The decoration and detailing inside is wonderful, and it is worth visiting the building just for that.

However, we were there for what, when we bought the tickets, was an evening with Joss Stone, and she was going to be performing with the legend that is Burt Bacharach. However, the billing was the other way around. It was an evening with Burt Bacharach, and Joss Stone was the leading lady in terms of accompanying him through his amazing songbook. However, there were three other singers who also accompanied Burt as he went through a repertoire of songs covering more than sixty years of song writing.

It was a nice summer evening as we got there, having stopped for a nice Indian just around the corner from the venue. Again, we were drawn in by the advertising of what dishes they did, only to find that the menu inside had been swapped around. As with the concert, we weren't really disappointed as the food was good. That plus I had forty-five minutes of a lovely cool air-con unit blowing cold air on to me, always a bonus

There was quite a queue outside the Apollo as it got to doors opening time. And some people were still trying to pick tickets up on the door. As is usually the case the eccentric man in the queue happened to be in front of us and decided to spend the time snaking through the barriers talking at Helen. It was amusing that he had been tutting at people to hurry up and get in there, only to stop and hold the rest of the queue up on occasions when he stopped to take photos of the building. He was hoping that Burt would play "Do You Know The Way To San Jose?" but he was unlucky this time, as that was one of his classics that were missed out this time.

The support act started early and by the time we'd got a drink and to our seats he was on his last song. The orchestra and band started to accumulate on stage and then Burt came teetering out. Despite looking somewhat unsteady on his feet, he was able to play the piano, and conduct the band in a free and easy way as befits his compositions.

Joss Stone joined him on stage for song two, a very good rendition of "Walk On By", and stayed for seven or eight more songs, and some quite awkward chat between songs, before going off again. She made two more appearances during the two-hour set, happily wandering around the stage in a gorgeous red dress and in bare feet.

The two hours flew by, and when it got towards the end, Burt wrapped up, saying there would be no encore, but getting the audience to sing along with the classic from the Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid soundtrack – "Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head".

It was a surprise just how many of the so-called Easy Listening classics Burt wrote or co-wrote with various other songwriters. I was also surprised that he is still writing, moving away from the general theme of love, hearts, and flowers that his songs are so famous for, and moving into love of all people, as he played songs written about the difficulties there are in his home country under President Trump, and about the seemingly never-ending toll of school shootings and deaths in the country.

He only sang the one song himself, a raspy version of "Alfie", but it was probably the most memorable moment of a great evening of song.

We may not have booked tickets if it had been billed originally as an evening with Burt Bacharach and mentioned that Joss Stone would be singing for some of it. But we were both glad to have gone and seen one of the classic song writers of the twentieth century. At 91 he may not tour these shores again, and if he doesn't that would be a shame. If you get the chance to go and see him while he is still touring then do so, it was a great evening well worth every penny.

Story Time

Dear Prudence

Dear Prudence,

Yes, it is the standard opening to a letter. To address the person you are writing to as dear, and then their name. In this case Prudence. And it is true that for many years you have been held dear to me. But my reason for writing to you is to explain that you are now anything but dear to me. Well, certainly not in the sense of being held in my fondest memories. Although, if it is dear as in the sense of being expensive, then you are indeed dear to me. Dearer than anyone or anything has ever been to me.

In fact, you have cost me everything. Money, belongings, my home, my job, my reputation, my sanity, and eventually my life. All for reasons which I cannot start to fathom. I would have liked to think that it wasn't done with malice aforethought. That it was all an accident. But I know that not to be the case at all. There is no way that all you have done to ruin me could have been any kind of accident.

You have managed to go as far out of your way as is humanly possible to destroy me. I can't begin to understand why you have done it. Or what you hoped to gain from such an utter destruction of me. For, as far as I can see, there is no physical gain from my destruction for you. You get nothing from me. None of my money, nor my house, nor any of my former possessions went to you. And now I have nothing, there is nothing for you when my will is exercised. It wasn't as if you might have gained in being able to take over the job you caused me to lose. You already have a far better job for a different company in a totally separate area of business. And I fail to see just what my reputation would have mattered to you for you to trash it in such a vindictive way.

What did I ever do to you to make you hate me so much to do all of this to me? All I have ever done is help you. I gave you a roof over your head when you were homeless. I pulled some strings to get you a job when no one would hire you, and so you were able to get back into work after years of nothing. You had my old car to use to get around when I got a newer one. The deposit for your first home was provided by me with no expectation of being repaid.

And what did I want in return from you? Nothing. I never asked you for anything. I never expected anything from you. I only ever wanted you to be happy. I thought you were happy. That you had everything you wanted and that when I took you in you thought you never would, the career, the house, the car, the fame, and fortune.

But it would seem that all of that wasn't enough for you, was it?

Instead, you wheedled your way deeper into my life again. Only to use that time we spent together to twist what I said and did. To splice together parts of disparate conversations. To access my e-mails and all my other computer files, to read and copy my documents, and to cause the worst kind of havoc in my life. Cloning my information. Not for personal gain it would seem – that I might have been able to accept – but solely, it would appear, just to lay waste to my whole being.

Was it such a crime to be kind to you?

Was it so terrible to help a vulnerable young person and let them make something of themselves?

To you it must have been. It is the only explanation that even comes close to making sense as to why someone I treated as if they were my own kith and kin would do such terrible things as you have done to me over the course of the last two years.

If I was destitute and trashed beyond redemption I could still carry on. But even this it would seem is not good enough for you. Still, you have carried on with your insane, and quite frankly unhinged, rampage against me.

Well, congratulations. You win. You have killed me. I am writing to tell you this. You are a murderer. You have murdered me as surely as if you had shot me or stabbed me, or had caved my head in with an axe or a sledgehammer. This is the final letter I shall ever write. I have enough time to seal this in the envelope and to post it to you. By the time this reaches you I shall be no more. The poison I have taken will have seen to my death.

But you are not the only murderer here. It turns out I am to be one as well. By the time you have finished reading this letter, I am sorry to say that your fate will be sealed as well. The paper in your hands has been soaked with poison that is absorbed through the skin. You will have absorbed enough of it whilst reading this to end your life as well. There is no cure. There is no antidote for the poison. You have less than an hour to live. Less than an hour before your life falls to pieces in as dramatic way as mine has at your hand.

After all, fair is fair.

Yours,

Joseph Ash III.

To: Josephashthethird@yahoo.co.uk
From: SuperPruper@gmail.com
Subject: What have you done?

Oh Joseph, you stupid, stupid, stupid man. Yes, I know you will never see this e-mail, as I believe your letter is entirely true and you are already dead. And it would appear I am to join you in the not-too-distant future. There is no time for me to be digging out pens and paper and writing a letter, let alone the time to find a stamp and get out to a post box to send it, but I feel drawn to explain, and someone will hopefully know exactly what has happened to the both of us.

I have a question; one it is too late to answer now. Were you blind all those years? Were you unable to see how I loved you? How you were the only man I ever wanted? Or was it that I was so horrific, or pitiful to you that you never even considered anything more than the platonic friendship you forced upon us?

All the times I leaned in to kiss you only to be presented with a cheek as you moved your head at the last moment. The time you woke to find me in your bed naked only for you to get out and go and sit in front of the fire by yourself. How you locked your bedroom door going forward. That solid rejection which felt so final to me.

You said you never wanted anything from me, apart from me to be happy. But I desperately wanted something from you, only for you to be blind to it all, and that made me so unhappy.

I thought to provoke you to jealousy by going out and finding a man. Hoping that seeing me with another man would trigger something in you that made you realise you wanted me. But no, you happily gave your blessing and gave me away at the wedding. Either as if I were your daughter, or as something you wanted to get rid of.

You mention my job and career. I cared for neither. I only tried so hard so that you could see I was worthy. That I would be suitable to be your partner.

But it all failed. And as the saying goes, there is no fury such as that of a woman scorned. And believe me I felt more scorned that anyone in history could possibly have been.

And so yes, it is true, I set out to ruin you. To pull apart and destroy your life and all you held dear. In the vain hope that when everything had tumbled down around you and you had no hope that you would turn to me to rescue you as you had rescued me all those years before. But the more I chipped away, the less likely that became. I saw that, but too late to prevent everything that was in flight.

It is too late to say I am sorry. And you may be correct in saying we are both murderers. That I forced you into suicide, and that it forced you into revenge with your poisoned penned letter. But you must know that you murdered me first long ago. You killed and removed my heart as surely as any skilled surgeon may have done.

It could have been so good. We could have been great together in life. But instead, it turns out that we are only together in death.

I just wish I could have been your 'Dear Prudence.'

Xx

Chapter and Verse

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

Five Go Mad In Manchester – Squirrels' Christmas Party

Not Squirrel as in the person, but the student bar called Squirrels (I did say this would get confusing at some point).

A couple of the girls from the OP student's union committee had arranged for the end of term party to be held in Squirrels. There was going to be a DJ, some food, and other things going on apart from the usual drink as many cheap drinks as possible type things that usually occurred on a Friday night. They were charging for pre-event tickets, and then going to charge two quid a ticket more to get in on the night. Somewhere along the way they decided they needed two more things. The first was to keep costs down to a minimum, and secondly that they would need a bouncer.

And so, they asked Squirrel to be the bouncer for Squirrels on the night. They were going to bung him fifty quid and he would break the habit of a Manchester lifetime and stay sober on a Friday night. And it happened.

Squirrel stood at the doors at the top of the stairs to the entrance to the bar and took people's tickets to get in if they had them, or took their money if they wanted to get in and didn't have tickets. And it went well. One of the usual crowd, Hopalong, or the Chemist would stick their head out of the door and pass Squirrel a lemonade or a coke, and he would stand there.

Now, no one would ever call Squirrel svelte. He was fat, and tall, but somewhere along the line of those first four months in Manchester he had bought himself a reversible padded jacket. It was far too warm for him, and it exaggerated his size enormously, and so he'd decided it was a great thing to wear when acting as a bouncer. Not knowing, or more likely not caring that it made him look even more like a fucking Weeble.

As the night drew on, those coming in and out past him to make their way down the stairs to the toilets became more inebriated. Some were more than willing to banter with Squirrel, a lot would have recognised him from propping the bar up for the last three months. It was all light-hearted stuff.

Of course, it wouldn't be a tale unless something happened that was out of the ordinary. And it would have to happen at the one moment Squirrel wasn't actually there. After consuming lots of fizzy drinks there came the inevitable time when he had to go to the toilet. He'd poked his head in the door and asked one of the usual cronies to take his place for a couple of minutes. But none of them could be bothered, so it ended up with the two girls who'd organised the evening on the door for a couple of minutes whilst Squirrel answered the call of nature.

When he got back to the door, one of the girls was crying and the other was screeching at him. Six non-students had turned up at the door, without tickets and brow beat the two young girls into letting them in without tickets and without paying, saying they were cleaning staff there and they didn't have to pay, and they'd forced their way in.

By the time Squirrel looked, they weren't at the bar and had disappeared down into the dance floor. Squirrel went back to the door. Only to have the girls come out crying again because there was a fight on the dancefloor.

When Squirrel got there, one of the guys who'd forced their way in had a nosebleed and their opposition was just standing there looking a bit spaced out. Nosebleed guy had his five friends giving it loads of verbals, Whereas spaced out guy just had his one annoying friend. I told spaced out guy and his friend to go back up to the bar and finish their drinks, and I shepherded out nosebleed guy and his five friends by the fire exit back to the toilet area.

The next ten to fifteen minutes were quite fraught. Nosebleed guy and his friends were kicking off wanting to get back in. Squirrel was telling them in no uncertain terms that they shouldn't have been in there in the first place, they hadn't paid and should have been ashamed of themselves, turning up pissed and bullying their way past young girls to get in, and then starting a fight. They were claiming they hadn't, but I'd already had half a dozen people telling me nosebleed guy had started it and pushed spaced out guy, who had responded by smacking him in the face.

Now Squirrel had been bantering with spaced out guy all night, and he'd seemed in good humour every time. He was surprised he'd got involved in a fight. In fact, he would have laid good odds that his lanky annoying twat of a mate with a dodgy scouse perm would have been the one fighting.

And so, it continued. Whilst Squirrel was trying to calm down nosebleed guy and his pissed mates and get them to leave; lanky twat kept coming out and taunting them and saying they see them outside. Squirrel told him to stop being a twat and stop interfering, to which lanky responding by showing him his doorman badge. Squirrel said thanks, but told him he couldn't be as he was pissed, but thanks for the warning that if he ever saw lanky on the door of a pub or club, he'd know to avoid it as it was likely to turn in to a war zone at any point.

One of the female friends of nosebleed guy had taken him to the toilets to get him cleaned up, and Squirrel took the opportunity, with a lull in proceedings to walk spaced out guy and lanky twat out through the fire escape and walk with them until they'd left Owen's Park. He went back into Squirrels and let it be known to nosebleed guy's mates that the others had left. That Squirrel had walked them out to Moseley Road. It took a couple of minutes for them to collect everyone, but the six of them left. Squirrel followed them out and smiled to himself as they all attempted to run, or stagger run, in the direction of Moseley Road. Knowing full well that spaced out guy and lanky twat had gone in the other direction.

The party passed without any more incident, and Squirrel had his first alcoholic drink at one in the morning as things were dying down. And no more was thought about it.

Until June. Squirrel got a call from the landlady of Squirrels. The police wanted to get a statement from 'the bouncer' on the night of the fight. Apparently, nosebleed guy was pressing charges for GBH against spaced out guy. So, Squirrel goes to the police station on Princess Road and gives a statement.

Only to get called to court in the September to give evidence at a magistrate's court trial. Now, Squirrel doesn't know if he was there as a witness for the defence or prosecution, but his evidence – as far as he was concerned – was purely

in favour of spaced-out guy. So much so the prosecution barrister blanched when having asked 'did you consider that the nosebleed guy's uncoordinated behaviour could have been a direct result of spaced-out guy's punch' he got a response of, 'no, nosebleed guy seemed the same as every time I'd seen him before and since the incident, pissed as a fart and overly aggressive.'

I would like to tell you the outcome of the trial, but Squirrel being Squirrel never bothered to find out.

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

Epilogue – Where To Find More Of My Writing

To get people to sign up, point them in the direction of my website's homepage of <http://www.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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