



15 IN THE GRAVEYARD

*I don't know how she came to be there
in the graveyard
I don't know how she really died
maybe she was cheated
growing up defeated
I only know that some young girl really died*

Despite Miranda's kind offer to stay overnight - there were, she said, nearly a dozen en suite bedrooms - I wanted to push on. Arthur, born freeloader that he was, tried to gain sympathy with his old-man-Steptoe act but I was adamant. Once ensconced in this elegant pad, he'd have been immovable and found ruses to stay on for weeks until finally ejected. No, I needed this business sorted one way or another as soon as possible. There were still many puzzling questions despite his apparent new policy of openness.

- What was the true nature of Arthur and Susan's relationship?
- Were his motives as simple and honest as he now said?
- Did she really save his bacon from the slicer all those years ago?
- Were all those boxes in the van of sentimental value only?
- What important secrets about me could he possibly have?
- And, of course, was I mad to get involved with him again?

Though I attempted to elicit some answers, Arthur was so nervous about the forthcoming reunion he became increasingly unable to talk sensibly about anything and either waffled inconsequentially or clammed up. Maybe his desire to hang on in Teddington had been just another delaying tactic? And how long had these tactics been going on I wondered - months, years, his whole life even?

We trundled into Swanage about nine o'clock and headed for the address given by Kate - up a steep drive to an imposing Edwardian pile overlooking the town and across the sea towards the Isle of Wight. By the time we halted Arthur was a trembling wreck - a state I'd never seen him in before - and refused to budge from his seat. I must admit I too was a little apprehensive now we'd finally arrived, having imagined all kinds of scenarios for this occasion and not at all sure what reception we might get. Would Susan thank me for returning her stray dog? If only half the stories about him were true, surely no sane person would welcome such a bundle of trouble, colourful character though he may be? But then again, I had.

Unlike Arthur, Susan had aged well and, in the dim porch light, I honestly thought the trim business-like lady answering the door might be her daughter - the mysterious 'kid' he had alluded to? Certainly not what I was expecting from the stalking dog image portrayed, nor did it appear she ever had been. Over charcoal slacks and white blouse she wore a loose cotton smock lightly daubed with paint.

Apologising for her appearance she showed me into the lounge, explaining that she only had time for her painting hobby in the evenings, and then asked what I'd like to drink. As she went off to change I perused what I assumed were her watercolours hung sparingly around the walls - tasteful and understated landscapes, almost Chinese in their simplicity, but with a hint of menace hard to put one's finger on. Then I realised what made me uneasy about these otherwise conventional pictures - they all contained dead or wounded animals lying unobtrusively somewhere with bright but tiny drops of scarlet like little signatures. Was

this what art should be like, I thought, or baffling junk assemblages? Both were unsettling, but for quite different reasons. At least Jim was upfront about his intentions - what about Sue?

On returning, though I expected her to enquire about Arthur she simply made small talk, but got up after a while to eye the truck outside. 'He'll come in when he's ready,' she said. 'But if that takes all night then so be it. He's a grown man after all. Well, sort of.'

Actually I was quite glad to be alone with her because it meant we could talk freely - though it wasn't easy knowing where to begin. As it happened, she made the first move.

'I've heard a lot about you,' she remarked, rather unoriginally.

'Oh yeah? Good, I hope,' I countered, in equally banal way.

'Not all, to be honest. Your choice of friends leaves something to be desired for a start.'

'Umm... we can all make mistakes,' I replied. Then glancing admiringly around the elegant lounge added, 'But you seem to have landed on your feet anyway.'

'Oh, Arthur was no mistake. What's he been telling you? That I was some poor besotted groupie?'

'Something like that.'

'It's true, I did pursue him when I was young - but I'm afraid it wasn't a misguided romance. He was loaded - potentially. Didn't you know? Of course he kept it quiet, to avoid liggers and leeches.'

'Like you,' I interrupted, with a hint of sarcasm.

'Maybe. But I wasn't being entirely mercenary. I was attracted to him for similar reasons you and everyone else was but, being young and naïve, I thought I could change him. Stupid I know, but there we are - some women are afflicted that way. Hearts of gold you know?'

'So this money you say he was due, where'd it come from?'

'Originally - his grandfather. He was a showbiz entrepreneur. Moved to America in the 1920s as a vaudeville entertainer, believe it or not. Most audiences thought not. Became an agent - then an impresario and finally a theatre owner. Eventually had fingers in all sorts of pies; casinos, hotels and so on, even a few movies. What's more, he held onto his investments throughout the depression - in fact, that was his period of greatest prosperity.'

'Really?'

'That's what I heard - and almost entirely down to prohibition. If you had the bottle, or preferably a distillery, the 'roaring twenties' was a great time to make it.'

'And what about Arthur's father?'

'Well, after the mob caught up with the old man and left him splattered on a speakeasy floor he felt, naturally enough, showbiz might not be such a good career choice.'

'Wow!' I said. 'So sudden death runs in the family?'

'Unless granddad was as big a faker as you know who?'

'That wouldn't surprise me.'

'Anyway, Arthur's father took a more orthodox route. Went to college and became an engineer.'

'And the family fortune?'

'Was put into trust, for the only grandson...'

'Our man?'

'That's right, providing he fulfilled certain conditions - one of which being that he never went into the family business. Don't put your daughter - or son - on the stage Mrs Worthington. Something like that. ⁽¹⁾

'So that's why he always avoided the limelight?' I said.

‘Exactly. Your little joke song at the Marquee hoiked him out of prosperous anonymity into poverty stricken celebrity. His only possible course of action was to fulfil the other main clause - which was where I came in.’

‘Gold digging?’ I said, coldly.

‘It was mutual. But to be fair, Arthur hung on for some years pretending he could do without the money. He even tried going legit - got his own band together and released a few records. Unfortunately they weren’t much good. He may have been great at inspiring others but Arthur never was very original himself.’

‘Really?’ I said, disbelieving. After all his fatherly advice and undoubted musical talent, was he just another showbiz sham in the end?

‘After he got ‘discovered’ - by some gung-ho hack at the NME, who saw Arthur as a crazy tortured genius like Syd Barrett ⁽²⁾ or Daniel Johnston ⁽³⁾ - and the music obviously wasn’t going anywhere, Arthur played up the mad act. It was entertaining at first but didn’t take long before every broadcaster in the UK had him on their black list. Even Channel 4 ‘yoof’ programmes wouldn’t have him back.’

‘I caught some of that - stoned off his nut on the The Tube TV show ⁽⁴⁾. Told Paula Yates he’d like to give her one. Unluckily for him Michael Hutchence overheard and gave him one instead. I believe it was when the pair first met.’

‘I didn’t know that,’ I said.

‘Yes. Poor girl.’

When was that - early Eighties? So what happened?’

‘Can’t you guess? Arthur may be many things, but at heart he’s a born idiot. Whatever he’d made soon got squandered. He racked up a pile of debts, not to mention enemies out for his blood and finally, in desperation...’

‘Staged his own death?’

‘Yup. And I helped him get away with it - change of identity and exit stage left - in exchange for a cut in the proceeds after we got hitched. The legal requirement.’

‘And it all worked out as planned?’ I asked, still rather doubtful.

‘From my side, yes. But I guess the reason he’s come grovelling back means he’s blown it again.’

‘You could be right,’ I sighed. ‘But maybe not.’

I went over to the window and looked out beyond the garden towards the sea. A full moon was gleaming on the dark water and, far on the horizon, the twinkling lights of a cruise liner were just visible. Idly, I tried to ascertain if the ship was moving away, towards the French coast, or inbound, headed for Southampton or Portsmouth. I wondered also if Susan’s account was all there was to this? It was neat and made sense, but I was unconvinced. She had pursued Arthur for many years before finally achieving her goal - but was money really the main motive? And how had she known about his secret in the first place?

As I stood there I saw the van door open and Arthur eased himself slowly down. Seeing me at the window he beckoned and I went out to lend a hand.

‘How is it?’ he asked.

‘Fine,’ I said. ‘She won’t bite you know. Come on in.’

I took his elbow and lead him up the garden path, then into the front room and left the pair together. Meanwhile I went back outside, rolled up the van’s shutters and pulled out our bags. After dumping them in the hall I returned for the battered tea chests and cardboard boxes. I then locked up the vehicle and returned to the room to discover the pair chatting amiably, glasses in hand.

‘Ah!’ said Arthur. ‘Alwyn, do join us. What’s your fancy? Beer? Wine? Or we do have a fairly decent malt here - as I’ve already discovered.’

Susan frowned a little at the presumption but said nothing.

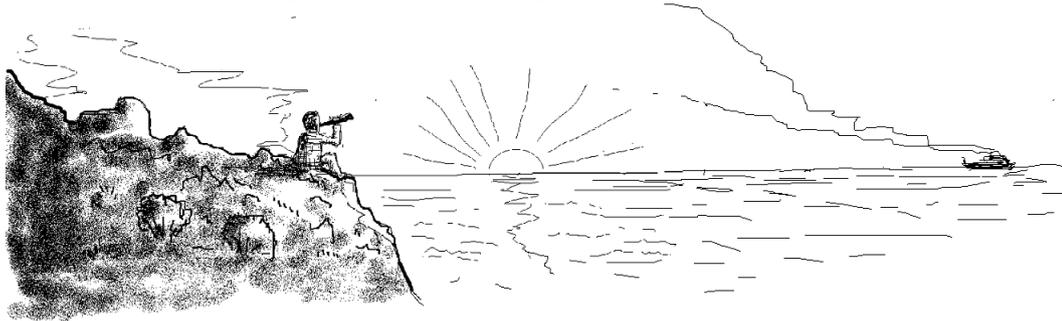
‘Actually, I’m rather tired and...’

‘Nonsense m’boy. The night is young. Oh, by the way, before you sit down, can you bring in a box - the one marked Darjeeling?’

I did what he asked, then, as further requested, heaved open the lid. Inside, packed neatly in brown paper bags, were a number of costumes adorned with faded feathers, ribbons and beads.

‘Recognise this?’ Arthur grinned, pulling one of the gaudy garments out and dangling it theatrically.

The bastard! Like Marley’s ghost, the Red Indian outfit (yes, I know, but that’s what we called them back in the Sixties) danced mockingly, turning the warm room cold. I slumped back in my chair and glared at the old dog.



The little mouse had shocked me with its squeaky, ‘Go home.’ But where was that any more? Though I tried to coax more information out of the terrified creature, as soon as I made a move it scurried off. Whatever it had meant, I couldn’t stay here in this dilapidated railway carriage and now, fully awake, might as well get going. So, as dawn rose, I walked back onto the road, hitching east towards Devon, then through Somerset and finally Dorset. I reached Swanage early the following morning having kept moving throughout the night. Thumbing a ride no longer held any romantic illusions; it was just a cheap way to get from A to B, and a pretty slow and tedious one at that. My one consolation en route came just after midnight at lorry driver’s café when I heard a bouncy guitar intro on the juke box, then a familiar haughty voice:

*well baby used to stay out all night long
she made me cry she done me wrong
she hurt my eyes open that’s no lie
tables turning now it’s her turn to cry
because I used to love her
but its all over now⁽⁵⁾*

The song was a big fat hit, the Stone’s first UK number one and went high in the US charts too, though they’d not yet taken Arthur’s advice and released their own compositions as singles⁽⁶⁾ it was good to hear their counterfeit blues sound again. Mick’s desperately fake black American accent, more Thames Estuary than Mississippi Delta, but all part of the charm. Despite the lyric’s self-pitying message, it was saved by the line about ‘her turn to cry’ and I couldn’t help wondering if things were about to turn good for me too. Or, as a later anthem went, was I once again to get no satisfaction? After all my hard travelling, with worn and dusty clothes, aching feet and empty pockets to prove it, hadn’t I’d earned some respite? It sure seemed like the end of the road anyway - the words of Blind Lemon Jefferson summing up my feelings:

*standing here wondering will a matchbox hold my clothes
sitting here wondering will a matchbox hold my clothes
ain't got so many matches but I got so far to go ⁽⁷⁾*

My first impression of Swanage, arriving at snails pace along winding country lanes on the back of a stinking farm trailer, was of a timelessly idyllic little hamlet nestling between towering white cliffs and rolling hills. Many of the buildings, especially around the sea front and High Street, were built in creamy Purbeck stone and, it seemed, planners had made sure few deviated from traditional lines. There were still the usual ice-cream parlours, amusement arcades, restaurants, pubs, cafes, hotels and quirky gift shops found in most English seaside resorts, but none were too sprawling or brash. Not that I'd have given the architecture such a critical evaluation at the time, but just felt immediately at home in such a quaint unassuming place. Sure, it was a backwater, but after rambling so long around the crowded highways and byways of Britain, I was more than ready for a quiet haven at last.

Walking into town, knackered from travelling but having no place to go, I headed for the prom and found a café with panoramic views. It was such a relief to just sit there, admiring the sparkling blue ocean and scoffing beans and chips, I felt like a knight returned from the Crusades - nothing gained but scars and hazy memories, though immensely relieved all the same. After a while I noticed a vaguely familiar figure coming round the corner and heading my way, his face beaming as recognition sunk in. It was Sammy Parker, a lanky crop-haired guy wearing tight pale blue jeans, white sneakers and bright red varsity jacket. 'You know what?' I said as he came over. 'I thought you were a Yank walking up the street.'

His face beamed with pleasure on hearing this and said he had, in fact, recently returned from the States where his father had a job. Unfortunately his folks had split up and he'd returned to live in Kingston with his mother and younger sister. He didn't seem too bothered about this situation, though said he really dug America and planned to return as soon as possible. Meanwhile, like me, he'd no plans and was just hanging out, working as a waiter by day but having a wild time partying by night by the sounds of it. I told him I'd not fixed up anywhere to stay yet and he offered me temporary floor space to crash, till I got sorted.

Soon other faces from the Dog appeared including, I was pleased to see, Jack and Jenny; all grabbing chairs, pulling tables together, chatting, laughing and generally larking about till the management began to make threatening noises. After a while people drifted off; back to work on the lunchtime shift, to grab a swift pint or laze on the beach, whilst Sammy and I returned to his hotel. After checking there was no one watching, we sneaked into his chalet and I dumped my bags and guitar. He then smartened up and went to leave, promising to ask the manager about a job for me, and I hit the deck for some shuteye. Why, I wondered, had I not made this move a long time ago?

It hardly seemed like minutes before Sammy returned, quietly closing the door and removing his white work shirt, black tie and neatly creased trousers. After pulling on jeans and a tee shirt, seeing I was now awake, he began to apologise. 'No vacancies here mate,' he said softly. The season's over soon and, even if they were short handed, wouldn't want to take on inexperienced staff. I'm afraid it's likely to be the same everywhere now.'

This was a blow I had to admit as I was down to my last spare change and needed a break from travelling, if only for a week or two. Sammy suggested asking around the bars and cafes, which tended to take on more casual staff than hotels. Provided I kept my head down I could stay with him in the meantime, he said. Thankfully he never suggested I should busk because, though I was becoming obsessive as a player and would happily strum anywhere, anytime, just for the hell of it, didn't have the nerve to ask for money. Even though, by this time, I was getting reasonably good and had a decent off-by-heart repertoire, I

was inhibited by a mixture of nerves and embarrassment (recalling my mother's view that busking was really begging). But maybe I was just chicken.

After a little scouting around I did indeed find a job, waiting in a fish restaurant. The pay was rubbish but most customers left a tip - though my inexperience made me so slow that I didn't do half so well as others. The trick was to carry as many plates as possible, balancing them along your arms and piled high - the lack of wet ingredients meant you didn't need to worry about spilling anything except the odd chip (which came with everything of course). My record was five platefuls, but some waiters managed as many as nine at a time - though a legendary girl called Chris was reputed to have carried thirteen. She went on to better things however, the plush surroundings of the Majestic Hotel as a chamber maid, the relentless pressure finally even getting to her. In fact, a few years later, Christine Perfect (McVie) moved on to much better things as the keyboard player in Fleetwood Mac (she'd said she played in a band but no one took much notice).

As an aside, most of the seasonal workers I knew in Swanage then were young free-wheeling types (plus a few older oddities; ex-cons, merchant sailors, drifters, drunks, screwballs, and lost souls) but, to my knowledge, few had musical aspirations⁽⁸⁾. There were one or two folkies strumming in bars or on beaches, but these weren't particularly talented (apart from Topham). Some were students, but the majority of my crowd were simply escaping the grind of boring jobs and endless grey city streets for a summer holiday by the sea, with a few chores in return for bed and board. In those days most people left school at fifteen or sixteen with no great prospects which, though that might limit ambition, was also liberating. Since little was expected of us career-wise we also felt free to do our own thing which was one reason why the hippy drop-out revolution was able to thrive. Though I did, as a joke, once don a tie-dyed shirt, images of Sixties beads and bells, etc, shown on archive footage were mainly clichés the media pumped up, down the Kings Road maybe and mostly for day trippers. Though some may have seen it as just another fashion trend, but to us then it was a whole culture shift - an attitude and lifestyle - and one that continues to this day. The Swinging Sixties never ended, it just spread out and became the norm.

I got paid the following Saturday, along with Sammy and many others, so we bought bottles when the pubs shut and made off for an all night beach party. Heading west out of town towards the lighthouse, after half an hour or so we tumbled down an overgrown rocky path in the darkness to a secluded bay. Our campfire was built up on a sheltered ridge, a stone's throw from the shoreline, where we danced around, played music, kissed and cuddled and, eventually, sprawled by the dwindling fire to doze.

About four in the morning, as light began peeking over the horizon, I heard some eerie notes wafting above the waves breaking gently on the pebbles below. After a few minutes I eased myself away from the girl I'd been wrapped up with and padded down the path towards the sound. High on a rock, silhouetted in the dawn glow, was a lone guy playing a clarinet. I sat and listened, soaking up the atmosphere of cool sea breeze and even cooler improvised jazz. For a while, time seemed to stand still. There are some things you can't explain or analyse, and this moment was one of those; a mixture of melancholy, joy, hope and overwhelming loss. Music isn't just about the good times, I realised, it should be able to express all feelings - and we shouldn't try to lock it up in neatly labelled boxes, processed, packaged and marketed - just another consumer product. If we do, of course, we get what we pay for- that and little else.

Here, unexpectedly and without rhyme or reason, was a taste of 'it'. Fleeting, I realised, this was something not dealt with in words or the thinking mind. Call it 'spiritual' if you like, existing beyond everyday reality - I didn't know what it was, just that it sent weird vibes tingling up my spine. I did know I wasn't stoned or drunk though. In fact I'd never felt more sober - but for a short while something different had happened. It wasn't nice or nasty,

good or bad, right or wrong. I couldn't describe it. Was it just the music? The time or place? I tried to understand but it was hopeless. My mind groped about for similes. But as soon as I tried to understand the 'moment' it vanished into thin air and I was back on an old Dorset cliff feeling the chilly morning dew as a rude wake-up call. The musician had stopped playing and, like me, was staring out at the lazy dawn-tinged waves. I never spoke to the fellow; didn't know anything about him, nor wanted to. Some time later I tried to capture a sense of that special night in a song but it was, of course, hopeless.

*down by the sea that's where you'll find my true love and me
when the edge finally falls every triumph will seem small
ah but me and my love will be gone
the birds in the sky they teach me how to fly
and the more you learn to live you learn to die
maybe we will meet again but I don't believe we will
so I'll say it right now - farewell*

On Sunday afternoon Sammy and I were lazing around in his chalet when there was a rap on the door – it was the hotel manager, a blustering pock faced man of about forty, accompanied by a young uniformed policeman. There'd been reports, he said, of valuables going missing from hotel patrons and staff. Had we lost anything or seen suspicious persons lurking about the grounds? He then did a double take on seeing me, suddenly realising I wasn't on the payroll, but Sammy quickly explained I'd just arrived on a social visit and nothing more was said. After a few more routine questions, including personal details 'for their records', our visitors left and I breathed a sigh of relief. A few minutes later Sammy got up, opened the door and quickly looked out, then told me to stay where I was and disappeared. He returned ten minutes later looking flushed, rubbing his knuckles in pain.

'You okay?' I asked. 'What happened?'

'God damn it,' he said. 'Their jaws don't crack like in the movies. It just fucking well hurts.' He grabbed a hanky to wrap around his fist and I saw it was bleeding. But the victim, an oafish local man called Bruno who worked in the kitchen, had come off a lot worse grinned Sammy. Only trouble was, now we were going to have to split - and soon. Bruno came from a large extended family of heavy boozers - renowned brawlers who were not to be messed with.

As we packed he told me he already knew about the pilfering and had discovered his prized Zippo gone only yesterday - a stupid thing to nick as it was a vintage item distinctively emblazoned with a bald eagle. Though my friend already suspected Bruno - the fool often bragging about his acquisitions - it was his obvious fascination with the American lighter that had clinched it. The manager's visit had simply confirmed what he already guessed and, rather than become a grass, he took the law into his own hands - pulling out his gleaming silver prize as proof and flicking it on like a stage magician. Anyway, shrugged Sammy, as we marched off up the road, he'd had a bellyful of the place; kowtowing to customers, being yelled at and threatened by the mad chef, working long unsocial hours, living in a broken down rabbit hutch and all for little pay that soon got wasted. I reminded him the last complaint could hardly be levelled at the hotel but, since I shared virtually the same list of grievances, agreed now was as good a time as any to get lost.

So, I was unexpectedly on the road again after no more than a week, this time with an amiable companion, but now with only one destination - Kingston. Even still, we did manage to get diverted, courtesy of some flash sod haring along in a red Triumph sports car, going East rather than North. Having trudged interminably most of the ten odd miles to Corfe Castle we could barely contain our enthusiasm when the little motor screeched to a halt.

Running full pelt we yanked the doors open and piled in before the driver had time to protest he'd only stopped to fiddle with the radio. Consequently, though grudgingly agreeing not to throw us out, he was hardly an amiable host and puffed away on foul smelling cigarillos throughout the journey, not even offering us a drag. Crammed snugly into the toy car, along with our rucksacks, my guitar and hundreds of brown boxes of lady's underwear (well we guessed that's what they were, so secretive was he), we were quite glad when he offered to drop us in Bournemouth, the next big town along the coast. It was a warm sunny day and the place seemed to be teeming with pretty girls who smiled obligingly as we bummed cigarettes, Cokes and ice creams along the prom, so we decided to hang about for a while, kipping that night under the pier.

One may wonder why we were skint so soon but, despite variously elaborate hard luck stories reeled out for the benefit of our obliging young benefactors, the truth was more mundane - we had splurged most of our last meagre wages the previous night. Expecting to be home within hours of raising our thumbs, we were not worried unduly about a temporary lack of funds - and the Hazels would keep us from starving. Several points should also be remembered, not in our defence but simply as a matter of fact. Those were the days when casual employment was easy to come by and since workers were generally paid weekly you didn't have long to wait till next pay day - and in the catering trade you always got fed. Secondly, with copies of Jack Kerouac and the American Beat poets stuffed in our back pockets, we were following a hazy dharma bums philosophy that things would probably work out - and if not quite according to plan that was no big deal, just another tale to tell. Thirdly, we were, I guess, just careless - blame it on our youth. Okay then - we were stupid and irresponsible. What more can I say?

I was woken early, not by over-zealous cops, but bin men clattering their way along the front. When they saw me peering out, squirrel-like, from my bag they simply laughed. Then one joker pretended to heave Sammy, still comatose, up into the truck. As a result we got chatting and I asked about temporary work, this being a much bigger holiday town than Swanage and with a longer season. The guy said the Council always had vacancies and, when short handed, would take people like us (idle layabouts turning up out of the blue) on at short notice.

Consequently, later that day, we found ourselves getting hired and were given the depot's address to attend early the following morning. That night, after a promising evening with the local girls, we wandered off, hoping to find a place to crash nearby our new workplace. Luckily we came across a large stone mausoleum in an overgrown cemetery, heaved open a creaking door and settled ourselves amongst the rotting timbers and cobwebs - not a place we'd have been seen dead in sober, but we were far from it. The stink of decay and stale piss woke me early and, unable to remain there without throwing up, shook Sammy and we soon departed. Wandering in search of the Council yard we refreshed ourselves with bottles of milk from doorsteps and cleaned up with water scooped out of a little stream. About six-thirty, we entered the gates to be greeted with, 'Where've you two 'erberts been? You're late.'

Allotted a truck we piled into the cab with two taciturn old blokes and rumbled off, shoving our belongings behind the bench seat (they'd be nicked or dumped, we were told, if left at the yard). Arriving at our first collection street we clambered down, rolled up our sleeves and tried to look hard. The guys paid us little heed at first as we swaggered in and out of gates but, as it soon became clear just how useless we were, they grew more supportive with cheerful words of advice. Despite this they couldn't resist pulling stunts, such as 'helpfully' heaving busted or leaking bins onto our shoulders or scaring us with tales of rabid dogs or life-threatening stuff like chemicals or acid which some nice householders left out 'accidentally on purpose'. This was, of course, long before the days of wheelie bins or indeed

any kind of regular pick-up points so that garbage could be found anywhere around premises and in all sorts of containers or none. The guy's horror stories reminded me of a childhood favourite, Lonnie Donegan's hit, 'My Old Man's A Dustman': ⁽⁹⁾

*oh my old man's a dustman he wears a dustman's hat
he wears cor blimey trousers and he lives in a council flat
he looks a proper narker in his great big hob nailed boots
he's got such a job to pull em up that he calls them daisy roots*

The song goes on to describe the ancient bin man's adventures including some of the strange things put out. For example:

*he found a tigers head one day nailed to a piece of wood
the tiger looked quite miserable but I suppose it should
just then from out a window a voice began to wail
he said - oi where's me head? - four foot from its tail*

Though Sammy and I didn't find much worth claiming, the guys were avid collectors and kept their eyes peeled for anything saleable – the main perk of the job from their point of view. About midday, we pulled into a quiet street and our new mates took out packets of sandwiches and thermos flasks. We, of course, had nothing prepared but Dick and Trevor took pity on us and shared their cheese and chutney doorsteps along with mugs of hot sweet tea. For twenty minutes or so they munched and read their Mirrors in silence while Sammy and I slumped with exhaustion, staring out the windows at a bleak housing estate. Though it had turned into a hot sunny day and, we knew, just a mile or two away would be hoards of semi-clad girls romping on the sands, we might as well have been parked on the dark side of the moon.

Suddenly and without warning Trevor, the brighter of the pair, banged down his lunch box and said, 'Righto! We're off to the tip. You two - fuck off!'

'What do you mean?' I asked, shocked.

'Look,' he said, seriously. 'Him and me - we're on the bins coz we got no bleedin' choice - not at our age.' They were, I guess, around forty but so weathered could have been twenty years older. 'But you two? Well, you still got chances. Plenty of time to make something of yourselves. Don't waste it on this pile of shite. Now - bugga off home the pair of you.' Then he pulled out his wallet and handed us a ten bob note.

It was, perhaps, the best and most generous bit of career advice I'd ever received and, though barely appreciated at the time, a welcome get-out. In any case, it was obvious we were just a liability to Bournemouth Council and, not wishing to spend another night in the stinking mausoleum, hit the London road.

Back at the family home - too broke and weary to go elsewhere - my mother gave me three letters received whilst away. One was from Phil which, though it began, 'Sorry to you too mate,' was a barely disguised demand for unpaid rent for the Maidenhead house plus three months penalty for defaulting on the agreement. The second was from the Cardiff police, also demanding money but with the added threat of a custodial sentence if it wasn't paid by the end of the month. The last letter was a polite but equally insistent request from the Swanage constabulary to attend a local station to verify personal details along with my movements at Sammy's hotel over the previous week. No doubt they'd also be asking why we skedaddled so soon after the alleged incident and even, maybe, what was I really doing there in the first place?

A couple of days later found me ensconced once again in the Dog and Duck, now a little more crowded as many people had returned from Swanage or other summertime destinations. I was supping with Easy, who'd been getting fatter and more sharply dressed by the day but still as jovial as ever, when a young girl called Heather introduced herself. Her parents, she said, had been persuaded to let her have a party this Saturday and would we like to come? She'd been around the pub asking everyone, though few knew her personally, and got only lukewarm responses. It wasn't that parties weren't a major attraction any weekend, but we were naturally suspicious of invitations since mostly we just crashed them. Who, in their right mind, would invite us lot (and by implication the hordes we leaked the information to) into their nice quiet suburban home? Only an idiot or rank beginner, of course. Heather might come under either category, so childishly enthusiastic was she, but the prospect of free booze and a little anarchy kept us interested.

As I weighed up the options - anything to take my mind off debts, dole queues and suspicious detectives - there was a screech of tyres outside, followed moments later by Arthur charging in and yelling, 'Geronimo!'

Post Script

A year or two later some lyrics came into my head uninvited, like shifty little vagrants - as they often do. They started:

*I'm a real live junky
and I'm dying
no I'm not lying
I'm really dying*

I had no idea where these words came from - I knew they weren't from personal experience and that was all. Many songwriters put themselves in another's shoes - it's a well used and perfectly legitimate device - but this felt different and kind of spooky. It wasn't just the lyrics themselves but the black humour which seemed to be their mood. There are, of course, many folk and blues songs about drugs, mostly using analogies (as with sex) but my song was uncomfortably direct. I did also know various people, as friends and acquaintances, using hard drugs though it was only later I came to see how destructive they could be. So were these lyrics a warning from my subconscious? And the apparent comic aspect another way of saying, 'Drugs may feel good, but don't be fooled'? All I can say is I didn't know - but I was bothered.

A couple of days after penning this song I heard the news; Sammy Parker was dead. He had OD'd on heroin just days after release from jail on dealing charges - only trying to fund his habit. He never got the chance to return to the States but was found stiff, cold and alone, a sad and pathetic waste. Though when I knew him he did nothing more than occasional pill popping and the like, over the following months this grew into a habit that could only lead to one thing. Sammy was a nice, funny, decent, intelligent guy with a family who cared about him. But, whenever I saw him around town towards the end he hardly recognised me through the haze of chemicals.

By the way, the lyrics that begin this chapter are from another song from around the same time about a similar case, though the junkie found dead in a Kingston churchyard was actually a boy (the sex change being artistic licence). Though I knew the guy less well than Sammy he was a familiar figure around our scene and I recall chatting to him in the Labour Exchange only weeks before his demise. On that occasion it was clear things were not going well for him but I, in my innocence, would never have imagined his days were so briefly numbered. I can't help thinking that the likes of Keith Richards who, by luck and the cushion

of wealth survived many years of excess (he claims only to have used high grade junk which maybe saved his life), might not be so gung-ho about drugs if they saw the likes of these young people who were ambushed, beaten and destroyed by them before they ever got a chance to realise what was happening.

And the problem, like an incurable and rampant cancer, eats away still, killing and maiming millions world-wide.

FOOTNOTES - Chapter 15

(1) 'Don't Put Your Daughter On The Stage, Mrs Worthington' From: 'Noel Coward On The Air – 1947'

Coward: 'Some years ago when I was returning from the Far East on a very large ship, I was pursued around the decks every day by a very large lady. She showed me some photographs of her daughter – a repellent-looking girl and seemed convinced that she was destined for a great stage career. Finally, in sheer self-preservation, I locked myself in my cabin and wrote this song.'

*Don't put your daughter on the stage, Mrs. Worthington
Don't put your daughter on the stage
The profession is overcrowded
The struggle's pretty tough
And admitting the fact she's burning to act
That isn't quite enough
She's a nice girl and though her teeth are fairly good
She's not the type I ever would be eager to engage
I repeat, Mrs. Worthington, sweet Mrs. Worthington
Don't put your daughter on the stage*

(2) Syd Barrett (6 January 1946 – 7 July 2006), born Roger Keith Barrett, was an English singer-songwriter, guitarist and painter. He is most remembered as a founding member of psychedelic/progressive rock band Pink Floyd, providing major musical and stylistic direction in their early work, although he left the group in 1968 amidst speculations of mental illness exacerbated by heavy drug use. Barrett was active as a rock musician for about seven years, recording two albums with Pink Floyd and two solo albums before going into self-imposed seclusion lasting more than thirty years. His post rock-band life was as an artist and a keen gardener, ending with his death in 2006. A number of biographies have been written about him since the 1980s and Pink Floyd wrote and recorded many tributes to him after he left, the most known being the 1975 album 'Wish You Were Here'. www.sydbarrett.net

(3) Daniel Dale Johnston (born January 22, 1961) is an American singer, songwriter, musician, and artist. Johnston was the subject of the 2006 documentary 'The Devil and Daniel Johnston'. He currently lives in Waller, Texas. Johnston has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder which has been a recurring problem throughout his life. www.danieljohnston.com and www.rejectedunknown.com (fan website)

(4) 'The Tube' was an innovative United Kingdom pop/rock music television programme, which ran for five seasons, from 5 November 1982 until 1987. It was produced in Newcastle

upon Tyne for Channel 4 by Tyne Tees Television, which had previously produced the similar music show 'Alright Now' and the music-oriented youth show 'Check it Out' for ITV; production of the latter ended in favour of The Tube.

The Tube was presented live by hosts including Jools Holland, Paula Yates, Leslie Ash, Muriel Gray, Gary James, Michel Cremona, Nick Laird-Clowes and Mike Everitt. 'The Tube' not only presented many top bands but showcased new and upcoming acts. The format was fast paced, rather anarchic, but full of energy and unexpected items including interviews and video clips, but mostly live performances. This spontaneous element was eventually to be its undoing when Jools Holland swore once too often (well before the watershed deadline) which resulted in executives resigning. Viewing figures had in any case been dropping as the show's format had been steadily watered down and the swearing slip was used as an excuse not to re-commission it.

(5) 'It's All Over Now' was written by Bobby and Shirley Womack. It was first released by The Valentinos featuring Bobby Womack and their version entered the Billboard Hot 100 on June 27, 1964, peaking at number 94 after two weeks. The Stones had their first number-one hit with it in July 1964. The Valentino's original version was played to the Rolling Stones during their first American tour in June 1964 by New York radio DJ, Murray the K. After they heard the song they recorded it nine days later at Chess Studios in Chicago (along with several other numbers). Years later Bobby Womack said in an interview that he told his manager he did not want the Rolling Stones to record their version of the song, that he told Mick Jagger to get his own song. His manager convinced him to let the Rolling Stones record a version of the song. Six months later when he received the royalty cheque for the song he told his manager that Mick Jagger can have any song he wants.

(6) 'It's All Over Now' did actually have a Jagger/Richards composition on the B side – 'Good Times, Bad Times' – recorded at Regent Sound Studios, London on 25.02.1964.

(7) Although Blind Lemon Jefferson was the first to record "Match Box Blues" under that title, in 1927, Ma Rainey had earlier recorded the famous line in her 1923 recording of 'Lost Wandering Blues':

*'I'm leaving this morning with my clothes in my hand
I won't stop to wandering till I find my man
I'm sitting here wondering', will a matchbox hold my clothes
I've got a sun to beat, I'll be farther down the road.'*

Paul Oliver has stated that both Rainey and Jefferson 'may have absorbed [the line] from traditional usage.' As later developed, the song consists of traditional blues lyrics that open with the initial verse:

*'I'm sittin' here wonderin', will a matchbox hold my clothes (2X)
I ain't got no matches but I still got a long way to go.'*

This verse is the only one common to all versions of the song – of which there are many by both blues and rock and roll artists.

Paul Oliver – 'Broadcasting The Blues' published by Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

(8) Top Topham – mentioned previously as a founder member of the Yardbirds – was the only musician I know of from those days in Swanage. Some of the seasonal workers were students coming from different parts of the country (Christine Perfect was from Birmingham). Others were locals living in the Dorset area. Of the Kingston mob, most didn't have any great ambitions then and were just glad to be away from boring jobs and families in the metropolis. There were a few artists, writers, etc, among us that I knew of, but the majority hadn't given the future too much serious thought – that would come later.

(9) 'My Old Man's A Dustman' (Buchanan / Donegan / Thorne), a number one hit for Lonnie Donegan in 1960, seems to have had its origins in a music hall version in 1922 written by JP Long. However that probably evolved from a Liverpool song called 'My Old Man's A Fireman On The Elder Dempster Line', which includes the lines:

*me father was a fireman, now what do ye think of that?
he wears gorblimey trousers and a little gorblimey hat
he wears gorblimey stockings and a little gorblimey coat
me father is a fireman on an Elder Demster boat*

One of the first performances was by Joe Brennan, who sang it in a J.C. Williamson pantomime, 'Forty Thieves'. According to the historian Paul Reed, in the cold winter of 1914-15, 'a new trench cap was introduced known as the "Gor Blimey" because of its ungainly appearance. This had ear muffs tied to the crest of the cap with flaps, which would come down when un-fastened and was worn well into 1916.' 'Gor blimey' comes from a mild oath meaning, 'God blind me!' The term 'nana' or 'narner' is a short form of banana and may be related to the term 'bananas' meaning crazy. It has also been suggested that it is rhyming slang – 'banana split' = 'twit'. (Christopher Howes – Daily Telegraph – Aug. 2009)