

Bubbala, Biker Scum and the 'T' Girls

Book 1 from the Strange Aid Trilogy

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Jacky Yanovsky

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Jacky Yanovsky

I was born into a middle class, mid level Jewish family in the suburbs of London and one of three children.

My parents met in a Russian Communist Club and my father named me after a famous London strip bar.

I kid you not.

My mother never cottoned on. I take after my father who was and up to this point, as well as being into martial arts, still is an unrequited academic who along with cryogenics was infatuated with the metaphysical poets and other obscure philosophies.

I really broke out in my adolescence, left home at fifteen, the day after I left school in fact and hitched to India with my friend.

I was only allowed to go if I went to Israel first, as if they could stop me! I travelled extensively, abroad and in England, having experienced war zones, and in true hippy style, living in a variety of dwellings including caves and boats.

From my early war experiences I realized that life is short and not a rehearsal. I married my friend and we have been pretty happy and lucky so far.

In my mind I am still travelling and fortunately we are both pretty similar so who knows where we may end up.

All I know is that I have this terrible urge to make people laugh and share some mad moments with me.

Hence this book!

Oh and food is never far from my mind, as you will see.

JB Y

This Book Is Dedicated To:

The man who haplessly coerced me into participating in his cryogenic experiments involving liquid nitrogen, snails (which I had to collect), cutting edge high powered microscopes modified with tins cans and Duct Tape, on the kitchen table on Sunday mornings.

The man who used to greet all the paper delivery people, wearing nothing but a gorilla mask before descending into his dungeon.

The man who tried to usher me inside his front door brandishing an unsheathed and deadly thirteenth century Samurai sword, using it single handed to protect me from the three thousand Egyptians which he was certain were around the corner ready to attack.

The man who once said, that just because we are genetically related, we don't have to like each other. Fortunately I do!

To my father, responsible for all of the above and so much more, whom I love dearly and who has always inspired me in more ways than he could imagine.

Prologue: About twenty years ago, we think sometime around April 1983-ish, very early am...

Jack the Ripper would have loved that morning. A good, grey almost woolly dank mist hung over Spitalfield's Lamb Street. Dark brooding corners that could hide any drug induced monster, imagined or real, with bends you couldn't see round. An impending sense of doom welled up inside Rich as he rode on his crap Superdream 250. He had a cold and his nose was blocked. How he managed to get a blocked nose was a wonder of science and physics considering the amount of Charlie (cocaine) he had been snorting in the evening and speed (amphetamine sulphate) during the day to keep him going as always. His blocked nose was the cause of an accident which was to change his life forever.

Rich's life had not been an easy one. He was a fourth generation Polish Jewish immigrant and therefore the butt of many jokes within and without his family. The fact that he had an immense intellect, very typical of Polish and Russian immigrants, but used it in very untypical ways, was neither here nor there. Rich had a big weakness. He had several, as anyone has, but in his case, given the people that he hung around with, those weaknesses were his undoing and his making at the same time. I think you can gather he was a mishmash of contradictions.

His contradictory nature was another but less significant weakness due to his parentage of two warring, feuding families that were reluctantly joined by Rich marrying one of his father's enemy's daughters.

The fact that he later inadvertently killed her as he tried to push her out of the way of an oncoming truck with great risk to his safety was completely ignored by all those present including both warring families, they did nothing, they saw that Rich had put her under the wheels of a swerving Lada. This didn't help the family's view of him. The poor totally misunderstood tortured soul had lost everything he held dear and therefore he found an alternative reality to compensate. You can't blame him for any of the past or what happens here in this book as he is really a good soul who is a victim of one of the aforementioned weakness. Oh, did I forget to mention the aforementioned weakness?

The first being helplessly attracted to beautiful young ladies or damsels in distress. The second having an uncontrollable and raging thirst for knowledge and first-hand experience, after the result of imbibing such knowledge, which often took him into some strange situations.

The second character of this prologue, is introduced with a short potted character analysis or assassination depending what your moral values are and the wretched misfortune of a poor and actually rather noble Mr. Lorenzo Albalo. Mr Albalo was now being divorced from his mercenary, heartless but beautiful wife of approximately eight years. Eight years in which he had built up his fleet of lorries with national accounts, in London and the Home Counties, his tried and tested and mostly loyal staff of drivers, accountant and administrators and his property portfolio in Camden. The bitch was going to take it all. So he hadn't maintained the fleet for the last six months.

He had told his most trusted staff what was happening and thereby had given them the chance to move on because he was sure they would be exploited to the max by her (Mrs. Marta Albalo). He had resigned himself to his fate. His fate and Rich's fate were uncannily and closely linked at this point. We don't know about the Czech's.

The wide trail of diesel spilling out of the fuel tank from Lorenzo's un-maintained lorry about ten minutes preceding the event was the key in all of this. As well as the poor Czech motorbike courier (the third character of this prologue) who was unfortunate enough to be working at the same time and in the same spot.

Poor lad, when he moved out of his home town in the Czech Republic he had hoped that a new start in one of the most open minded countries in Europe would have saved his soul. In fact, it really did save it as unbeknown to him his long time girlfriend was plotting with his mother for the wedding of the street, back there in cosy downtown Czechoslovakia. She, at his house cosily sitting in the kitchen with her intended future mother-in-law, and him, at the station planning on leaving

that night and buying his train ticket out of there. He had saved all his money from his cleaning job at the university where he had passed his degree in 'most things' computers specializing in photography. He had got a first, was the youngest person in his school and class to get into university and was actually a near genius if truth be told.

He had invented new software systems that linked to digital cameras and was privately considered a protégé by his tutors who had hoped he would put their town on the map. Our rather sweet young Czech lad knew he needed to get out of his suffocating homeland and into the world.

He wanted mostly to go and photograph glaciers. He found the cold and the wondrousness of it all a purifier for his otherwise decidedly unholy, according to his mother, being. Whilst being near genius, as is often the case, he had no common sense at all. Consequently he didn't know what hit him when he arrived in London with money to survive for two days. He ended up working as a courier four days after his arrival in north London's Kentish Town. He bought a totally illegal and uninsurable motorbike, registered for work with someone else's name and address having gotten all details from the net and using his considerable skills was thereby being completely legal on the outside but hugely illegal on the inside.

The other genius in question, Rich, also had a missing link where common sense is concerned. Rich and the Czech had quite a few more things in common that morning.

Both had not registered and could not insure their bikes, both were illegally working on the black and both were involved in a not so slow and hugely uncontrolled slide, side by side, not quite making it round the blind bend. The inevitable happened. Over they went, each rider slammed to the floor. The mist dense enough to hide the road surface which was thickly smeared with Lorenzo's diesel, which neither of them smelt, Rich because his nose was blocked and the Czech just not clear headed or experienced enough to take in the significance of smells when you are riding.

The bikes slid down the road, Rich's front wheel going under a parked car and the Czechs hitting the kerb and then a lamp-post. The Czech came off worst with a seriously ripped jacket and torn jeans. The poor soul had gravel rash that would keep him in pain for weeks. Plus the inevitable dislocated thumbs. Rich, who was so used to hitting the floor, was much more relaxed and got away with scuffed leathers and just one dislocated thumb as he twirled round on his back like a grotesque version of a Wurlitzer at the funfair. He looked like a dead ant on its back. Parcels and post were scattered all over the road, spewing out from the split top boxes.

The Czech went into an 'adrenalin aided' flee mode. Possibly because he was an illegal immigrant. He made the immediate decision to cut his losses and disappear before the police or anyone else started to ask difficult questions. Rich went into 'thief mode', gathered up all the post on the floor, well the important ones that he knew about of his and some more of the Czechs.

He left some of the Czechs post, left the bikes and left the area pronto, disappearing into thin air, his mind racing like a Laverda Jota, possibly the fastest road bike at that time, thinking of what he could do and who he should and shouldn't call in order to work out just how he could profit from the situation...

CHAPTER 1

Christian Lake entered the reception of L.G.W. (Lativan, Gouldewater and White) Solicitors. It was empty. He looked around for a brief second, not noticing how very similarly bleak this part of L.G.W. was to any Social Services reception in any town in any part of the UK, even in this brave new century. He leant his un-toned and flabby hulk against the counter and drummed his stubby grimy nail-bitten fingers on the fake wood-like Formica in a desultory and laconic kind of way, although Christian himself wouldn't have used the word laconic in that context as he would have thought that 'laconic' was something to do with faecal emissions. 'Laid back' was more his style given his monosyllabic tendencies.

In actual fact, 'laid back' was remarkable for Christian. He was feeling kind of beatific, another word he would never have used, syllables notwithstanding. I think you get the picture. He gave himself a smug little smile. This had the effect of making the swastikas tattooed on each of his ear

lobes do a little dance, as if in mock salute to Himmler, the master himself.

What was even more remarkable was that Christian's 'How Fucked Off Am I?' internal barometer showed a 'fair and sunny outlook'. His internal needle hardly EVER got past 'stormy-high pressure'.

The reason for this rare and pleasant calmness, mingled with the smug grin, was that Christian was a father again, to a little girl no less. This time he was allowed to stay for the birth. Last time he had been thrown out because of the fact that his wife had bitten him so hard during the thirteen hour labour that he finally called her 'A mean fucking bitch...' and told her that he was going to 'fucking clock her one if she didn't get her fucking teeth out of his arm'.

This time there was no biting involved, as he cleverly surmised, the drugs were so much better now, so he was allowed to stay. Coming out of his family reverie, he moved his large fat head slightly towards the small door behind the reception. Someone was coming.

An odour of 4711 cologne preceded Mrs. Gouldewater Senior as she finally shuffled through the door and into the reception. The usual maroon tweed wool suit, neatly blending into the dark and musty colours of the decor, hanging on her thin frame as if, it too, was appalled and protesting about being anywhere near this ginger, wiry haired, sour faced old woman's person. Her face first registered resignation on seeing this, in her opinion, barely human being in front of her, but then somehow it morphed into her set 'customer reception' look, not that much different, as she remembered her good manners. In the Synagogue last Friday, the Rabbi Hershaw had said that as a congregation and a community they must all try to be more inclusive.

This was a good thing for Mrs. G Senior, as more inclusive meant possibly more business for her son Mr. Gouldewater, partner with Mr. Lativan and Mr. White, Solicitors. So with this inclusiveness in the forefront of her lizard like mind, she welcomed Christian Lake.

"Today you're different. What's different?" she said (also laconically).

"Is it that you are doing so well at this courier business that you can smile like that and so early in the day for you too. Why is this day different from all other days?"

"You are blessed with insight Mrs. G" chirped Christian, "Indeed this day of the twenty second of March is the second day of the birth of my baby daughter. I'm a daddy again. Here, let me show you a picture"

A picture thought Mrs. G Well, pictures of children, anyone's children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews were right on target with Mrs. Gouldewater. She held out her hand being careful not to actually touch the grimy digits in front of her. Christian proudly showed Mrs. G the picture of his newborn baby daughter, including the unmistakable bloody, full colour graphics of Mrs. Christian Lake delivering her.

"Look! Here's another one I took after they cleaned her up a bit. She's a little doll isn't she?"

To her credit, Mrs. G didn't flinch and went gamely on, holding on to the fact that she too was a woman and that God himself had created women's' bodies to do just this, so why should she be feeling so sick?

"Well mazeltov Christian, how much did she weigh? What have you called her? My, she looks just like you. Even at this age she takes after her father."

Mrs. Gouldewater had visibly softened and melted on hearing that this short, fat, bald-headed, unwashed person who smelt of decaying human flesh and fabric, wearing a ripped waterproof jacket that looked as if it had been driven over by a truck. Who had what seemed to be perpetually dirty fingernails. Who had been picking up and delivering packages and post to and from this office for over a year now, had indeed some kind of connection with the rest of the world and human beings in general. He was a father, fathers she understood. What was faintly worrying was what kind of father, indeed, what kind of family, lurked among those five million or so people living in London, could Christian Lake belong to and, God help us, perpetuate.

In the back of her mind was the phrase 'They should all have been killed at birth', but then Hitler had said that about the Jews hadn't he? So she renewed her efforts to be a good Jewess and to be all-inclusive even if it was just to avenge Hitler and her conscience. She said a silent Brocheh (pronounced 'Brockah' and is a Yiddish word for a blessing) for Christian and his family.

“We’re calling her Kay, after her Grandmother, God bless her soul, and she weighed 7lb 1oz and she came into this world screaming, just like her mother!”

“Well I wish you every joy,” said Mrs. Gouldewater, “You’re lucky to have a daughter. I hope she marries well. Braces, I recommend braces at 13 or puberty, whichever comes first, that’ll keep those boys away”

Christian looked at Mrs. G in a new light. Such good advice he thought to himself, so wise, his HFOAI (How Fucked Off Am I) barometer still on ‘sunny climes’. With that, he picked up the package waiting to be taken back to the office, fiddled around for his keys and put on his battered lid (crash helmet) and clumsily made his way towards the door calling out a thanks to Mrs. G who hadn’t even heard him as she made her way back into the security of her little office in the secret hidden chambers of L.G.W. Solicitors.

Once outside, Christian started his GT550 Kawasaki, his courier bike painted in matt black road-rat style, and went out to try to disappear into the traffic, his still smiling face hidden behind the dead flies, bird shit and road grime on his visor.

CHAPTER 2

Alf Napier was hiding out just off Smithfield, sprawled out on the bench recently vacated by the local all dancing, all singing care in the community resident. He was watching a London pigeon pick at one of the sweets he had thrown in the road and was waiting to see if it could eat it all in one go, or whether said sweet would be stuck on the road and impossible to get.

This could provide hours of pigeon fun he thought to himself and a great insight into the minds of pigeons. The radio strapped onto on his Trans Vehicle Services bib i.e. the plastic jacket that all couriers should wear to advertise their company, which all couriers hate wearing as it gives the police something to go on, started cackling, buzzing and beeping at him. This didn’t disturb the pigeon, which was now trying to remove the sticky mess of the sweet from its beak, using its feet to try to get to the green and blue goo which was clinging to it in hard to reach places.

“Yo muthafucka.” said the radio.

“Yo muthafucka.” he replied.

“Watchya doin?” said a deep but well articulated voice on the radio.

“Experimenting in pigeon mind control” replied Alf.

“Is there food involved?” inquired the voice.

“Used my last sweet” replied Alf “and I need further supplies. See you at Mazerati’s. If you get there before me, make sure you get the last of the apple crumble for me”

“What makes you think you deserve it?” said the voice.

“Because I’m a Bastard” replied Alf, and switched off his radio.

He took one last look at the multi-coloured sweet smeared pigeon, which was now fending off other pigeons that were trying to eat the sweet off its neck, put on his lid, hoisted his courier bag over his shoulder and jumped on to his VTR (a very fast motor bike) and headed towards Farringdon in central London and Mazerati’s Café for breakfast, mission accomplished.

Mazerati’s was in full swing. There were about seven bikes parked outside varying from super bikes, road bikes, scum bikes, insurance rip off bikes and Christian’s bike. Inside, radios were beeping merrily like caged finches and equally ignored, throughout the café. The café wasn’t huge but had become a meeting point due to the patience of the owner, Norma, her two Hungarian waitresses, who had now left after they both became engaged to rich bikers in Holland Park and her uncontrollable gambling habit. She would take business anywhere she could get it.

As well as the couriers the café was populated by blue or orange boiler suited manual workers, normally loaders at the nearby Smithfield meat market, the late night/early morning gold toothed, ‘rock’ chewing dealers and the odd stray ‘suits’ and sales ‘reptiles’. The suits and reptiles usually ate up quickly having, seemingly to them, stumbled into a café of iniquity and left fearing for their lives and belongings. The dealers talked in dialect amongst themselves and on their mobile phones and kept sweet with the meat loaders and couriers. After all everybody needs meat and the couriers

usually needed chemical assistance, everyone was happy. Today Norma was the proprietor and also the waitress. She was taking an order from Eileen one of the few female couriers in the business, who was also receiving orders from her controller, known as Brash and Bollocks to all the couriers from T.V. Services.

Now controllers are a peculiar bunch at the best of times. They're the ones who allocated the delivery jobs from their clients to the bikes, cars, vans, push bikes, whatever their company used. A courier company is a bit like a private post office except hugely more expensive and often with more psychopaths working for them. The controllers can make a courier's life hell or heaven, profitable or not, when they give out the jobs, decide on the order of who gets what and who goes where and how often.

So imagine if you will, that a controller who does not know a large city in which his courier company is based, is like an air traffic controller who doesn't know where north is or thinks that it is always the direction you are facing. You can therefore see the potential for cock-ups that can ensue in a place like London especially if you have a controller who is directionally challenged or just plain thick. Add a few twists like the controller doesn't like you, didn't get laid the night before, has a grudge against educated erudite people who happen to like bikes so much that they want to work all day with them, or is on a serious comedown, you could very easily see the potential to encounter problems when working with them. Brash and Bollocks was a mixture of all those things, good and bad.

He knew most of the routes, had grudges against couriers when he thought that they had somehow insulted him, but he was too thick to work that out most of the time. He was scared of women bikers and really believed that people like Christian Lake were more fitting for the profession than our other chums, who were on route to the café, namely Nathan, Alf, Eileen and Dave. Fortunately from all those except Christian, the abuse that he received generally went over his head. So all in all there was a workable arrangement, albeit on a knife edge most of the time.

Indeed, if Brash and Bollocks had been a little smarter and less lazy, none of our couriers would be able to get away with what they did or so they thought by common agreement. Needless to say, Brash and Bollocks was kept well out of the loop regarding Mazerati's, and other forms of skiving and pigeon watching.

Eileen, one of the women bikers that B&B was particularly scared of, with good reason, also worked for T.V. Services. She was firing off a breakfast order as Brash and Bollocks was giving her the next job. Her expertise at doing both simultaneously without B&B suspecting their whereabouts was noteworthy and a tribute to her intelligence, masked by her Irish brawn and confusing, for some, by the choice of her husband.

"Toast, fried eggs, bacon, black pudding and bubble & squeak. (Beep). Roger that (Beep). First floor (Beep). Make that twice, one for me one for Dave, he'll be along shortly (Beep). Is it sign or post room? (Beep) and a portion of chips (Beep). Rog" (Beep).

Having got everything sorted, she sat down at the six seater table. She was expecting Dave her husband, also a courier, and the others at any minute, business having been taken care of for the next two hours by the devious setting up of Christian and Bone-Head, a courier who fitted his nick name like a coffin for a corpse, to be on call and therefore cover for them. This was a common occurrence, every day in fact. The controller Brash & Bollocks being such a dickhead had no idea of the ingenuity of this jocular group of scheming motor biking scum working the roads in this particular part of London.

As predicted, no sooner had Christian turned up and drunk his tea than his radio went again calling him off to WC1, EC1 then Parkway for a wait and return. Bonehead had been sent off to pick up nine jobs on the E14 run.

Alf's VTR pulled up outside reasonable sedately for him. Alf was about 5'11" and today's choice of clothing was black Gore-Tex waterproof trousers and jacket both armoured, with protective Sidi boots that had been well worn in. Apart from the boots, all exterior gear was in good nick.

In fact most of the couriers in this particular group had good gear, apart from Dave, because they knew it would save their limbs if and usually when they slid down the road or encountered other

bits of moving traffic. It was actually quite a dangerous job being a motor-bike courier in London and although most of them looked as if they didn't know shit about anything, they had all been doing this for a long time and as yet they hadn't done any serious damage to themselves, this in itself proved that they were good.

Many other couriers had suffered serious accidents and in some cases had joined the great big motorcycle club in the sky. Alf walked with a North London swagger and could do wheelies at 120 m.p.h. He swaggered into Maserati's feeling satisfied and justified with the mornings proceeding because of his pigeon antics. A few moments later, a brand new black Bandit 1200, tuned to the bollocks, screeched to a gravel shattering halt, peppering the window like buckshot, his owner doing it because he could! A tall well-built man wearing armoured black leathers grinned, dismounted the beast, and made his way to meet his friends in the café. Nathan.

"Yo muthafucka" said Alf

"Yo muthafucka" said Nathan, "I bet that scheming bitch has had the last of the apple crumble".

"Oi I heard that" yelled Eileen "No, today I'm on a diet so you can have the apple crumble to your muthafuckin self. Dave and I are going out later so we don't want pudding."

Her five foot eleven, long, red-headed angular frame settled on a chair. Eileen was wearing men's Gore-Tex waterproof gear as all the girly bike stuff didn't fit her nor was it protective enough, the designers obviously not expecting Eileen's contours in their profiles. Eileen was not exactly pretty, but she was disarming. She had pale freckled skin, with the most brilliant blue eyes, she also had a resigned air about her that kind of indicated she wouldn't tolerate fools too easily and you had better make your point quickly before she gives you huge hugs or annihilates you, depending on her view of your performance and intentions.

On first appearances she was indeed very intimidating but to those who knew her well knew she had an almost naive compassion that could transform her into the most gentlest 'Amazon' of a woman you could wish to meet. The problem was her trusting and respecting you enough to get past the scaly and scary dragon lady image she gave to most people she encountered. For those who had taken the time to completely ignore all of that, she was a very big warm hearted leprechaun in bikers clothing.

She chose her seat. She put down her tea, put in three sugars and stirred it. As expected, her five foot five equally long red-headed string bean of a husband Dave turned up on his orange CB500. It was really Eileen's bike but Eileen was riding the MTV while Dave's bike was being serviced. Dave happened to be the exception of the collective skills of the couriers. Dave was an accident waiting to happen. Eileen was better than her husband, but no one mentioned it, not even when it was really tempting. They all thought that it was Eileen's prerogative to emotionally destroy Dave, not theirs.

Alf, Nathan and Dave joined Eileen and sat down, comfortably eating their breakfast with little conversation. Alf, Dave and Eileen all were having the fry up, Nathan having the fry up and the steak pie. He was quite fortunate that due to life's little quirks his metabolism was a little different from most and he used energy in strange and mysterious ways.

There was a good humoured gentle hum of peace, tranquillity and munching throughout the café. Very rare moments indeed, in this environment, but wait...

Eileen leapt out of her seat and onto the table.

"Don't any of you move!" she screamed, "This is a shrubbery. Any of you motherfuckers move and I'll electrocute every motherfucking last one of you!"

Her chair had gone flying out of control, flung across the industrial lino floor into the diners behind her, spraying hot blobs of bubble and squeak everywhere. Swirling around in the chaos she had created, her thick hair coming loose and wild, poised, ready to pounce, elbows at ninety degrees to her body ready to be used as weapons and for leverage, she was pogo-ing on the table, which, surprisingly held her weight, shook her head madly, bared her teeth and shoved her hand into her jacket.

She stood on the table amidst the baked bean and sausage chaos, in a crouching position as seen on TV in CSI Miami and definitely and clearly showing the whites of her eyes. Nobody dared do anything. They all just watched helplessly as Eileen leaped around amidst the mess sending

everyone diving for cover. Silence.

Still nobody moved or did anything, everyone too petrified and stunned to think.

Time stood still the static of fear filled the air. The gold-toothed dealers were silenced, the 'suits' and 'reptiles' turned a paler grey, the couriers shrank in their leathers. As ordered, no-one moved. The whole café was riveted to the spot in suspended animation, staring at Eileen who had a wildly insane, that's a deeply profound understatement, grin on her face, one that would have done Jim Carey proud, as she twirled around on the table like the grim reaper on LSD, waiting to catch you. Nathan, Dave and Alf were cowering under the table whilst Eileen was stomping around hissing and spitting at everyone.

"Do something Dave, she's your wife!" hissed Nathan shoving him and trying to get him out of his state of rabbit in the spotlight daze, and clock on to what his crazy beloved was doing.

Dave tentatively poked his head out from under the table and stared at his wife, his eyes wide but not comprehending fully. Then the slow realization of the fact that she may have well and truly lost it and really flipped her lid this time and he was going to have to deal with it dawned on him. He was petrified and shrunk back, riveted to the floor. Nathan shoved him harder.

"Fucking do something NOW before she gets herself arrested or sectioned!" He hissed even louder and grabbed Dave's testicles to get his full attention.

That did the trick. He looked at Nathan with grave indignation then very slowly raised his hands and again tentatively poked his head out from under the table for the second time and tried to very carefully get her attention in some effort to hopefully placate his wife. He didn't get a chance to say or do anything before she reached into her jacket in what seemed like the slow motion frames of film and pulled out what, to everyone's further and frozen horror, seemed to be a gun.

Dave dived back under for cover. Eileen with a gun was not a laughing matter as she had been known to use her air rifle to shoot out the windows of her neighbours opposite, in their high rise flat, because they were doing DIY at 11.45 a.m. on a Sunday morning. The whole café took an intake of breath and clenched everything as she slowly revealed the weapon.

Nathan in true Nathan form was busily analyzing the situation and was going over her words 'This is a shrubbery...!', Eileen was now laughing hysterically, wired and wide eyed, she was the only one who was. Nathan took a deep breath put on his lid for protection and tried to peek out to see what Eileen was up to.

Alf and Dave both scrambled to get their lids on too before Eileen shot them or something. They all slowly and gently raised their heads out from under the table like three mute black headed beetles, only to have a very strange feeling, a bit like a dentist's drill, powering through their crash helmets.

They met Eileen's insane, laughing hysterical eyes, and slowly they caught a glimpse of what she was using to drill on their crash helmets. Nathan had to blink twice to make sure of which reality he had landed on. Dave wasn't even looking and had pulled down his tinted visor, he was too scared of what he might see. Alf's jaw dropped. Shocked they stood up knocking over more chairs and plastic ketchup bottles, struggling to make sense of the scene before them. The rest of the punters in the café started to very carefully move away from the couriers not sure what was going on but that they definitely wanted to get distance between themselves and her.

After what seemed like an eternity the reality of what she had done and had in her hands hit them. All of them, stared at her, still paralysed. Grasped very tightly in each of her hands they saw the huge thick shiny plastic twirling and wobbling purple vibrators. As if under a spell, they were still mesmerized as she slowly turned on the buttons, held each one aloft to each ear, grinned, then slowly and erotically licked them and ceremoniously held them out to for all to see and listen to their loud, proud and lonely hums. Then she did a funny little dance on the table and turned to her captured audience.

"Gotcha!"

In retrospect, they were not sure if they were more shocked because she pulled out a couple of vibrators than a gun or because it may have been a new kind of gun weirdly designed as a vibrator, but there was a deeply bemused silence, except for the sound of the humming and heavy breathing.

You could sense the mixed emotions emanating from various individuals, that Eileen's little act had triggered throughout the café. Nathan was anxiously looking round now to make sure no-one was about to leap over the tables and try to kill her. He was amazed at every one's restraint. Mind you no-one in their right mind would take on Eileen, sane or insane. He breathed out slowly, releasing all the unwanted adrenalin.

"Fuck sake" said Alf finally breaking the moment by starting to giggle. As if responding to a signal, the Café gently went back to a kind of surreal normality as Eileen clambered down and retrieved her chair. None of them said anything for a while, they were waiting for the surrealism to pass, and given their collective history that shows how fucking weird that little scene really was.

"I thought I was going to have to knock your wife off the table" whimpered Alf, who was by now rolling on the floor laughing. Dave however was looking at his wife in absolute admiration.

"That was truly magnificent" he said, "but you fucking do that again and I won't give you any dope or blow jobs for the next three weeks. Why our vibrators?"

"She's got balls, I'll say that for her" chipped in Nathan, who, having uncrossed his eyes was now trying to gather up and put away fifteen years worth of all the mental images of death and destruction that had been unleashed and were running loose in his head.

"It was well planned, well thought out, well executed, you have far too much free time Eileen. I worry about you."

Eileen just kept on grinning. The suits had now come out of their shock, Norma actually smiled towards them in a weakly reassuring way, glad that everyone seemed to be OK and not dead. The dealers grinned back and fired up their mobiles, making sure that they were still cool, the meat loaders roared their approval stood up and applauded her loudly.

They would be talking about that for a long time to come. Eileen stood up and took a bow- it was after all a performance worthy of an Oscar. She had been planning it for weeks. The couriers were all grinning from ear to grime covered ear. Alf was now laughing so loud he nearly fell off his chair again. Nathan who had had a particularly nasty flashback to his police days when he was actually shot at, was saying a little mantra to himself '...I'm in this layer of reality,' he hadn't said it in years, but it reminded him he was still alive and had all his bits intact.

In fact, after the initial shock, they were all perversely brimming over with pride that one of their friends could actually do that and a woman as well, how about that!

The conversation eventually returned to normal after letting Eileen go over and over her cunning plan and the reasons why she did it, which still no one really understood. They were now on a more comparatively comforting subject, moaning about Brash and Bollocks' controlling skills or rather his lack of them and Slithery Paul's, a fellow courier, latest sucking up to the boss.

"Here's what we could do" said Alf "let's collect those pink gay stick-on triangles they're giving away with the Pink Press and plaster them all over Slithers brand new TDM. We could write his telephone number on them too."

"At least he'll feel loved and wanted when he gets all those calls," remarked Nathan grinning in between sipping his tea.

"Teach him to arse-lick," said Dave.

"My friend Rich did that once" went on Nathan, "no not arse-lick, Eileen, the sticker thing. He did it to one of the van drivers in a firm I used to work for. It changed the bloke's life you know. He was last seen at Madam Jojo's dancing with blokes wearing leather chaps of many varieties. That reminds me" he said "I got a package from him, Rich, about a month ago. It was an old key wrapped in some old paper. He asked me to put it in a brief case, which I have been keeping for him for about four years now."

"I'd forgotten all about that. Remember Rich, Alf? I've not seen him since he did that cheque job and had to emigrate to Holland. Last I heard he was living above a brothel in Utrecht looking after some guy's hydroponics grass system."

Nathan paused for a moment, thinking back to the letter, Rich and everything. He continued.

"Funny that, as Rich knew nothing much about growing plants, only about smoking them."

Nathan's eyes grew vague when he got flashbacks, as he often did, this one was of him, Rich and

Alf cutting lines in a flat in Kilburn, his future wife's flat as it happened, all of them completely wired and discussing theology. Rich was really into theology. He had originally wanted to be a Rabbi, but his mother had sworn that no son of hers was going rabbinical.

So he had been brought into the family business, antiques dealing, for want of a better term, in the Portobello Road Market. Rich's knowledge of antiques, theology and logistics had really helped the family, one of the positive uses of his weaknesses, but his liking for smack one of the negative uses of his experiential weakness, had got him into a bit of a fix. As such he, as a good Jew, had grasped opportunity by the horns and rather than embarrassing his family due to his smack habit, had opted for life as a courier instead. This in turn was how he had got himself into that 'bit of bother' mentioned earlier culminating in him having to leave the country pronto but taking someone else's shit load of dope, cheques and assorted other goodies with him. Holland seemed to welcome him.

"Yeah" said Alf, "Rich was weird one. Funny about the key though, what was it like?"

Alf had an interest in keys and locks. This interest was more than just a passing phase. This particular interest had led him into some very interesting jobs in his past which in turn had led him into some very good money, all used notes and untraceable.

Except that on one job, it wasn't, they'd traced them back to Alf. Once more, he'd been back in lock-up, where this time, even he couldn't break out, for about fourteen months. During that time he had learnt several things. He had learnt that he was dyslexic. He had learnt to keep very quiet and invisible to the screws and he had learnt to make sure that if any of the other guests at that particular HMP even tried to touch him, they would never want anything but one-way traffic in a very personal place. Alf could get a fork, plastic or otherwise between anyone's buttocks. He couldn't read, but he could fuck your mind up for life if he felt you weren't being respectful.

However, he respected Nathan, Dave, Eileen and Esther. They were his friends and to him along with Dob his dog, were family and so were important to him. This meant that if Nathan was puzzled over something then Alf was there to help, when he felt the need to or he actually could.

"So this key then. Is it small, large, brass, nickel? Give me a description."

"Well it's like an old barn door key, you know, big heavy brass thing, long stem with a kind of balanced feel to it."

Alf sat thinking for a while, mulling over what kind of lock would need this key and what it may have locked.

"I'll have a look at it later tonight if you can bring it over. Beer's at my place around seven everyone. Rita'll probably turn up a bit later after he's had her nails done. I don't know if Sandra's coming over, I've told her not come. She kept me awake all last night asking me if I love her, it's driving me mad, all I want to do is sleep and then she keeps asking 'what am I thinking?' and 'Do I really love her? Christ, she's in my bed, isn't that enough?' Alf really meant this stuff about his long suffering girlfriend Sandra, in all seriousness. Dave and Eileen exchanged knowing glances with each other. Dave raised an eyebrow and nodded in support. Nathan look resigned. He gave up trying to educate him regarding his treatment of women not long after they became friends, way back when.

"Yeah bro," he replied to Alf's dilemma, subtly taking the piss, "Sleep's important. Christ, with all these idiots on the road, especially these born-again bikers, they can kill us. You've got to be alert and on your toes."

"Don't call me a lert, muthafucka"

"Surely I can call you what I want"

"Don't call me Shirley either" quipped Alf. With that he got up and left. His drop had been waiting for over two hours now, a wallet for some rich guy who had left it behind and needed it shipping to Ohio. Alf had 40 minutes to get it to Heathrow Airport. Plenty of time.

CHAPTER 3

Nathan gathered up his stuff and called Brash & Bollocks. To his delight he was given a distance

job. This meant more money, but he would be home late. He thought he'd better call Esther and let her know that he wouldn't be able to make it to Alfs with the others and that the key would have to wait a bit longer. If he didn't call her she may worry and he never liked his wife worrying. In the past it had made for complications for which he had paid dearly with no sex or supper for far too long. No, No, No! He always let Esther know what was happening now, for his own security and because he loved her. Nathan called the school number where she worked, and got no reply. He also tried her mobile but it was switched off. He'd drop in on her and tell her, just in case she'd planned something special.

He pulled up outside the Pupil Referral Unit. This particular PRU was a place of education for fifteen year old girls who were not in mainstream education for one reason or another i.e. bitch trolls, bullies and/or victims or any other reason why they couldn't or wouldn't be included in the already overcrowded and underfunded mainstream schools. Esther was the teacher in charge and manager. He rang the bell, approached the office where he found her in the middle of talking to one of her pupils.

"Look, do me a fucking favour Marie, and see sense. If he's screwing someone else, nicking your brothers scooter and making you unhappy then he's playing with you and you're letting him and he's doing it because he can. Here, have another ciggy."

As Nathan looked through the door. Esther waved him in and exploited him for the benefit of her young charge, the situation and because she could, offering what she called the 'school fags' around to everyone. Her logic being that she had these girls for a precious year to get through their GC.S.E's and turn their lives around, empower them and repair years of emotional damage. Having them detox and suffer withdrawals on top of all that pressure was too much for anyone and in her mind totally illogical. They could do that after they left her and moved on to the jobs, training or the further education they all managed to get once they'd left the care of her and her team. No one argued with her, her track record said it all.

"Oh, hi darling! Marie, you remember Nathan, my husband? I'm just sorting out Marie. She can't finish her English coursework because of this bastard she's going out with, we all know his kind." she said, starting to get annoyed "Marie, do you want me to give Nathan his address? If you want this git of a boyfriend to leave you alone, you know, be taught a lesson, it's not a problem. Just give us the word and it shall be done."

Marie's face did a little dance that would have made any mime artist proud, she was not too sure whether to take this seriously or not. Given this was Esther she was talking to, with her husband present, she thought she probably meant it so gave a serious answer.

"No, it's alright, but I'll think about it. I'll try to finish this coursework. He's fucked me up enough and I'm not going to let him fuck up my education too."

"Atta girl Marie. Do you want another ciggy for later? Take one and tell the others I'll be there in a minute."

Marie went away convinced that both of them were quite serious about mysteriously causing something quite nasty to happen to her boyfriend if it would help her.

"Counselling another one?" asked Nathan.

"Yeah, she's so smart that one but gets used so much."

"You know how that feels don't you," replied Nathan softly.

He knew Esther's weaknesses. Esther let him know them. He went over to Esther, a small but well formed and curvy woman of indiscriminate age and thick and wavy black hair that fell loosely around her shoulders like something out of a Botticelli painting. She was his princess and he was her proud and extremely protective knight. He put his arms around her, almost smothering her and gave her a hug, rocking her gently in his arms. They did this a lot, any time, any place, anywhere.

"Listen, I've got a distance to Portsmouth. I may be back late, is that OK?"

"No problem. Are you OK?"

"Yeah, look I've got to go. Give my regards to the girls, see you tonight, don't wait for me to eat, I'll pick up something later."

"That's OK hun, I'll defrost some of your chilli in the micro and you can have it when you get in

if you want.”

“That’ll be great, see you later tonight, I’ll call you when I get there.”

He gave her a kiss and another quick hug and was gone. Esther walked back into class.

“Everyone OK?” she enquired.

“Yeah, how ‘bout you?” enquired one rather gorgeous girl with an angelic face, looks can be deceiving, with a pink ribbon, butterfly clips and feathers in her hair.

“Oh yes, he just dropped in to tell me he had a distance job. He sends his love to you all.”

Esther turned her attention to her class.

“Ok. Marie, nice piece of writing....”

The sound of the Bandit drowned out her words, but that was not a problem. The girls were used to Esther and her husband. They both kept them safe.

Nathan’s tall Nordic frame sat comfortably on his bike as he worked his way through the heavy London traffic. He saw the gaps and went for them, reading the road and car driver’s minds like a shrewd politician. He had been riding since he was seven, off-roaders, anything he could get his hands on. His publican parents, so busy working all the hours God sent tried to ignore his passion. He had spent hours, days, weeks, months chanting ‘bike bike bike bike’ at them, but in the end they were too exhausted, so to stop his chanting they gave in.

Consequently bikes slid into Nathan’s life and had not stopped since. He absolutely had to have a bike in his life, it was an underlying need which permeated his soul. No bike, i.e. not having one, equalled severe depression for Nathan, a bike, i.e. having one, equalled happiness, lots of bikes equalled sheer paradise. That’s just how he was.

When Nathan was riding he was at peace, Zen like, well, not quite, not all the time, the exceptions being when people tried to overtake him. Then he was like the cousin of Thor, loud, intimidating and almost merciless to whoever got in his way.

Once he’d put distance between them and him, preferably with a nice corner involved, then he was a happy courier, until the next victim unwittingly got themselves caught in Nathan’s game of tag. Sometimes he found someone else who liked to play. Both of them tearing up the roads with large, stupid, big kid grins on their faces, fellow adrenalin junkies. However, this time Nathan was not quite Zen like and once out of London cruised at 70 m.p.h. Illegal equalled normal for Nathan but this time slow definitely equalled not normal. Something was playing on his mind and he needed to work it through.

This was the best time and way through it for him, a distance job on a warm dry day. He found himself thinking about Rich again, Rich and his key. He worked out that if Alf had gone on about the key thing then he must have picked up Nathan’s feeling of being not quite right about something. Maybe it was the key.

A key of dope would’ve been nice, or even better, a key load of charlie, but a key load of, well, key? This key thing was weird, but then Rich had always been cryptic. Maybe the key was meant to signify something Nathan should know, but what? He thought back to the early years when he’d never been that naive but was nevertheless young and much thinner and a young police officer walking the beat in Kings Cross, a very busy and seedy part of London at that time, the hub of it Kings Cross main-line station.

They’d cut his long blonde hair to regulation length.

His Judo training with the judge, his father’s friend from the pub, had made him lithe but muscular. His height always made him quite conspicuous which he used to his advantage when still in school. There the bullies had laughed at his shyness as they tore up his poetry in the playground when he was young. They’d seemed more like killing fields to a sensitive and lonely little boy.

Those same bullies hadn’t noticed how the shy and vulnerable victim of their jokes and fists and therefore the physical evidence of their power had changed.

Suddenly the killing fields were Nathan’s. He left the strongest ones till last, savouring their physical agony, their bodies and egos a bloody mess on the school tarmac.

He won the battle, won the girls and lost his virginity. A fair swap thought Nathan, a fair swap indeed. His girlfriends loved him. He was tall, blonde, strong, funny, and emotionally literate and

rode motorbikes.

He rode off into the world, or at least to the next village, earning good money as a welder and roofer. He was always incongruous though. You didn't often see a solitary roofer sitting a hundred feet up on an RSJ reading war poetry, eating a sausage sandwich and drinking a bottle of champagne in his lunch break. Inevitably, the big smoke called, the jobs having dried up in Middlesbrough. Nathan joined the police, it was good money.

The Judge had given him the idea, knowing that when you truly looked into Nathan's eyes, you could see his humanity, his support for the underdog and his cold cynicism in measured and equal parts.

"Go and join the Metropolitan Police" The Judge had told him, "It's the best Force money can buy".

The speed helped his memory and the whisky helped his courage. He passed his entrance exams with flying colours and he was in.

It was on his time off that he found a sleazy bar in Chelsea, far from his station in Holborn, where he could relax and be himself after his shifts. Nathan having been brought up in pubs could talk to anyone about anything and they began to know him there. He was as comfortable in front of a bar or behind it. Mostly he was in front of it. However, he had helped Harry, the owner, once or twice. Once Harry had been so out of it after a dose of strong acid that Nathan had found some Mogodons, strong sleeping pills, to bring him down and then took over the bar for the night. If one of his squad came by, not likely, 'who gives a fuck,' he thought.

So one early morning, his bike parked outside, Nathan was propping up the bar with Harry, who was just about to close, in comes this guy, nothing spectacular to look at, small compared to Nathan, stocky with black hair and a beard.

"Harry, I've come to collect" he said.

Harry looked anxious and was jiggling with a beer mug.

"What, now, at this time. Here?"

Nathan's 'trouble radar' started pinging wildly in his brain. Great he thought, this little shit's going to start something and I'm going to have to find another place to drink and I like this place. Nathan waited for developments.

"Harry" said Black Beard, "How long is it since I last saw you, two years?"

"About that yeah" replied Harry cautiously.

"Have I called you or asked for anything in all that time?"

"Well" Harry paused for a while and thought. "No, not that I recall" he replied.

"Have I ever let you down on any deals?"

"Well no" repeated Harry miserably.

"Have I ever got myself in a mess over a woman?"

"Well yes, most definitely" enthused Harry feeling a bit more like he was getting some kind of edge.

"And have you?"

"You know I have" responded Harry a little more crestfallen now.

"And what did I do for you Harry? What did I do?"

"You let me stay with you Rich," muttered Harry, now knowing he had completely lost whatever edge it was he had been trying to gain.

"Yes Harry, you stayed with me. Was it good?"

"Yeah, it was" conceded Harry, knowing that somehow he was really letting himself in for it.

"Were you scared of me, my friends or of what I might do at any point?"

"No" he whispered.

"Then you know I am an honourable man?"

"I never said you weren't," replied Harry, genuinely distressed now.

"I know that" Black Beard replied gently, "But now I need a place to stay, not because I'm hiding or running, but because I need to study for my theology exam and my mother is driving me mad. The dog's always barking and my nephews are over."

"You're the only one who knows about this and now, this guy too" he said, pointing at and addressing Nathan. "Please don't be insulted, but as you can see, I have a problem here."

"No offence taken," said Nathan, beginning to warm to this character.

"Harry, can you help me or not?"

"You could always stay in the bar," said Harry, "Would that help?" hoping that this would appease him and lessen the impending doom, whatever it was.

Apparently it did and Harry breathed a relieved sigh as the inquisitor with the black beard visibly brightened.

"Harry, I love you," said the guy now known as Rich.

"By the way" said Harry, feeling more confident now that he was back on some kind of equal footing, "Nathan here is a more than a regular. He's helped me a lot, he comes from generations of publicans, just so you know, Nathan's all right."

You picked a lucky night Rich, " he continued "A lucky night."

"That's no surprise to me," replied Rich "I'm one of the chosen people of the twelve tribes of Israel," he said as he walked away jauntily to get his things.

Nathan turned round and watched Rich as he headed towards the door. When he turned back there was whisky set for three people.

These are good people thought Nathan, and felt that after all, it might be his lucky night too.

Inevitably, Nathan, Harry and Rich became good friends. Nathan was intrigued by Rich, an eccentric Jew amongst other things, and his theology. Harry was a good barman, which meant a lot to Nathan, but Harry didn't do the theology thing well and tended not to get too involved. Nathan and Rich discussed theology, women, alcohol and both found a common love for all things that were fun, decadent and hallucinogenic.

Rich claimed hallucinogens helped him to visualize the theological situations, his weakness for experiential reality blossoming, especially when the words actually became real and started to have minds and actions of their own. Rich found this was especially good with Corinthians II where the bible stated that women must not adorn themselves. Something to do with the letters L, S and D he said, qualifying it by adding that he felt more at home with the theologist's and their theories when the words seemed so concrete (literally) instead of abstract. Nathan agreed and felt that it definitely enhanced Shakespeare, especially Hamlet as well as The Grateful Dead. Also Nathan knew that between Chiswick roundabout and Richmond on a cool night, it was very exciting and satisfying when these three little letters began to play with your mind and your speedometer.

Through all of that time, Rich had never once asked Nathan about how he made his money. Nathan had never asked how Rich came to be so rich. There was a sense of protocol and integrity to each other and life.

Four years later Nathan was asked to leave the police force for belting his sergeant who had bullied him once too often. It was either that and pay £2000, or be put in jail along with those he had put there. In that sergeant, the killing fields came back for Nathan. His slow fuse exploded and took five of his bosses teeth, some of his jawbone along with Nathan's police identity card.

In the long run it was probably a good thing as Nathan was by then drinking at least a bottle of vodka a day to enable him to walk his beat, his humanity having been nearly destroyed by joining the force designed to protect people from each other. On the other hand it was a pity as he was about to sit his detectives exams. He'd been advised by one of the guys in the squadron's boxing team that he would make a good detective. He'd hoped to go into the drug squad or fraud squad, after all he was quite an expert in both branches.

One day shortly after that Nathan found himself with Rich in Harry's bar and he mentioned to him that he was looking for work.

"Work with me" said Rich.

Which is what he did. Rich operating the courier vans, and Nathan the bikes. Together they supplied the whole of Camden market with variety of most definitely illegal solids, liquids and gas, and legal repro-antique furniture. Business was good. Business was booming. Business went on like that for a long time, Rich and Nathan changing companies whenever it was necessary.

Suddenly, business boomed with a loud bang for Rich. He'd branched out into other areas unknown to Nathan. Had he known Nathan would have strongly advised Rich against this development as paper can be traced but it was understandable nevertheless. And that's when Holland, which always had seemed to Rich to be a country well versed in sleaze, seemed a good idea. The fact that Rich also thought that anonymity seemed a good idea was a bonus. Rich just left. The incident with Mr Albalo's spilt diesel and the Czech's collision seeming like a sign from God to Rich that his time in the UK was up. He got a message to Nathan a week later.

The messenger, a sorry looking courier, gave Nathan a note, which stated that Rich was in Holland and couldn't come back and could he keep his briefcase. Nathan had then decided logically that it was time to stop this particular form of livelihood. He lay low for a while at a friend's house in Khatar, United Arab Emirates, to see how things developed. When he felt that it was safe, he came out of hiding and returned to London all cleaned up. No alcohol where he'd been.

So, on his way to the Portsmouth drop, Nathan was re-living all of this and more. Something definitely was afoot. He didn't know what it was, but he felt he was being put in a situation on purpose by Rich and that key.

Something was going to happen, he knew that Rich knew that too. That was OK, Rich also knew what Nathan could handle, and therefore, it must be something that he could easily cope with. He reached Portsmouth, did the drop and called Esther. He got home later that evening, ate chilli, watched stupid TV, made love to Esther and went to sleep.

He woke up early the next morning at his usual 5.30 a.m. Esther was still asleep, as usual and as usual he went out into the expectant world.

It was coming, whatever it was and it was coming soon.

CHAPTER 4

Under a bare light bulb in the sitting room which doubled up as a bike scrap yard, in one of the many non-descript and run-down council estates in North London, Christian Lake had been kept up all night by his baby daughter. This particular morning however was not the norm for Christian, for he was still somewhat beatific but his HFOAI barometer was now juddering dangerously close to 'unsettled' as he made his way to work for his first delivery of the day.

Mrs. G was not in her office, instead, Mr. Lativan came out to give him the package. Mr. Lativan looked how he sounded, kind of Latvian, ancient, burly, dark haired, deep growling voice, navy suit. He gave Christian two packages dismissively and then left reception. Christian looked at the addresses, one normal run for Oliver Bowles Financial Advisers, at Liverpool Street, the other for Mr. Brooke, the director of Trans Vehicles Services, the company our biker scum pals worked for. Better get the one for the boss in quick thought Christian and moved out pronto, radioing the office to let Mr. Brooke know he had an urgent for him and was he in?

Nathan, Alf, Eileen and Dave were all in Mazerati's arguing as usual as to who, this time, would have the last portion of apple crumble.

After the last little performance a few of the regulars kind of winced in case this was a next time she may lose it and even more spectacularly. Maybe today, this time, it would be for real and not just vibrators. Who can blame them?

"Today is a bad day for me and therefore, for you, I have serious PMT and cramps so be warned." snapped Eileen.

"So what makes you think that it is your right to get the crumble then?" retorted Alf.

Nathan thought that this was brave but dangerous banter given the circumstances and remembering how well Eileen had slipped into character on the vibrator/gun day and how far she would go.

"Because I fucking can!" yelled Eileen, her eyes bulging. The whole café seemed to shrink.

There then followed complete silence for approximately two seconds before common sense and survival prevailed.

"Yeah, you're right," said Alf as the café seemed to take on its own life and held its breath until

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