

# FOSSILS

Viagra, Snuff and Rock'n'Roll

by

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## -Track One-

Charles felt the walls closing in as his world fell apart. He longed to hold his wife, tell her how much he loved her, smell her fragrance, and hear her comforting voice telling him that everything would be fine. Standing with his hands clasped in front of him, he glanced over at her gloss wood casket and heard the faint hum of the conveyor echo in the chapel as a curtain closed and the coffin slowly moved toward the furnace.

Charles's sons, John and Peter, two of the pallbearers, then came and sat on the pew beside him. John patted his father's arm, but Charles just stared forward.

Lorraine, Charles's daughter, with tears streaming down her face, gently squeezed his hand as the vicar prayed for the safe journey of Mary's soul. Charles wasn't listening and showed no emotion trapped within his earthly cocoon. Apart from being with his beloved Mary, nothing else mattered to Charles.

With sobbing heard in the crematoriums chapel on the outskirts of Cleethorpes, the vicar finished his prayer and told the congregation to reflect on Mary's life.

Charles gazed up at a ray of sunlight that shone through a skylight. He gasped and smiled. "Mary," he whispered, as an apparition of Mary's face as a young woman appeared in the sunbeam.

"Hello my darling," said Mary's voice in his head.

Charles trembled and thought, 'Oh Mary, I am so lonely and sad. I want to end this and be with you.'

Mary smiled and Charles remembered the smile he fell in love with all those years ago, as Mary said. "We will soon be together my darling, but now is not your time. You still have plenty to live for...remember what I always told you. Life is too short to be sad."

"Dad, sit down," whispered Lorraine as the vicar beckoned the congregation to sit.

Charles, his thoughts interrupted, sat on the pew. The vicar went to the small pulpit and began his sermon, giving details about Mary's life, a woman he barely knew.

"Are you alright, Dad?" whispered Lorraine, noticing Charles smiling up at the skylight.

Charles ignored her, 'Where are you my darling?' Charles thought, watching rays of sunlight dancing through the empty skylight.

"Dad, are you okay?" repeated Lorraine, squeezing his hand.

John, hearing Lorraine's concern, looked at his father and gently nudged him. "Dad!"

Charles juddered and smiled at John and Peter, and with a glazed expression and tears in his eyes, looked and nodded at Lorraine.

Lorraine, relieved to see his tears, wiped them from his eyes with her sodden handkerchief. She kissed him on the cheek, faced forward, and listened while the vicar continued his sermon. Charles now felt warm, safe, and no longer alone. He glanced up again at the empty skylight, and as the vicar's words become a blur, his thoughts drifted into happy memories.

On a warm summer's afternoon, a removal van arrived and unloaded a Steinway Parlour Grand Piano into the recreation room. Throughout the day, elderly residents came and admired the fine instrument, inquisitive

about who was moving into Albert's old room. However, three residents felt excited by the piano and eager to meet its owner.

The following day, a BMW came up the driveway. A middle-aged couple got out of the front seat and helped a gaunt, but well-groomed, elderly man out of the back. They took belongings from the back seat, walked into the residence, and went to the warden's office. The curtains twitched as excited old folk tried to see their new neighbour.

John, Lorraine, and Charles sat in Mrs Chew's office while she explained about the residence and the rules and regulations that Charles must abide by during his stay.

The office smelled of stale tobacco. Hilda Chew, a small, haggard woman in her early sixties with stern features and a wrinkled face making her look like a constipated bloodhound, had been the warden at Fossdyke since it opened eight years earlier. Charles paid scant attention to the warden's instructions as his mind wandered elsewhere.

Mrs Chew then took them along a corridor. They stopped at a room on the ground floor and went inside. "Here's your room Mr Clark, or can I call you, Charles?"

Charles shrugged as Mrs Chew told him, "This will be your home from now on Charles. We put your chair near the bay window. The grounds look lovely this time of year."

John put Charles's suitcase on the bed. "It's nice and roomy Dad," he said, opening the case and hanging clothes in a wardrobe.

"You have a television, but most of the residents watch the large one in the recreation room," said Mrs Chew, pointing to a portable television and then told him. "Your piano's in there."

"I'll put your socks and underwear in this drawer," said John, but knew his father wasn't paying attention.

"Isn't this nice, Dad? And look, you'll have plenty of things to do," said Lorraine, waving the Fossdyke brochure at her father. "It's near to the beach and you love the seaside."

"And you'll have plenty of company," said John sniggering, "Did you see all your new neighbours looking?"

Charles sighed, walked over, and sat in his armchair.

"Don't worry," said Mrs Chew and assured them, "It takes time to settle in, and he'll be fine. It might be better if you both leave and give him time to get acquainted with the place. I am sure he will have visitors come along once you've gone." she smiled.

Lorraine nodded and said, "Okay Dad, we are going, we will let you get settled into your new home."

"I will bring Emma and the kids to see you soon," said John.

"Peter said he will come when he is not so busy. I will bring George and the kids to visit once you get settled," said Lorraine, who walked over and kissed her father on the cheek. She felt tears well up in her eyes as she saw the vacant, lost expression across her father's gaunt face as he gazed out of the window. She stroked his grey hair, picturing the vibrant, caring man from her childhood. Here was the same man who picked her up after a fall, taught her to play the piano and appreciate the beauty in music. The man who she could always depend upon and the man whom she never imagined would end up in this empty shell.

"Bye Dad," croaked Lorraine, and with tears streaming down her face, walked towards John.

"Bye Dad, see you soon," said John, putting his arm around his sister, and along with Mrs Chew, left the room.

Charles stared out of the window over the manicured lawns. His room smelt like the rest of the place. It had an eggy, musty smell, usually associated with old people's homes. For Charles, it was not, or never would be, home, and he hoped his stay here would be short. He gazed around the garden and watched a bumblebee

disappearing into a rose. Reappearing moments later, it clumsily flew past butterflies airing their brittle colourful wings. Sparrows chased each other, flying low past Charles's window, and while nature went about its business, he reminisced about growing up around the entertainment business.

Charles's mother was an opera singer, so he had gained a love for music from an early age. His father, disappointed by his son's chosen interest, expected Charles to follow him into the army, but he was killed in Northern Ireland. His mother encouraged, and tutored him, into becoming a vocalist, but with having deformed vocal cords, his voice sounded gravelly. She knew he would be unsuitable for classical singing, so she bought him a Steinway piano. That opened up a new and exciting world for young Charles. He practised hard and became a talented pianist. The Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra employed him soon after he left Surrey University.

Charles was twenty-two when he met Mary. She was auditioning for a violinist position in the orchestra. He'd noticed the pretty young blonde in her interview when she played Paganini's Caprice No.24 in A minor. Joseph Fletcher, the orchestra leader, impressed with her performance, and with Charles's prompting, employed Mary. Charles and Mary grew close, and after a short courtship, married.

Mary hailed from Cleethorpes on the Lincolnshire coast of England. With property prices being cheap in the seaside resort, they bought a five-bedroom house on the outskirts of town. They performed with the Liverpool Philharmonic for four years before Charles accepted a position in the prestigious London Philharmonic Orchestra. They realised that Charles's new job meant he would spend a lot of time touring, so Mary left the Liverpool Philharmonic to go with him. However, she fell pregnant after their second tour, with their first child, John.

Charles spent the next few years touring the UK and abroad, while Mary remained at their Cleethorpes home raising John. She gave birth to two more children, first Lorraine, followed by Peter, a year later.

The years passed, and with Charles spending most of his time away from home, he and Mary decided that he found work closer to Cleethorpes. He taught music at a local college, where he stayed until retiring and with their grown-up children now having families of their own and life was idyllic for Charles and Mary. They spent their days either in each other's company or with family members and evenings they spent alone with Charles playing his piano and Mary playing her violin. The couple lived a serene and happy life until the scourge of leukaemia took Mary and Charles's world fell apart.

A knock on the door interrupted Charles's thoughts.

"Hello Charles, the evening meal starts at 6 o'clock, so you need to go to the dining room." Mrs Chew shouted through the door.

"I'm not hungry," Charles replied.

"Suit yourself," grumbled Mrs Chew and walked away.

Charles relaxed back into his chair and recalled events leading up to him living at the residential home. He thought about his uncaring children.

During Mary's wake, John had put his arm around his father and said, "Dad, remember what Mum told you to do when this day came."

Charles glared at his son and said nothing, so John sighed and went over to speak with his brother and sister.

Once Doctors diagnosed Mary's illness, Mary, Lorraine, John, and Peter, arranged for Charles to move into Fossdyke residential home as soon as Mary passed away and organised everything without involving Charles, who, although angry when he found out, said nothing, not wanting to accept the inevitable.

After the wake finished, Charles was alone in the house. He played his piano and drank himself into a stupor, thinking about his life and his emptiness without his rock, Mary.

John arrived at mid-morning and went over to his father. Noticing the empty whisky bottle and knocked over glass, he shook his father awake and said, "I'll make a cup of tea Dad. Why don't you go to bed and I will bring one up to you."

Charles got unsteadily to his feet, went upstairs, and got into bed. Family members turned up throughout the day to help with the move. With only a few personal items allowed into the residential home, the family sold the rest of Charles and Mary's belongings and divided the proceeds between them.

While a removal company took his piano and cleared the house, Charles remained in his bedroom.

Several hours later, the house was bare apart from Charles's bedroom furniture. Lorraine had brought food for Charles throughout the day, which went uneaten.

That evening, Charles walked around his empty home, desperately wanting to join Mary.

John and Lorraine arrived the following morning to collect Charles. They led him from his house and drove forty minutes to Fossdyke residential home.

Another knock on the door disturbed Charles's thoughts.

"I am not hungry," Charles shouted, sounding emphatic as he assuming it was Mrs Chew.

The door opened and a small rotund man as bald as a bell-end walked in.

"Charlie boy," shouted a jovial geriatric in a gruff voice.

With a cheery grin, he went over to Charles. "I'm Steve, but they call me Strat. Chewy told us you weren't coming to eat, so I thought I'd come and change your mind."

Shocked, Charles forced a smile and said. "No, I'm not hungry."

"Come on, just try some. The grub isn't bad, and tonight it's BBQ rib night, a real treat," insisted Steve and put his arm around Charles's shoulder to coax him out of his chair. "I'll introduce you to everyone," said Steve, and sniggered. "You can meet the band."

Charles, taken aback, asked, "Oh, you have a band here? I never heard about that. What type of music do they play?"

Steve grinned and said. "It's a long story, but I will tell you over supper. Come on, before the ribs get cold or the other old farts scoff them all."

Charles looked at the comical character resembling a pear with spindly legs and, realising he was persistent, got out of his chair.

"Don't worry Charlie, it ain't bad here. I've been an inmate for five years and known in most of the pubs in the area. You'll be a big hit with the ladies with that posh accent."

Steve chuckled and the pair made their way to the dining hall.

The chatter in the dining room stopped when the pair went in, with all eyes focused on Charles, who fidgeted and looked uncomfortable.

"I hope you old farts saved us some ribs," Steve growled and led Charles to empty seats between two other elderly gentlemen.

## *-Track Two-*

Within picturesque grounds in the northeast coastal town of Cleethorpes, Fosdyke, converted from a guesthouse into a residential home by the current owners, had a two-story building with twenty-three spacious ensuite, furnished studio apartments. The ground floor apartments had large bay windows at the front overlooking landscaped grounds, making it an idyllic and tranquil location.

A short distance away from the resident's block, another building housed a kitchen, communal dining area, with meals provided three times a day, and another larger room served as a recreation room, where the residents could congregate, organise activities, and watch a large TV. This communal room also contained several smaller rooms where residents kept belongings locked away, and it now had a Steinway piano in a corner of the room.

With little happening at the home during the summer months, the old folks would either stroll along the boating lake and nearby beach or relax in the gardens. It was a serene existence and the residents varied. There were several married couples, but it was mainly elderly widowed men and women.

After Charles and Steve sat, the dining room was again full of chatter and clatter. Kitchen staff continued to serve the residents' BBQ ribs and drinks. Even though some struggled to gnaw through the pork with their false gnashers, it didn't stop them from giving the meat a damn good sucking. Charles looked around the room at his new neighbours.

"Charlie, meet Wayne," said Steve as he sat back, and a man leant over and shook Charles's hand.

Wayne looked Latino, with black curly hair and a boyish demeanour.

"Hi Charlie, I'm Wayne Logan," he said, shaking Charles's hand.

"It's Charles, not Charlie," said Charles.

"What?" Wayne asked.

"I said, it's Charles, not Charlie," repeated Charles... louder.

Wayne looked confused and then said. "Yes, I have all my teeth."

Steve chuckled and said, "Sometimes he is as deaf as a post, and he dyes his hair black."

"What?" Wayne repeated as he turned up the volume on his hearing aid. "That's better," he said.

"Hello Wayne, what part of America are you from?" asked Charles on hearing Wayne's accent.

Wayne frowned and said, "I am not a yank, I'm Canadian."

"Oh, my apologies," said Charles.

"Allo Charles," said the man to his right in a chirpy cockney accent, "I'm Elvin Stanley, but they call me, Chippers."

"Charles Clark," said Charles, and shook Elvin's hand. He noticed that Elvin had several fingers missing and felt uneasy trying not to stare.

"Right," said Steve, "now you've met the band."

Wayne and Elvin looked puzzled as Steve announced, "After we've finished eating, we can go along to the recreation room and see what you can do on your old piano."

Charles tried to imagine what instruments their band could play, with one as deaf as a dildo and another whose hands looked like a lobster's pincers. Elvin and Wayne looked nervously at each other as Steve pointed out several other residents and relayed some of their weird foibles. Andrex Ethel, who walked around with toilet paper sticking out of her knickers and boring Bill, who people avoided, as all he ever talked about was pigeons.

Charles felt eager to see his piano, so after they had finished eating, the four went to the recreation room and over to his Steinway. He sat on his piano stool, lifted the lid, looked at the ivory keyboard, and stroked the keys. The other three stood around the piano.

"So, what kind of music do you play?" asked Steve.

Charles smiled at the three and played Sergei Taneyev concerto in E flat.

Several other residents made their way over to the recreation room, which was usually noisy as they chatted, played games, or watched TV. There was silence as they listened to soothing music as Charles became engrossed in the concerto.

Word quickly spread and a dozen residents came in.

Charles finished fifteen minutes later. He stared at the keys, reminiscing about how the tune was one of his and Mary's favourites. He languished in his thoughts while the recreation room remained silent for a few moments and then the other residents applauded. However, Charles noticed his three new friends did not appear impressed.

Mabel, a sprightly eighty-two-year-old, started singing 'Lily of the Lamplight.'

Steve, looking disappointed, then asked. "Do you know any rock 'n' roll?"

Charles looked at the three. "No, sorry, I know some older tunes, but mainly classical music and opera."

Steve frowned and he, Wayne, and Elvin stood back and talked amongst themselves.

Charles again tinkled on the piano keys and played a short Mozart piece. He stopped when Mabel came over and interrupted him. She barraged him with requests, so he played, 'White Cliffs of Dover' with Mabel shrieking along.

Steve then put his hand on Charles's shoulder and with a mischievous grin, and through Mabel's toneless warbles, said, "Don't worry Charlie boy, me and the lads still have high hopes for you."

Charles watched as Steve, Elvin, and Wayne went over to a room, unlocked the door, and went inside.

With Charles trying to match chords with Mabel's screeching, the three emerged from the room several minutes later.

Steve carried a beaten-up guitar, a small Marshall speaker/amp, and a microphone stand. Elvin had a large double bass, and Wayne carried over two round drum cases.

Mabel stopped screeching and gasped.

Charles saw a look of horror on the faces of the residents in the recreation room as the three came over to him. Steve plugged in his microphone and set up the stand. Wayne set up his drums, while Elvin tuned his old double bass.

The room plunged into panic as Steve adjusted the microphone stand. He tapped the microphone, and after a dull thump came from the speaker, he stood with the devil's glint in his eye and snarled. "Right you old fogeys," he paused for effect as the crowd trembled and he growled. "Strat's back!"

Mabel shrieked and Ethel ran around trailing toilet tissue, while boring Bill headed for the door. Wally, another resident, made a desperate plea,

"Somebody get Chewy... and hurry!"

Steve plugged in his guitar and took a plectrum from his wallet. "Here's my old faithful," he said, showing Charles the old plastic plectrum with an 'S' hand-painted both sides.

Elvin stood to the side of his large bass and Wayne sat behind his drums, all smiling as the panicking residents rushed out of the room.

Charles sat at his piano looking confused as Mrs Chew rushed in and hurried over to the four.

She glared at Steve and shouted, "I told you not to set up again after the last incident. Don't you remember our previous conversation?"

Steve smiled and said, "Just making our new friend feel at home, besides, the rec room's empty, so we aren't disturbing anybody."

Mrs Chew became exasperated and yelled, "It's empty because you scared everybody away, the same as before."

Steve chuckled and told her. "This time it will be different. We are playing along with Charlie's classical shit." He turned to Charles and said. "Play her some of your music, Charlie boy."

Charles, looking dumbfounded, played Debussy's, 'Clair de lune.'

Mrs Chew stood with her hands on her hips and listened to Charles play the melodic tune. She knew Steve was manipulating her yet again, but he was the boss's father, so she couldn't say anything.

Glowering at the smiling Steve, she snapped, "You have one hour and then be out of here." She glared at the four and stormed out of the recreation room.

"Good, now Chewy's pissed off, now we can start," said Steve and grinned at Charles, "Okay Charlie boy, you can stop playing that crap and we can get down to playing serious music... Rock 'n' Roll."

Steve sang and pouted like a bald teenager as he played, 'Johnny 'B' good; and rocked away like a space-hopper on steroids.

Elvin struggled to pluck his double bass because he hadn't put on his 'little falsies.' Wayne rocked back and forth, thumping out a beat on his drums, but unfortunately not for the same song.

Charles sat at his piano while they banged out their rendition of the rock 'n' roll classic. He grimaced as he listened and thought he could feel his eardrums bleed. This wasn't music to his ears; it sounded more like cats being murdered. He understood why the others had panicked in the desperate need to escape.

Fortunately, Charles's torture only lasted several minutes, and the three finished and looked at him.

"Well, what do you think Charlie, could you add something to make any improvements?" asked Steve, looking pleased.

A shotgun came into Charles's mind as he looked at the smiling faces of the proud wrinkled rockers. He recalled what Mary always told him about not being good or bad music, only music that people either liked or disliked.

"Hmm, perhaps you need to all come together with a little more harmony. You need a little structure." He replied.

The three nodded and smiled at each other.

"Can you 'elp us with that?" Elvin asked.

Steve interrupted, "Yeah Charlie boy, you can help us and join our band. We will give yer a cool stage name."

Charles knew this would be a challenge but relished having something to keep him interested with this motley band of geriatrics and thought it could be fun. He smiled and said, "Maybe I can help, but please don't call me Charlie."

"What do you want us to call you?" Steve asked.

"My name is Charles, so how about you call me, Charles."

Steve laughed. "I'm known as 'Strat', Elvin's 'Chippers' and deaf boy over there," he said pointing to Wayne, "Sticks, so we can't just call you boring old Charles," said Steve.

“Ow about Nobby?” interrupted Elvin.

The three looked at Elvin and asked, “What?”

“Nobby,” repeated Elvin, and explained, “In the military, anyone with the surname, ‘Clark,’ was always called ‘\*Nobby’ Clark.”

Charles remembered from his childhood how he had heard people refer to his father as, Major ‘Nobby’ Clark, although unsure why.

Charles pondered, looked into the faces of the excited old rockers, scratched his chin, smiled, and said, “Okay, Nobby it is then.”

The three cheered and patted Charles on the back. “Welcome aboard Nobby,” said Elvin, and walked back to the small room.

“He’s gone to get his falsies,” said Wayne as Elvin returned carrying an old holdall.

Charles watched Elvin fitting homemade prosthetics to his digitally challenged hands.

“I will sound better playing with these on,” said Elvin, waving his small Edward Scissorhands-Esque attachments. One had an index finger and a thumb-shaped object set at various angles, which Charles noticed was the perfect shape and design for plucking the strings of the double bass. His left-hand prosthetic was just one small tube, which looked ideal for covering the fret strings at the neck of the instrument. ‘Ingenious,’ thought Charles.

Elvin, noticing Charles’s interest, said. “These are me little falsies. I made a few of these for different occasions. These are my ‘bass falsies’. I also have me ‘eating falsies,’ ‘card-playing falsies,’ ‘lady pleasing falsies,’ and many more, which I will show you in the fullness of time,” said Elvin in his cheery cockney twang.

Charles looked at Elvin’s tatty old instrument and asked. “That’s a Flores, isn’t it?”

Elvin, impressed by Charles’s knowledge, told him, “Yeah, a Flores Midnight double bass, which I bought many years ago when I saw it advertised for sale. Although dilapidated and ‘eld together by woodworm holding hands, I fell in love with the tatty old instrument, so I got it restored. I always loved playing the double bass and learned to play years ago before I lost me fingers.” He again held up his hands displaying his falsies and proudly announced. “And fanks to these, I still can.”

Charles winced and hoped Elvin would not play again.

The four old musicians stood by the side of Charles’s piano and Steve said, “Well lads, we still have thirty-minutes before Chewy finished ironing her wrinkles and chases us out, so what shall we play?”

The others chuckled and Elvin replied. “Perhaps Nobby could suggest somefin.”

Charles cringed. He looked at the eager trio and suggested. “I suppose our first step would be to find something that we can all play together. I don’t know any rock music and I don’t imagine you have sheet music for me to follow, so maybe we start with the basics.”

“Sheet music,” said Steve. “I don’t reckon that any of us can even read sheet music,” he laughed.

“I can,” said Elvin sounding wistful.

“Me too,” said Wayne. “I have also written a few songs.”

Steve looked shocked; he had known Wayne for almost two years and never suspected that this old Canadian had any musical education.

“You’re a dark horse, Wayne Logan,” said Steve and grinned.

“Perhaps I could look at your songs, Wayne. We may as well learn them,” said Charles.

“What?” asked Wayne.

Charles repeated his request but spoke louder.

“Okay,” said Wayne “They are in my room, so maybe tomorrow.”

Charles wanted to find out more about his new friends, partly because he was interested, but more importantly, because he wanted to fill the remaining time to stop them playing more awful, eardrum-bleeding noise.

“Are any of you married?” Charles asked.

“No,” said Elvin, and sighed. “My wife passed away four years ago.”

“I’m single. I got divorced years ago and played the field,” Steve interrupted and chuckled.

Charles looked at Wayne fiddling with his hearing-aid, and asked, “How about you Wayne, are you married?”

“Wayne lost his wife twenty- years ago,” Steve said and shouted at Wayne. “Didn’t you mate?”

“Oh, I am sorry to hear that Wayne,” said Charles.

“What?” Asked Wayne.

“I’m sorry to hear that your wife died,” Charles shouted.

Wayne looked confused and said, “My wife didn’t die.” His hearing-aid screeched, so he tapped it.

Elvin and Steve chortled.

“She didn’t die,” said Elvin. “He just lost ‘er.”

“That’s better,” said Wayne, now able to hear. He looked at Charles, smiled, and related his story.

Wayne, popular among the female residents of Fosdyke with his Latino appearance and, when he first moved in, the old women hung around him like a Liverpool postman on giro day. Even Mrs Chew had a crush on old Wayne, even though married and 20 years his junior.

Wayne had lived at Fosdyke now for two years. Originally from Ontario, Canada, he settled in Cleethorpes years ago, after trying to trace his long lost love, Julie.

His family originated from Sicily and owned an Italian restaurant chain in Canada. With his sights set on becoming a musician, he left the family home on his 16th birthday and joined The Alex Gilroy Band, a seven-piece swing band. He studied music at school, and although he could play keyboard instruments, he loved playing the drums. Given the nickname, Sticks, by the band, because he always carried around drumsticks tapping anything that could offer a beat. He toured as the band’s drummer throughout Canada. When the rock ‘n’ roll revolution hit America in the late fifties, Wayne moved to the U.S. where he joined ‘Johnny and the Jeepsters,’ a rock ‘n’ roll, skiffle band. Throughout the sixties and seventies, he moved around with various bands.

During the 1980s, as other forms of music pushed out rock ‘n’ roll, he tried his hand at rock music. Although ageing, he joined a rock band called, ‘Smoking Heads’ and dropped his nickname, Sticks, as he felt it was no longer cool, and didn’t belong in the rock, pop era. The band never became famous but had a small fan base. They performed many gigs around the world, touring several countries. With the loud music taking its toll on his hearing, it became increasingly more difficult to hear the music as each tour went on. The group did a tour of the UK in the mid-1980s. They decided to get rid of Wayne, who, due to his age, no longer fitted in with their rocker image. They played his farewell gig at the Sheffield Arena, where he met Julie, an attractive twenty-five-year-old woman from Cleethorpes. Wayne prided himself on having no emotional attachment towards women but became besotted with Julie. He invited her to the United States, and she accepted.

Their life was great at first. Wayne found work as a session musician and wrote several songs.

As his deafness became worse, his work sessions got shorter. He became miserable and angry, taking his anger out on Julie. He turned into a violent drunk and Julie felt dejected. One night he came home \*spannered, and Julie and her belongings were gone.

Over the next few days, he stayed sober while trying to figure out what happened to Julie. He'd phoned friends and acquaintances but to no avail. Julie had vanished without a trace, taking a chunk of money from their joint account and used their credit card to buy a flight to Manchester, England.

He had inherited 25% of his family's business and received an annual dividend. With money being of no concern, he decided to search for Julie in the UK. Wayne knew little about her, he never bothered with that side of their relationship. All he knew that her name was Julie Croft- something, and she was from Cleethorpes.

Wayne arrived in Cleethorpes in the winter of 1991 and spent the next few months trying to track down the Croft family. He came across many people with the same surname, but nobody knew or had ever heard of, Julie Croft. Now in his 50's, his hearing had become impaired and he could only hear on sporadic occasions. Wayne, having spent many years in the UK, hadn't given up hope, and did not want to go back to the USA. He knew his blemished record and age would prevent him from ever being hired, so he lived in a flat in Cleethorpes. He worked as a taxi driver and had an active social life.

In 2002, he read an obituary in the Grimsby Evening Telegraph, of a Mr Ronald Croft-Baker who had passed away. 'Croft-Baker, that's it,' thought Wayne, 'Julie Croft-Baker.'

Excited, he read the list of those who attended the funeral. Wayne noticed the daughter's name, Mrs Julie Braithwaite, nee Croft-Baker. Wayne knew that it was his Julie. He tracked down the only relative who remained in Cleethorpes from the Croft-Baker family, Ronald's elderly sister. She confirmed Julie Croft-Baker was her niece who had spent time in America. The old woman told him that she had seen Julie at the funeral along with her husband, but that was the first time in many years she'd had any contact with her. She told him that Julie only came, paid her respects, and then left. She had no other information. When Wayne heard that Julie had re-married, he gave up his search.

Wayne lived alone until the latter part of 2008. He bought a set of drums and a small Yamaha keyboard to entertain himself. He composed a few songs, although he had trouble performing them. Even though he wore a hearing aid, some days he couldn't hear the lyrics. His deafness became a burden and he was robbed several times, as word spread that a deaf old man lived alone. He became afraid to stay at home and felt too old to return to Canada or the States. Cleethorpes was now his home, so he sold his house and moved into the residential home.

"And that's how I ended up here," said Wayne and smiled.

"We only found out by accident that he played in a band a few years ago. He said he was a taxi driver who played the drums and keyboard for pleasure after coming 'ere to look for his missus," said Elvin.

Wayne smirked and said, "Well, I did only play for pleasure... then."

"You are a dark horse, Logan," said Steve and chuckled.

Charles looked puzzled and asked, "I thought you dropped the name Sticks. So how come they call you Sticks now?"

Wayne looked at Steve and frowned. "It's that slap-heads fault," he said. "That's how they found out I was in a band. I kept a few mementoes from my younger days and one was an old framed poster from my time with 'Johnny and the Jeepsters,' hung in my room."

Steve giggled as the story unfolded.

"One day, I was getting ready to go to the recreation room. Steve knocked and just walked into my room." He scowled at Steve still smirking, and continued, "He went over, looked at the picture, and asked

about the band. He said he had never heard of the Jeepsters, which was great, as I didn't want them to know about my past. I told him I played with them for a short while in the '60s, but he wouldn't let it be and kept asking more questions. He then read the band's line up, and saw Wayne 'Sticks' Logan."

"And Sticks was reborn," said Steve smirking.

Wayne mumbled and sighed.

Much to Charles's relief, the three did not play anymore after hearing Wayne's tale, and Wayne, Steve, and Elvin packed away their instruments.

"It's early," said Steve. "How about we go for a couple of pints in the Pavilion?"

"Yeah, good idea," said Elvin. "It ain't far Nobby, only a ten-minute walk."

Charles wasn't in the mood, but after the three persisted, and wanting to hear more about them, he agreed.

The Pavilion, a public house near a large shallow boating lake with two small islands at its centre, was a sanctuary for the colourful bird populations inhabiting the area. Surrounded by trees and hedgerows, the Pavilion was a popular watering hole during the warm summer months, with the daylight sun lasting well into the evening. With the lake in view and the flora and fauna in full bloom, the outside seating area looked picturesque.

The four sat outside on a bench enjoying a cold beer, watching ducks idling along the glistening lake, and listening to wood-pigeons repetitive, coo-coo-coo-cu-cu. Familiar fragrances of flowering hawthorn bushes drifted on the light breeze

Steve took out a packet of cigarettes, lit one, and with a satisfying grin, blew out a cloud of smoke and said. "I like sitting here, and I can smoke," he leaned over to Charles. "But don't tell Chewy."

Charles nodded and asked. "So Steven, how come you ended up at Fossdyke?"

Wayne and Elvin groaned. They knew Steve's life story because he had told them many times.

"I'm from Scunthorpe, thirty miles away," said Steve, "When I left school, I worked in the steelworks alongside my old dad," said Steve and smirked, "I got caught up in the swinging sixties and wanted to be a rock star, so I bought an acoustic guitar and learned to play."

Steve did a quick air guitar demo, smiled and continued, "I saved my wages and upgraded to an electric Fender Stratocaster, adopting the stage name, Strat... because it sounded cool," he smirked, giving another air guitar demo, before continuing. "Me and two mates from the steelworks formed, 'Strat and the Steelers.' We performed in several pubs and clubs in Scunny," he sighed. "We could have been famous if we weren't crap... and I wasn't married to Jane. After we disbanded, I settled down and worked long hours at the steelworks to support my family."

He coughed, took a swig of beer, and said, "We had a beautiful daughter, Lucy." Steve looked proud and told Charles. "Lucy's smart, unlike her dumb old Dad. She was always an intelligent and independent young woman. She's now a successful Doctor and she and her husband Bernard own Fossdyke," said Steve, took a photograph from his wallet, and showed Charles his middle-aged daughter. Charles felt relieved that she wasn't bald like her father, as Steve said. "That's my little girl, Doctor Lucy Fossdyke."

"Oh, so that's why it is called Fossdyke?" asked Charles.

Steve nodded and took another swig of beer. "Anyway, after Lucy went to University, Jane and I drifted apart. I worked long hours to pay for the university medical school, and Jane got a job in a bike shop."

He chuckled and said. "The manager wasn't only riding pushbikes, the bastard. I should have realised when she trowelled on her makeup to go to work. When I found out, I went to the shop and punched his

lights out, and later divorced Jane,” Steve sighed. “I felt gutted and spent the next few years skipping work and spannered.” He looked at Charles and said. “In my forties, I realised my life was going nowhere and my dad, even though retired, gave me grief because he heard rumours that the steelworks were about to sack me. One morning I woke up and thought, Fuck it! So I booked a flight to Australia. Lucy was then a qualified Doctor with a well-paying job, so I took my savings, a bag of clothes, my old Stratocaster, and flew to Oz.”

“Oh,” said Charles, impressed by Steve’s audacity.

“Yeah, it was great. The years flew by, moving from town to town, city to city, and job to job. I played rock ‘n’ roll in local bars for drinks and food and lived the carefree life I always wanted, with no ties. I severed all links in England.”

“What about Lucy?” asked Charles, “Didn’t you at least stay in contact with her?”

Steve shook his head, “No, nobody.” He smirked, “But don’t worry Charlie my story has a happy ending... sort of. I was almost sixty and alone. I wanted a female companion to take care of me in my old age. I knew that if I stayed in Australia or returned to the UK, I would stay alone. A short, fat, bald, sixty-year-old musician, who smoked three packs of cigarettes a day, would be as appealing to a western woman as Deep Heat on a dildo. Besides, I didn’t fancy being lumbered with an old troll with loads of kids or grandkids, so I tried the Philippines.”

Wayne and Elvin juddered, they knew what was about to come next. They had heard this many times before as a prelude to one of Steve’s repeated tales.

Wayne turned off his hearing-aid as Steve said. “When I was in the Philippines,” Elvin’s groan went ignored as Steve went on, “I had my biggest regret,” he nudged Charles, laughed, and said, “I wished that I had gone sooner, the place made my head spin. This fabulous new culture and lifestyle drew me into a magical existence.”

Charles noticed Steve demeanour change as he talked passionately about the Philippines.

“I settled in Angeles City, a raucous, sex-filled place. I worked in live music venues around sin city. Although I wasn’t paid much, I reaped the other benefits of being a western musician and lived a carefree life with benefits,” he chuckled, rubbed his crotch and continued. “I no longer wanted to settle down, with too many eager young women to choose from.” Steve laughed, rubbed his hands together, and said. “They all wanted to please this sex god, although they cost me a lot of money.”

Elvin tutted, and he and Wayne went to the bar for more beer while Steve continued. “I spent years living a blissful existence, until one day I woke up in agony. It felt like an alien eating its way through my stomach.” Steve put his hand on the left side of his abdomen, winced, and said. “I’d never felt so much pain, and having no money, the girl I was with at the time, took me to the local quack, who operated on a strangulated hernia.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Charles. “That sounds serious.”

“Nah,” said Steve, “It wasn’t too bad, but it made me realise that if something serious were to happen, who could I turn to, and who would look after me with having little money? I tried to contact Lucy, who I’d had no contact with for over 20 years and with no idea where she was, I contacted the British embassy in Manila.”

Elvin and Wayne brought beers outside. Elvin heard the part of Steve’s conversation when they approached and sighed. He looked at Wayne in his silent bliss, nudged him, nodded to his pubic region, and shrugged. Wayne, realising Steve must be on the J-cloth story, smiled, while Elvin groaned. They had heard the hernia story many times. They put the drinks down and Steve and Charles took a drink, as Steve continued. “A few weeks later the embassy contacted me and told me they had traced my daughter,” Steve looked proud as he announced. “Doctor Lucy Fosdyke M.D., a general practitioner with a practice in

Cleethorpes. Lucy and her accountant husband, Bernard, came to visit me in Angeles. It was great to see them, especially my little girl. Bernard's a bonehead, but a nice bloke."

"I bet you were overjoyed," said Charles. "Did you come home with them?"

"Nah," said Steve, "they kept trying to persuade me, but I was too happy in the Philippines, so they went home without me."

Steve took another slurp of beer. "About a month after they'd left, I got the same excruciating pain in my gut and they rushed me to the local hospital where a quack opened me up. They found a large mass that they thought was a malignant tumour... I shit myself when they told me."

Charles looked concerned, Elvin yawned, and Wayne smiled, unable to hear Steve's tale, as he went on, "The embassy contacted Lucy, who became distraught. She arranged for me to be medivaced to England. I got flown back and rushed into surgery when I arrived in Manchester."

Steve unbuttoned his shirt, showed Charles a large scar down the centre of his abdomen, and pointed to a smaller hernia scar on his right-hand side. "The operation was a success and the surgeon removed a filthy old J-cloth from my abdominal cavity, festering there from my back-street hernia operation." He laughed and said, "I made a full recovery, but now have an irritable and uncontrollable bowel, which gives me moments of embarrassment. I let rip pungent-smelling gas, which escapes at the most inappropriate moments when I'm nervous or excited."

"Pungent," interrupted Elvin, "It smelled like a rat ate a pile of cow dung, before crawling up yer arse and dying... wait until you smell it Nobby, it will make your eyes water."

Steve chuckled and said, "As I said, pungent. Anyhow, I was eager to return to the Philippines, but after lengthy conversations with my exasperated daughter, who kept telling me to grow up. I eventually heeded her advice and stayed in England. Lucy and Bernard Fossdyke are successful in their respective fields and bought several investment properties, including a guesthouse in Cleethorpes, which they'd converted into Fossdyke residential home. They told me I could stay there for as long as I wanted and I've been there ever since."

Elvin knew Steve had almost finished his tale and thought. 'Charles got away lightly. He didn't mention his Filipina sexual encounters as usual.'

"So Charlie boy, my roaming, carefree days were over, and I am now settled into a boring life in Fossdyke," he sighed. "I'm seventy-one now, so I can't ever see me ever making it back to the Philippines," he gazed into his glass, took another drink, and said. "Fossdyke was crap at first, but I entertained myself by thrashing out tunes on my beat-up old Stratocaster to annoy the other wrinklies and the old dragon, Chewy," said Steve, and pointed at Elvin. "My dreary life took a turn for the better when he moved in."

Elvin, seizing upon the moment to interject, said, "Yes, that was both memorable and amusing," he chuckled. "However, that story will have to wait." He looked at his watch. "We had better get back before Chewy locks us out."

They agreed, finished their drinks, and made their way back to Fossdyke.

Charles went to his room. The past few hours had been fun, but now he was alone in his room the pain of being without Mary gnawed away at him. He smelt the eggy musty aroma; he chuckled and thought. 'That must be Steve.'

He drew the curtains, leant back in his chair, closed his eyes, and told Mary.

The following morning, the four met at breakfast. Charles noticed the old folks seemed subdued compared to the chatter from the previous evening and kept glancing at the four as they ate.

A woman put a full English breakfast in front of Charles. He looked at the plate of greasy offerings and tucked in.

“Glad to see you found your appetite, Charles,” said Mrs Chew, who hovered around the table.

Charles nodded and shovelled a sausage into his mouth.

“Right,” whispered Steve. “When Chewy buggers off we can plan what to do today.”

He sneered at the other terrified looking old folk and played his imaginary air guitar. They cringed and put their heads down, rushing to finish their food.

“So Elvin, how did you end up here?” asked Charles, while cutting up a runny egg.

Elvin was the eldest of the four at seventy-five-years-old. A small solid built man who remained fit and active throughout his life. He had lived at Fossdyke since his wife passed away. Bald as a baboon’s botty, his dry sense of humour made people laugh with his witty off-the-cuff remarks.

Elvin took a slurp of tea and said. “After me missus died, I didn’t want to be alone, so I looked for a residential home and I liked Fossdyke. It was close to the sea, with a well-equipped leisure centre and swimming pool nearby, with other seaside amenities within walking distance. It appeared clean, efficient, and well run. I arranged an interview with Mrs Chew, who told me that there was a room available. She showed me around the residents’ quarters and while showing me the dining room, a woman came over and pulled ‘er to one side. Chewy apologised, saying that she needed to sort out a problem, and she directed me to the recreation room, suggesting that I should check it out. I went along to the room and as I approached, I heard a guitar playing.” He pointed to Steve, who chuckled as Elvin continued. “So I went into the room and he stopped playing and asked me if I was lost... No, I said, Just ‘aving a gander.” Elvin smiled at Steve and continued. “A gander,” he said and taking the mickey out of my cockney accent, asked. “Wot part of London are you from me old cock sparra? The Grimsby part, I told ‘im.”

He laughed, unplugged his Stratocaster from the amp, walked over, and said his name was Steve Baker... or I could call him, ‘Strat.’ I told ‘im, I’m Elvin Stanley... or he could call me, Elvin Stanley,” he chuckled and continued. “I told him I knew the song he was playing, County Jail Blues and said it was a great song and I could play it. He asked if I was a guitarist. I told him I wasn’t, but a dab hand on the old double bass. He must have got the ‘ump, because he couldn’t take his eyes off me Bobby Charlton comb-over, and said I looked like a twat.” Elvin rubbed his bald head. “He said he had Braun clippers and would give me a solar panel for a sex machine.”

“Well I did, but you still look like a twat,” interrupted Steve chuckling and rubbing his head.

Hmm, grumbled Elvin. “Then the cheeky git said, Elvin, that’s a stupid name for a rock star. I didn’t understand what he meant, so I said, I’m not a rock star... I’m a geriatric.”

Steve interrupted. “I wanted to liven the place up, so I wanted to tell everyone he was a rock star. I knew it would give old Elsie an orgasm. Her tubes won’t have been lubed since her old man snuffed it. She’s probably got moss growing from her flaps,” said Steve and chortled.

Elvin laughed, pointed at Steve, and said. “He then glared at me and announced. I’ll call you Chippers! Short for chipmunk, because one of the bloody annoying chipmunks on T.V.’s called Alvin, which sounds like Elvin, so Chipper’s it is.”

Elvin looked at Steve, smiled, and said. “He made me feel right at home before Chewy came back into the rec room. She gave him a filthy look, dragged me away to her office, apologised, and hoped that Steve hadn’t put me off the home. She assured me that the other old residents were far more relaxed.” Elvin laughed. “I paid my deposit there and then, sorted out the paperwork, and a few days later me and my old double bass moved in.”

“Yeah,” said Steve, “there was hell on over the next few months for the old codgers.”

Elvin chuckled and said, "Which only got worse for them when Wayne arrived wiv his drum kit and Yamaha keyboard."

"Great for us, though," said Steve, "we were now a trio."

Charles cringed, recalling the dreadful noise he'd heard from this trio.

After breakfast, the four went to the recreation room. Residents who milled around in there were about to leave when Mrs Chew walked in and stood guard over the door to their instruments.

"We've got bingo at 10:00 am, so none of your antics today," she said and scowled.

The four sighed, went to the coffee machine, took their beverages outside, and sat on a bench in the grounds.

"What did Mrs Chew mean last night when she mentioned what happened last time?" asked Charles, looking intrigued.

The three looked uncomfortable and Charles thought he had hit a raw nerve, but after a moment's silence, Steve said. "You tell him, deaf boy. After all, it was your fault."

"What?" Wayne asked, feigning deafness and fiddling with his hearing-aid.

Steve sniggered and said. "Okay, I'll tell him."

Steve took a drink of coffee and said. "Old deaf boy hadn't told us his full story, and always became selectively deaf when we questioned him about his life. Although strangely enough when we are in a pub his hearing becomes clear when offered a pint of beer," he said, and he and Elvin chuckled.

Wayne, knowing he had been rumbled and his hearing was okay, took over telling the story, which happened over a year ago. "Toward the end of my first year at Fossdyke, I noticed small spots of grey hair."

"Small!" Steve interrupted, "you're a lying twat Logan. You looked like Santa's dandruff," he chuckled.

Wayne glared at Steve. "At least I have hair, baldy," said Wayne, running his fingers through his hair. "Not bad for a seventy-two-year-old," he smirked. "Anyhow, I was applying a dab of black hair dye to a small patch that looked lighter than the rest." He pointed at the giggling Steve and Elvin. "Those two knocked on my door wanting me to go to the recreation room to rehearse. They kept banging on the door, so I slipped the small plastic hair dye bottle into my pocket and answered. Steve pestered me to hurry, so in my haste, I forgot about the bottle."

He took a slurp of coffee and continued, "We did a soundcheck after Elvin fitted his little falsies, and we played. Engrossed in beating out a rhythm, I didn't notice the bottle of hair dye slip out of my pocket and lodge under the foot pedal of my bass drum. I stamped on the pedal and the top of the bottle popped off."

"A stream of black hair dye spurted over the cream-coloured, shag-pile carpet," interrupted Steve. "And the worse thing is, old deaf boy didn't see it and carried on stomping on the pedal... You should have seen his face when he realised what happened and picked up the empty bottle."

Elvin sniggered as he recalled the event, remembering how Steve warned Wayne about how Chewy would crush his knackers unless he serviced her.

"Well you made matters worse, buddy," said Wayne smirking.

Steve looked embarrassed as Wayne continued and pointed at him. "Because old ripey was laughing so hard, he farted."

"It was too much excitement for my uncontrollable dysfunctional bowel and it belched out foul-smelling puffs of gas," said Steve, smirking.

"Foul-smelling puffs of gas. That's a goddamn understatement. It smelt like putrid eggs blowing out of your ass" interrupted Wayne smiling.

"It was like being gassed," said Elvin, "it wez 'orrible."

Charles was enjoying every moment of this light-hearted banter, as Wayne told him. "Chewy walked into the rec room, saw the black stains on the carpet, and smelt the pungent air around old ripey. She pinched her nose and accused us of letting off stink-bombs and throwing paint over the shag pile."

"She wuz livid," said Elvin, "and glared at us with 'err 'ands on 'err 'ips, screaming about wilful acts of vandalism, calling us senile destructive old men, and she called the boss, his daughter," he pointed at Steve.

"And her crush on old deaf boy was over," chuckled Steve.

"We felt like scolded schoolboys when the furious doctor and Mrs Chew came into the recreation room and bollocked us. We had tried scrubbing the dye off the carpet, but only spread the stain around," said Elvin. "They threatened to kick me and Wayne out."

"Yeah, but fortunately they only banned us from playing music again," said Wayne.

Steve chuckled and said, "But now that you're here, Charley boy, I'm sure I can persuade Lucy to let us rehearse again."

Charles cringed, and through grated teeth said. "Oh, that would be nice."

"So what's the plan? We can't sit around here all day and I don't fancy bingo," said Elvin.

"I'll call Lucy," said Steve, taking out his mobile phone.

Elvin looked at Charles and in a soft voice said. "When we saw you yesterday, you looked like you had just lost someone very close, was it your wife?" he asked.

Charles nodded.

Elvin gently squeezed Charles's arm and said. "My world collapsed and I felt lost and alone when my missus died. I wanted to end it and I fink about her all the time," he looked at Charles, smiled, and told him, "It gets easier Nobby, and we are always here for you. The band of wrinkled brothers," he chuckled and said. "Life's too short to be sad."

Charles gasped. "That's what my wife Mary always said."

Elvin smiled. "And she was right."

"Great news lads," interrupted Steve looking pleased, "Lucy will have a word with Chewy. We can start rehearsing again tomorrow."

"Great, well done buddy!" exclaimed Wayne.

Elvin put his hand on Charles's shoulder, smiled, and said. "Now the healing begins Nobby."

The four spend the afternoon in the gardens planning for the next day and Charles told them about Mary. Mrs Chew came outside on occasions and glowered at the four after receiving Lucy's instructions.

Apart from Steve terrorising the old folk and warning them what lay in store, it was a sedate day for the old musicians.

After the evening meal, they strolled along to the Pavilion.

They sat on the same bench around the table and while Steve lit a cigarette, Elvin leaned over to Charles and said. "I suppose you want to know what happened to my fingers and me little falsies, and 'ow a cockney ended up in Cleeforpes?"

Charles had been wondering about Elvin's lack of digits since they first met, but felt too embarrassed to ask. Now Elvin had offered to disclose the fact, he wanted to know and nodded. Elvin held up his pincers and said. "I lost these many years ago when I was a stoker in the Royal Navy. They selected me for the Portsmouth \*Field gun crew and I spent the next few years shore-based at H.M.S. Nelson in Portsmouth, training for the royal tournament at Earls' court. During one training session, while running with a 12-pound gun, the wheels slipped as we tried to lift it over the wall. I made a grave error of judgement and ignored the warnings from me training and grabbed the wheel to stop it slipping." He held up his hands. "I trapped me bloody 'ands

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