

TRAVIS' BARN, SUSSEX: 26TH
NOVEMBER 4.15PM

Travis' car is empty

The headlights are on. The driver's door is open, I check inside and find the key in the ignition and without thinking, pocket it. Travis has left in a hurry. He is in trouble.

A corridor of white light is illuminated through the gloaming of the closing day, rutted tracks and scrubby patches of grass lead up to the halo of debris that surrounds the barn. There are woods to my right, open fields to the left. There isn't any sign of the 4 by 4, or of Hooklam, in any direction. I wonder if Travis' has managed to lose him. I keep low and away from the track as I run towards the house, conscious of the silence and fearing that the shuffle of my footfalls will leave me exposed.

I reach the first piece of agricultural junk. There is a

large cylindrical container on pair of wheels ahead with one end sticking ten feet into the air. By pulling myself onto to it I am afforded a view across to the barn. Everything is still. Silent. A distant bird call marks the passing of the day. Travis and Hooklam have been spirited away, taken into the woods or the skies themselves, leaving me alone, chasing at shadows.

Then, a couple of feet away, a light pricks on. A torch that I watch bob and wind its way across the field, over rubbish and weaving between obstacles. It is flicking to the left, to the right, scanning around. Searching. I drop down. The firefly of light darts through the wreckage field, swinging low, checking the ground and then arcing up, to shine over trees and bushes.

Then it stops.

I can see a shadow beside it. The light burns a white spot into the ground, just a single point. I can here movement, perhaps a mechanical sound. A clicking. Then torch is raised and the beam lances out across the junkyard, and a gun shot cracks the silence in two.

There is a cry. I drop down. prone, pressing myself hard against the rusted surface of the tanker. Another shot fires out. There is shouting; someone is shouting and running. I look upward and see the torch holder following someone; his beam jigging and dancing through the air, jerking up as he hurdles obstacles, at one point falling low and freezing on the ground. Then it stops and sweeps another long arc across the rubbish.

* * *

I drop down from the top of the tanker, and then run fast and low towards Hooklam. I reach the edge of the field and the light turns towards me. I drop and wait, my ears stripping the silence for any sign of Travis, a cry or a whimper of pain... anything. I crawl through wet-leaves and between the rusted and sharpened points of forgotten machinery, hoping to find him before he is found.

I crouch beneath a stunted blackthorn bush, its branches pricking into me unheeded as the torch beam slices that air above my head. Then I hear it, a tiny coughing moan, a sigh that you would miss if you weren't listening out for it from just a few feet away.

I crawl forward again, into a clearing and seeing ahead of a white enamel bath-tub. The same tub Barney had rested in three weeks ago as he spoke to me of his schemes and delusions. I squirm over to it, and, lying on the ground, run my hands up to its lip. Then my hand is grabbed and pinned down and a fist drives down at me, I move my head in time, and it thumps into the armour on my back.

I pile into the bath, before Hooklam can bring his light to bear on us, pressing down on top of Travis, my hand covering Travis' mouth as he squarks beneath me. He struggles at first under me and then by the torch's reflected light I see his eyes widen in shock and his body relaxes, but his teeth sink into my palm. I try to pull my hand away but he won't let go. Then very distantly but distinctly I can hear the low throb of two car engines. I push an eye

above the edge of the bath and watch them approach across the fields.

Travis spits my hand out and hisses at me: “You’re on my fekin’ leg”. The warm damp of his blood is permeating my clothing, I shift my weight and we are able to lie side by side. He is incredibly close to me, a sweat of fear and panic leaks out of him and into me, filling my nose. “What the feck are you doin’ here?” he whispers.

“I tailed you. What were you doing at my house?”

“I was sent to look for you.”

“By Barney?”

“He wants to know if you’re alive.”

I can hear the cars drawing near, their engines humping and jerking as they bump and slump over the rutted ground.

“Where is he?” I ask.

“Hidden, someplace he feels safe. He’s preparing himself for an operation, something important. He’s a lot better off with you out of the way.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know what you are but I’ve seen the way you work... and you’re a fekin’ problem. You and that girl of

yours.”

“You’ve got that wrong. It’s nothing to do with me... I need to talk with him.”

“No chance.”

Car doors open.

“If he goes into that power plant, I think people might die.”

“Says who?”

“I... met Lucinda’s sister.”

Car doors slam.

“Oh aye, that’s handy.”

More voices.

“We’re movin’,” he begins. “You’ve gotta help me... and after this you better feck out of it, alright? Find out what is going on out there, alright?”

I put my hands on the side of the bath, I raise my head enough peer out and see that two cars have pulled up at the barn. There lights are burning the side of the building white and revealing a set of kicked out windows and a door teetering on a single hinge. There are four men there, prying around the building, shouting to each

other. They are armed.

“They’re busy at the house,” I tell Travis. “There’s someone at the gate.”

I lift myself up, over him and slip out of the bath. I’m on my knees and have to reach back to pull him out. He flinches in my hands and then falls out at my side, making sufficient noise that we lie fearfully prone at the side of the bath. I go to lift Travis onto all fours but he slaps my hands away, and then takes hold of my sleeve. Hobbled and limping he leads me along a shadowy and maze-like path that wends through his field of scrap.

<Mention that he takes them through a secret gap in the hedge to avoid the person at the gate. They run to the car

It is dark now. We are leaving the barn, the men and their cars behind; pushing our way through the hedges and out into the fields. Towards the lights of his car, when we’ve passed the upended oil tank I pause.

“What has happened to you Travis?” I ask. “What did Barney say to you?”

He stops, looking at me and then over my shoulder at the house. “He and I are the same Cornelius,” he tells me. “I don’t think he even he sees it, but the whole thing, what I told you about. It’s the same for him too. He was all lost and washed-up, but you know what. He knew. He told me.”

* * *

“Told you what?”

“Told me shite that you’ll never get your head round believing, or perhaps will Cornelius. Perhaps you’ll take it all in and then go and tell that girl of yours, or her sister or whoever it is that you’re feckin’ shaggin’ these days.”

There are cries from behind us, I look back at the house. They are working their way through the junkyard, calling to each other. It won’t be long before they learn of our escape.

“You better feck off now, Cornelius. I’ll take you to yer car and then its feckedy-bye-bye, alright lad-ee?” As he looks at me I can see just a glimmer of the care and humour with which he would address me. The dieting embers of our friendship spluttering for once last time.

Then a beam of light illuminates his face, and his eyes widen in shock, and before I can move, or turn, or even understand what is happening, he’s thrown himself to the ground.

There is an explosion.

Something slams into my back, it lifts me off my feet, and I fall face forward into the dirt.

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Travis' Barn, Sussex: 26th November 7.00pm

My body aches but the shock and the adrenalin is carry me through it all. Travis has run, dodging and hobbling,

falling and weaving away into the dark. Hooklam walks past me, holding a shotgun to his shoulder, a torch clamped to the barrel. He takes aim at Travis' receding back, and fire another shot. The boom echoes out into the night, ricocheting off the hills and dying in the woods, but that's all there is. The shot missed. Travis has escaped.

I reach into jacket pocket, feeling the torch and then the handle of the telescopic baton. I grip it firmly in my left hand and manage to wedge my right under my body, readying myself. Hooklam turns and walks slowly towards me, bathing my body in light. There is a *clack* as he breaks the breach of his gun and the soft thud of a spent cartridge dropping to the ground, just inches from my head. He reaches into a pocket for fresh ammunition.

"It's toime you gat a little bit of tha treetment boy," he mutters as he thunks a fresh shell into the empty chamber. He moves closer. He hasn't closed the gun yet. There is a boot on either side of my head. "Moister Dudley wirl bee disappointed to muss this," he says.

With a sharp *click* the gun closes.

I spring up to him, whipping the baton from my pocket. It shoots out and is transformed into two feet of hardened steel. I crack it into the side of his head with such force that we are both thrown off our feet.

The gun drops. I stumble into the side of the tanker. He falls to the ground, his back leg twitchy in involuntary

and uncontrolled spasms.

I run hard now. There are shouts and calls from behind me, I'm waiting to hear more gunfire but it doesn't come. Not immediately. Not until I reach Travis' car and bundle inside. As I pull the key out the side door window bursts and a shower of glass cascades across the passenger's seat. The key is in the ignition. I take a breath, just one deep breath to make sure I do this right. Ahead of me I can see figures loom into sight. Hooklam is still on the ground, someone of them has gone to him. Another lifts a gun to his shoulder.

I start talking to myself: "Turn on the engine. Foot on clutch, foot on accelerator, into first, release clutch." Right the way through the whole process, I talk. Keeping myself calm. Keeping myself focused. "Accerlarate. Turn has right. Duck down."

A hole blows in on front window, jagging glass around the interior of the car.

"Turn around. Keep it going. Head for the gate. Not too fast. Don't hit it."

The rear window shatters.

"Through the gate. Speed up. Good second gate is open."

Cracks of gunfire from behind. Wind blowing into the car.

“Hard right on the road. Full beams and I’m away.”

Half a mile on I swap cars. I swing the Travis’ estate across the road, blocking it, and then throw the key into a hedge. There are lights following me up the lane when I get into the Citroen, but they can’t come any closer and they don’t catch me.