



16 GAMBLER

*there was a gambler who wanted money
and was so desperate to be free
of his faithful but jealous woman who just wouldn't let him be
he'd gambled all his life away but now it was coming to this
to take the life of the only girl
the girl he could never resist
it was hard times - hard times
hard times at the last chance hotel*

At the bottom of the box of stage costumes, mostly Red Indian garb but also some crumpled Stetsons and rhinestone cowboy gear, there was a mildewed box file which Arthur insisted I open. Scanning the contents briefly, I noted lyric and tab sheets, band parts and technical notes for recording engineers; paperwork relating to show biz agencies, TV and radio stations, producers and the like; restaurant, hotel, and shop receipts for other sundries; as well as a hand scrawled IOU for £5,000 made out to Della from WG, or that's what it looked like. All these documents were dated 1964 or 65, some giving UK or European addresses, along with a few former communist states like Poland, Estonia and Czechoslovakia. Frankly, I was flabbergasted - not just by the overwhelming blast from the past, but that he'd bothered to hang on to any of this material - and for so long.

'Is this some kind of shake down?' I asked coldly.

'Of course not Allie-boy,' he laughed. 'But...'

'It's Alwyn,' I said, between gritted teeth. 'I thought I was doing you a favour, driving all the way down here - bringing two love birds back together for a last drippy curtain call - and now this?' I kicked at the box of relics in disgust and was about to leave - where to I'd no idea - but Susan took my arm.

'Wait a minute,' she said softly. 'Hear the old dope out first. Then, by all means, stomp off in disgust - I may even join you.'

Arthur smiled at Susan and muttered his thanks, then began, 'I'm sure you know what all this gear is, eh?'

'Sure,' I admitted. 'We did a lot of daft things once - mostly not recorded for posterity, thank God. I'm only glad there was no internet back then with ghosts still floating around the ether to come back and haunt us.'

'Got the next best thing here though,' said Arthur, tapping the papers. 'Every bill tells a story. Let's see...ah! What about this lot?'

He handed me a wodge of faded garage receipts held together with a paper clip and I laughed. 'Now you must be joking - nothing incriminating here. All these record is an erratic road trip in that death trap you nicked.'

'Not nicked, my son - won fair and square, as you well know.'

'In a dodgy poker game?' I said.

'Well, does it matter? You came along - and don't say it was just for the ride. No one forced you.'

'But I was desperate,' I pleaded.



When Arthur had charged into the Dog all those years ago yelling the name of a long dead Apache war chief, I'd experienced a quiet chill; similar to what homesteaders in New Mexico must have felt upon hearing the notorious renegade was heading their way. But, unlike Lieutenant Gatewood (the commander generally attributed with capturing Geronimo), Arthur was not waving a Winchester rifle but a flaming red Gibson electric. Despite my protests he'd dragged me outside, strings a-twanging, followed by an inquisitive crowd and yanked open the back door of a battered green Bedford Dormobile. Inside were a pile of drums and guitar cases, along with amps, speakers and other band paraphernalia. Dangling the keys in my face he grinned like a kid and said, 'Let's go man.'

Bewildered, I was dragged into a front seat, followed by Easy who seemed to be in on whatever prank was afoot, and we zoomed off into the night. At first just taken aback but soon angry at this abduction, I yelled at Arthur to pull over and let me out - or at least explain what was going on. I was met not with answers but only vague reassurances that everything was 'cool man' and not to 'flip my wig', etc. (In those days such expressions held a certain transatlantic mystique which, if uttered by the likes of our Gandolfian leader, you almost took seriously.) Arrangements had been made and not only were all our financial problems soon to be over, probably for ever, but my true song-writing genius would be recognised and applauded by millions. All this wasn't put so succinctly but, amongst the hip superlatives, I got the drift. As soon as I did get the message, I made to jump out the van and head home for some sanity - the long walk would sober me up. Last time I'd climbed into a vehicle with Arthur we'd wound up in a police cell - so I had every right to be wary. Even when he showed me the logbook I was more than a little dubious - and tales of late night poker sessions with a bunch of losers called the Green Doors, a rockabilly outfit from the wilds of West Molesey, did little to reassure me.

Only Easy's calm and measured tones made me stay put. He had, he said, checked out Arthur's plans and, though unlikely to satisfy a bank, found them reasonable. A gamble for sure, but weren't most big business opportunities? In any case, our man was funding the hair-brained venture himself (from whatever illicit pot it was better not to ask), so what the hell. Reassuringly, my old school mate also promised to accompany me as unofficial agent and make sure there were no scams. I later discovered he'd set up some publicity deals (and who knows what else?) which could, if all went well, be a nice little earner for him so he wasn't just looking after my best interests. Though fair do's, as I've found, one should often be more suspicious of the altruistic - sensible people always have something in it for themselves. So what was Arthur's angle? Never really explained, as usual, despite all the hype and hullabaloo. Indeed, so pumped up was he that night I couldn't help wondering if he'd recently scored some extra heavy duty speed.

So what was his grand plan? Tomorrow, he said, we were booked on a cross channel ferry and hence to record my song at a top notch continental studio. Then, over the following days, there were to be some warm-up gigs in selected venues - maybe even a few media interviews. Later, back in the UK, the real assault on the nation's airwaves would begin, commencing with the newly launched pirate radio stations who were positively slaving to break new bands. The reasons all this had to start abroad were unclear, but something to do with contractual matters I 'needn't worry about'. Anyway, it suited me - the whole escapade

was likely to be a debacle rather than a chirpy Cliff Richard style summer holiday ⁽¹⁾, and the fewer friends and family witnessed it the better. Despite assurances of massive profits, especially in the rock music desert that was Europe in those days, I remained sceptical. But, in the unlikely event some cash did flow my way, it would certainly be welcome - and if not, what was the worst that could happen? Some high jinks would at least take my mind off the dole queue, unpaid bills and police investigations - so maybe it wasn't such a bad idea after all.

That night, much to my surprise, Arthur invited Easy and me to stay with him, 'for a quick getaway in the morning'. It was surprising because I never imagined my rambling friend to have a permanent residence, and certainly not one so close at hand, nor as clean and tidy as the Tolworth Towers council flat in Surbiton he led us to. Explaining this was actually his aunt's place - presently away visiting relatives - and used by him only as a crash pad, he nevertheless seemed very much at home. In fact, it was all rather nice and cosy as we sat on the sofa sipping cocoa. Looking around at the neat domestic scene I saw nothing unusual or out of place, though I did wonder who the pretty pony-tailed girl featured in family photos on the mantelpiece might be. Some pictures were clearly of Arthur when younger, often with a jolly middle-aged lady - one even included him and me amongst a group of Boy Scouts - others may have been of his father or relatives, but I didn't recognise anyone else.

In any case, he was evasive about the place and only interested in discussing the upcoming trip, getting me to run through the proposed ditty a cappella. Though I'd only played the song to him once before he'd already worked out an arrangement and proceeded to outline it on an old upright piano used mainly, so it seemed, to display pot plants - though I also noted suspicious little burn marks on many keys. His version, he explained fervently, would open with a lone vocal accompanied by low-key bass drone (to which I nodded approvingly), leading into atmospheric electric organ (where I started frowning), staccato guitar riffs and booming ethnic tom-toms that built to an apocalyptic crescendo (by which time I was now shaking my head in disbelief) and a soaring female choir (when I finally hung my head in dismay). He was even considering sound effects such as thundering buffalo hooves, eagle cries and twanging arrows, though how he was going to organise all this in such a short time I couldn't imagine.

His arrangement, as explained, was unashamedly cornball and veering dangerously close into novelty song territory. Admittedly, this wasn't considered such a great crime in the Sixties (before becoming the fifth Beatle, George Martin had produced several humorous records ⁽²⁾ for the likes of The Goons, Beyond The Fringe and other British comedy acts) but I was deadly serious about 'Geronimo' and didn't want it overblown or dumbed-down. On the other hand, there was always the money - should even a fraction of the promised fortune ever materialise.

Surprisingly, we were shaken awake at seven then hustled out to the Snotmobile and taken to collect bed rolls and passports from our respective homes. My mother protested on discovering I was away again but had written me off by now as some kind of lost sheep - if not quite black then needing a good scrub - consoling herself that at least my younger brother and sister had swung the balance by getting into college. By contrast, I was soon hopping back onboard the battered bus of destiny, guitar case under my arm, off to Reading to collect the remainder of our tribal crew. Nicky, true to his word, had recruited some fellow musical mercenaries; Potto, a fat bass player with droopy moustache and foul smelling droopy pipe to match and his mate, a stick-thin nervous wreck of a drummer called Wilky with an uncontrollable need to clear his throat and gob every few minutes. But we all had our bad habits which would soon become irritating as hell although - naïve fool that I was - I first accepted as creative eccentricity.

At this early stage I found it hard to see how such a disparate bunch of odd-balls could manage getting even one pop song arranged and rehearsed sufficient for a recording, never mind a whole stage set - an aim Arthur seemed to have in mind. Indeed, our wizard-like maestro gave the impression we already had numerous bookings lined up in prestigious European venues. What had I let myself in for? Trying desperately to look on the bright side, if the worst came to the worst, I supposed Nicky's mob had an R&B routine we could fall back on which I'd busk along with.

We arrived in Antwerp mid evening, still drained and bilious from the rolling Channel crossing. Only Arthur remained buoyant, directing Easy, who had taken over the driving, through a maze of narrow streets until we pulled up outside the café Veronika. Whether there'd been a power failure or this was a squat I didn't know but no lights were on and only candles illuminated the archaic interior - the walls of which were covered in semi-erotic murals that had a dream-like effect on my weary brain. A few hairy bohemian types hung around the bar and at odd tables smoking and drinking, but we only passed them by and were led up a winding staircase along a narrow corridor to a back room. Here a big bearded man sat chewing a cigar at a paper-strewn desk and, as we entered, rose to greet Arthur, his sagging features suddenly transformed into cheery animation.

Before long we were all embraced like long lost brothers and then, following charming apologies, asked to offload the bus and heave our gear up the rickety stairs. That night, despite the weariness, a merry time was had by all with Henri and his petite partner Fleur at a nearby restaurant. Finally, back at Veronika's, our host pointed out some mattresses and a few threadbare blankets on the floor - something of a downer after all the high spirits, but we were too exhausted to raise objections and hit the sack without a murmur.

The following morning Arthur again roused us at some ungodly hour to heave the gear up another floor to a makeshift recording studio - at least, that's what I took the reel-to-reel recorder and other equipment loaded on trestle tables to be. Our beds were also dragged up and hung on nails around the walls and narrow mullioned windows - presumably to deaden the noise, but would anything be enough to sweeten our racket? It turned out the sound proofing was mainly to deflect the chugging generator downstairs rather than spare neighbours' eardrums. Whilst we tuned up and Arthur fiddled with the equipment, Fleur passed around coffee and fresh croissants. Unbelievably, after a very shaky start, we were making a sound not too remote from the one proposed back in Surbiton and which, I soon guessed, the lads must have already been primed for. Despite our incongruent appearance in just about every department - height, weight, hair length, etc - musically we soon became a passable unit, even if I did little but strum and hum.

By lunchtime, to save time and money, it was suggested we go for a live take with the whole band, only my vocals to be over-dubbed later (Arthur had just four tracks to play with anyway) and despite many doubts we did our best. After a couple of technical runs, and much to my surprise, we soon had a great version that even I was happy with. Even though we did more, it was that first bash that was used. Then, while the boys took time out, I gave it all the vocal welly I'd got with just Arthur and Henri looking on. After re-grouping we recorded a Leadbelly number everyone knew with me yelling out the verses as authentically as possible.

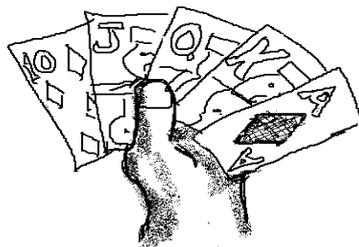
*when I was a cowboy out on the western plains
when I was a cowboy out on the western plains
made a half a million pulling on a bridal reins
come a cow-cow-yicky
come a cow-cow-yicky-yicky-yeah* ⁽³⁾

This fun blues would be a good foot stomping crowd pleaser, especially when we donned our costumes, and make a fitting flip side. It was also quick and cheap to record. Late that evening we listened to the play back, then hit the town to celebrate. Everyone was in high spirits, scoffing big piles of steak and chips washed down with umpteen bottles of fizzy beer. Strangely, Arthur did not join us, though we later discovered he'd been twiddling knobs and dials, adding 'one or two' special effects as well as extra guitar and keyboard parts using some mysterious technique with the daft name of 'ping-ponging' ⁽⁴⁾. He was still playing around when we stumbled back to the café in the early hours, having got waylaid and lost numerous times among the many gloomy alleyways. Though today there are plenty of memorable neon lit clubs and bars in Antwerp, in those days even the red light district was something of a dingy labyrinth.

Drifting blearily into the studio mid afternoon the following day, clutching Gauloises to catch the mix, I think it's fair to say none of us were prepared for the audio assault and battery that had us spluttering into our café-au-laits. What we'd laid down, I'd thought, was a folk-rock ballad with a few ethnic touches - even a modicum of integrity - all be it with some of the maestro's eccentric touches. The social message it contained, though not overt as a Phil Ochs or Buffy Sainte-Marie protest song, had been important to me but was so swamped by over-dubbed instrumentals, whooping female vocals (which turned out to be a multi-tracked Fleur) and Wild West sound effects, that only the title phrase was decipherable, though even that had enough reverb to hypnotise a hog. The rhythm track had also been given a disco make-over (a decade before it was invented) and now boomed hypnotically in true Euro-trash fashion.

As the last notes died away we all froze, stunned into silence. I didn't know whether to cry out in anguish or roll about laughing, having had my heartfelt anthem massacred but, in the end, found myself rising with the others and giving out whoops of delight, clapping Arthur on the back and shouting appreciation like football fans at a fluky winning goal. 'Fuck me,' I guess we all thought, 'it's so bad it might even make it.'

Nicky and his crew hadn't done much recording before, just a few demos, but they were all experienced live musicians and not easily moved, yet they recognised a wacky genius at work. Never mind wall of sound, this was a whole bloody city of Jericho, and no way would it fall. Easy was grinning like a maniac - at last he could see what the old bull-shitter had been driving at and believed this really could be the one. Despite all the hoopla I still had a queasy feeling in my guts but, like the sea sickness of the day before, tried to push it away and after a few minutes went outside for some fresh air to get my head together.



Susan's reassuring voice brought me to my senses asking if I wanted to hit the sack. It was almost midnight, I was pretty shattered and, though still bewildered by the box of evidence plonked accusingly before me, realised my old bones needed some well deserved R&R, preferably in a big comfy bed. Long gone were the days when I'd settle for any dump, anytime and anywhere, so long as it just about kept the rain off and there weren't too many vermin scurrying about.

The swish en suite room Susan allotted me was on the third floor overlooking the ocean and, though shattered, before retiring I peeked through the silk curtains, half expecting the same liner I'd seen before to be gliding along under the stars. But the view was cloudy

and, apart from one or two twinkling lights on shore; it was hard to distinguish between land, sea and sky. Many unanswered questions still bugged me, especially why I'd reacted in such a hostile way to being shown the contents of that box. What had made me assume the worst, like something underhand was being perpetrated against me, rather than just laugh it all off as a sappy trip down memory lane?

Although determined not to let my concerns bother me I woke with the dawn light and, unable to get back to sleep, tiptoed downstairs for something to drink. Passing by the lounge, the old tea chest seemed to beckon me but I managed to hold out till after I'd brewed a pot of tea and returned to eye the offending article. Though sitting awhile wishing it would spontaneously combust, I eventually lifted the lid and began poking about. Tucked down one side, between costumes and other stage gear, I discovered a large brown envelope addressed to W.G.Holdings, care of a post office box number in the Bahamas. Inside was a faded document which I soon realised was a contract between the afore-mentioned company, and Alwyn Stevens, aka Steve Candyman, dated the 18th October, 1964, witnessed by Edward Zachman and Henri de Leuven. Scanning the text it was clearly about as unfavourable to the artist (myself) as it could possibly be; offering just 10% of royalties and other receipts for up to five years, or ten singles and five LP records, whichever was the sooner. Also claimed were copyright of all creative output; plus 90% of any fees from live performances or media work, both in the UK and throughout the world. There were pages of detailed clauses which, one way or another, meant I could barely piss in a pot without WG's say so.

The only thing I vaguely recalled about any of this was coming up with the stage name. Arthur had always found my old girlfriend's name, Carol Ann Candyman, highly amusing and said it was too good not to use. Some people already called me Steve, abbreviated from my surname, and though I didn't much care for the idea accepted reluctantly that Steve Candyman had a ring to it. We'd also toyed with various group names, such as 'The Braves', 'Flat Foot Warriors', 'The Wild West Bandits', etc. Most were rugged, earthy sounding - unlike most bands these days which tend to go for the wilfully obscure. We settled in the end for 'The Buckskins' - from the gear we had to wear - and maybe hoping the tag, along with our war paint and outlandish characters, could be discarded just as easily after gigs.

The scariest part about this document was that I couldn't remember ever having seen it before, never mind signing on the dotted line. Nor had I any idea who or what WG was. The date, I realised, must coincide with the celebratory night on the town after recording 'Geronimo'. I guess I'd have signed anything then; stoned on the whiff of success, as we were, not to mention other intoxicants. Nor did we come down from the high for nearly two weeks, belting around Belgium, France, Holland and Germany in the rapidly disintegrating Snotmobile to perform in bars, clubs, and dance halls, even one or two rundown theatres. Easy returned to his job in London on Monday, but we four clowns donned cowboy and Indian costumes every night and played our hearts out. Earnings varied from a few francs collected in a hat to, on one occasion, fifty quid apiece for an all-nighter at a packed transvestite dive in Hamburg. But the money wasn't really the thing - we were just having a great time, at least until exhaustion and common sense began to prevail.

The end, for me at least, came on returning to Antwerp where Henri told us of arrangements to appear on local TV. At first I was delighted because, as he said, the record was due for release soon and everyone had high expectations of 'Geronimo' making the charts. The plan, following our warm-up gigs in Europe, was to return to the UK where a major tour was being arranged along with an all-out attack on the national media. Arthur, so he told us excitedly, had pulled out all the stops and hyped up DJs, journalists and record company A&R men, etc, and was confident of maximum exposure. It couldn't fail.

I stared back at the contract, the legal jargon hard enough to decipher now but which would have seemed like Chinese to me as an impetuous nineteen year old, and got up to wonder as I wandered.

- Why had I not clapped eyes on this before – if indeed I ever did?
- Was it still valid?
- Who was the mysterious WG?
- How much of this was Arthur's doing? Surely, he hadn't the guile to perpetrate a scam of any complexity?
- But why had he held on to the document, along with all this junk, for so many years?
- And what more surprises might the other boxes contain?

'Ah! So, you found it.' Arthur's voice startled me and I looked up to see him shuffling into the room, a grey woman's mackintosh draped around his bony frame like a cloud. 'Don't worry; we gave up on that years ago,' he said waving at the papers. 'I was against it from the start, if that's any consolation, but the others insisted.'

'What others?'

'Oh, you know - business advisers. Wankers all - but they had a point. We invested a lot in you.'

'Really?' I said. 'I find that hard to believe. It was a laugh, but I never really expected anything to come of it. A few notes maybe to pay off some debts, that's all.'

'Yeah, well. I was the one landed with debts. Take a look if you don't believe me.' I got up, went out into the hallway and prised open a few of the boxes; they were packed full of posters and other promotional material including tee shirts, car stickers and badges. A few quid's worth for sure.

'But why did you never tell me?' I asked.

'If you recall,' he said. 'You pissed off. No one knew where you were. Didn't even know why you'd gone - though I guessed.'

'Okay. Maybe I owe you - I guess that's what all this is about eh? You want me to feel guilty. About forty years too late. Well, I did try and warn you. Anyway - you answer a few questions and maybe I'll tell you what happened.'

'That's why we're here,' he said, settling on the sofa. 'Just get me a whisky eh?'

When I returned, having helped myself to a drink as well, he began. 'WG is actually my initials. My real name.'

'Eh?' I wasn't expecting that.

'Yeah. Wynn Gwynedd. The family goes back centuries - down to Tudor and Stuart periods in North Wales - big land owners and all that shit - descended from kings, so they say.'

'Susan said something - that you were due to inherit a packet.'

'Only if I kept my nose clean,' he grinned. 'My granddad was loaded. But he made an even bigger fortune in the States. He was a rebel - started out in vaudeville, became a successful agent and ended up owning a whole pile of real estate - it was an empire man. A whole freaking empire.'

'But your Dad didn't approve.'

'You could say that - and some. But I guess you can't blame him. Grandpa also liked to party. He was never home - not his home anyway. He died drunk - but rich. Filthy rich you might say.'

'With a hole in his head,' I added.

'Yeah, well.'

'And your father didn't want you ending up the same way?'

This time Arthur laughed out loud, swirling his whisky. ‘Nah! But well... you know? Runs in the family I guess.’

‘Except you don’t seem to have inherited his instinct for holding onto the bread - I mean money,’ I said.

‘Maybe. Anyway, my Dad died when I was seventeen. I’d been crashing with Auntie Kate - like I told you before - while he bugged off around the world. She’d been my nanny ever since I was a bairn - that’s what she called me you know – her wee bairn. Always wondered about that too - you know? Anyway, I was a cutie, according to her.’

Strangely enough, behind the sagging grey features, his blue eyes still twinkled with a child-like mischievousness and I believed him. It was, no doubt, that spark - along with the elfin grin - which had been both his trump card and the key to all his troubles. As is so often the case our greatest assets, if misused, often end up as liabilities. Arthur’s charisma had opened many doors, but led him to believe he was invincible - which is always a dangerous assumption. The belief that he was due a fortune at some point must also have reinforced his charmed-life syndrome. Eventually he’d come a cropper too far, prompted by my stupid Marquee expose, and eventually fled the country. Maybe now this was some kind of belated revenge on his part - as I’d wondered at first. However, I let him continue.

‘When I went back to the States to collect my dues at last...’

‘You couldn’t get your grubby hands on it.’ We both spun round to see Susan standing in the doorway. ‘You silly old sod,’ she laughed. ‘You may be able to handle a guitar or keyboards, but boy - not money. It just slips through your fingers like dust - gold dust.’

We both stared at her, rather shamefaced, even though we’d done nothing wrong. ‘Tea?’ I asked eventually. ‘I only brewed this pot a while ago?’

‘No thanks,’ she said. ‘I heard voices. Just came down to see what you two were up to at such a God-forsaken hour?’

‘Sorry if we woke you - couldn’t sleep,’ I said. ‘Anyway, now you’re here, perhaps you can explain how you knew about Arthur’s inheritance?’

‘Hasn’t he told you yet?’ said Susan, making herself comfortable. ‘I’m Kate’s daughter. Arthur and I grew up together so the last thing I wanted was to marry him – yuck! I knew him too well. But I did have a vested interest in protecting him – from himself.’

‘So why did you get married then?’ I asked.

‘To be honest, it was a last ditch attempt to make something out of the mess. My mother had spent years working for the Gwynedd family but was left with nothing. What else could we do?’

‘No idea,’ I said, though I did wonder why she hadn’t just explained their problem to Arthur and asked him for his help in the first place. He wasn’t an ogre after all. Then Susan answered my unspoken question.

‘Arthur’s always been a great bullshitter. Good intentions, maybe, but basically not to be trusted. I guess he fooled you like he fooled everyone else, even me at times. Told you he had influence with high rollers, eh? So long as he was scoring their dope maybe - or who knows what else? You could never guess what the daft bugger would do next. Smashing into a wall at high speed wasn’t an isolated incident. He’d also broken the agreement not to earn money from music - and Mum and I hadn’t succeeded in keeping him safe. Getting married was one of the other main conditions of the will. So after his little contretemps...’

‘At the pie factory?’

‘Exactly. I managed to smuggle him out of the country and we were hitched in the US having secured the services of a very smart lawyer. I returned later, suitably rewarded, to develop my own thing down here in Swanage. I also set Mum up with her little shop in Newcastle. The hippy bazaar was an excuse to sell her handicrafts, something she’d always

been into - she even made these costumes you know - but it was never a big earner. The tea and cakes on the other hand are what's kept the business afloat.'

'And what about the kid?' I said, staring at both of them accusingly. 'Didn't you feel any responsibility towards your own child whilst you were feathering these lucrative little nests?'

'Eh?' asked Susan, glaring at her misbegotten ex. 'You never said anything about children.'

There was a deathly hush, and then Arthur grinned, 'Ah, the kid. I think you may've got the wrong end of the stick there Allie-boy. Have you still got that list?' Delving into my wallet I retrieved the paper he'd given me outside the Railway. 'Take another look,' he said.

I scanned the roll call but wasn't sure what to look for. Though more familiar with the names now than when I began this voyage of discovery, some still meant nothing to me or were just spectres - half-remembered figures from drunken nights long ago. But, so far as I knew, none were exactly kids, either then or now. However, I kept coming back to one. 'Della,' I said. 'Rings a bell. Della? Della? Where was it...?'

'She's the one,' cried Susan. 'The Kid! That's what we called her. An unctuous little hustler. Used to put on the sweet-and-innocent act, then leached on any mug stupid enough to believe her hard luck stories. God knows how she got away with it. I don't know about 'kid' - scheming little brat more like.'

'Yup,' said Arthur. 'That's her. Della de Brix - as she called herself - real name, Diane Burt.'

'So where does she fit in?' I asked.

'Would you believe it - she became one of the biggest operators in the business?'

'So what?' said Susan. 'Don't tell me she took you in too?'

'Well, she thought she had. Got me in on this big card game. It was her forte - wheedling punters into scams. Still is as a matter of fact. Only I saw it coming and thought I might as well go along for the ride - make something of it.'

'The five grand!' I yelled, suddenly catching on. 'But, just in case she caught wind you were back in the country and might cause trouble, you got me to scout around and warn you?'

'Spot on,' said Arthur. 'But no worries. I heard she married an Aussie beer baron and now lords it over New South Wales - some political baloney or other. Poor sods. They may win the Ashes but there'll still have her ladyship to contend with.'

'Alright,' I said. 'That's very interesting, but what about me?' I held up the legal documents. 'Why bother with all this formality?'

'It was a gamble,' replied Arthur. 'I hoped it might make you take things more seriously.'

'What? My songs? The music business?'

'All of that. I saw you had potential - some great material actually. Maybe it was stupid of me, but I wanted you to have the success I knew I couldn't.'

'You're telling me I let you down?'

'Well... you blew it, certainly.'

'What?' I stood up, angry as hell. 'How could I ever be successful - with this?' I pointed at my cheek.

'But that's why 'Geronimo' was so perfect,' cried Arthur, almost petulantly. 'All the face paint?'

'And after? When the make-up came off?' Have you ever seen anyone on stage with a red birthmark splashed across their face?' ⁽⁵⁾

'There's always a first time. Anyway - no one had to know.'

I started pulling out the faded costumes from the tea chest and tossed them onto the floor. ‘You really thought this fancy dress tat and a bit of slap would do the trick?’ I shouted. ‘And what’s all this?’ At the bottom were several smaller cardboard boxes, seven or eight inches square. Tearing one open, I lifted out a handful of vinyl records – shiny black 45s – with ‘Steve Candyman and the Buckskins’ printed on the labels. Only they weren’t so shiny any more. Nor did they feel light and flexible. ‘What the hell are these?’ I demanded.

‘Ah!’ said Arthur. ‘I was coming to that.’

FOOTNOTES - Chapter 16

(1) Summer Holiday is a British musical released in 1963 featuring Cliff Richard in his best known film. It was directed by Peter Yates and produced by Kenneth Harper for Associated British Studios at Elstree. The original screenplay was written by Peter Myers and Ronald Cass (who also wrote most of the songs). The plot involved Cliff and his friends taking a London double-decker bus to through Europe to Greece. On the way they have various adventures and take on board a three girls, pursued by one of their mothers. The film was huge box office hit, following up Richard’s previous success with The Young Ones.
<http://www.imdb.com> (International Movie Database)

(2) During the late Fifties and early Sixties George Martin recorded novelty songs and other material for Spike Milligan, Peter Sellers, Jonathan Miller, Peter Cook, Dudley Moore, Alan Bennett, Joan Simms, Bernard Cribbins, Rolf Harris, Flanders and Swann and Shirley Abicair. Many other reputable artists have had novelty pop hits including, Lonnie Donegan (Does Your Chewing Gum Lose Its Flavour On The Bedpost Overnight?), Chuck Berry (My Ting-a-Ling), Frank Zappa (Dancin’ Fool), Brian Hyland (Itsy Bitsy Teenie Weenie Yellow Polka Dot Bikini), not to mention many comedians such as Steve Martin (King Tut), Ray Stevens (The Streak), Allen Sherman (Hello Muddah, Hello Faddah) and of course loads by The Chipmunks. There are numerous others – though sadly the genre seems to have diminished in both quantity and quality towards the present day despite some valiant efforts on YouTube, mainly by amateurs.
www.musicianguide.com/biographies

(3) ‘Western Plains’ or ‘When I Was a Cowboy’ by Huddie Leadbetter (Ludlow Music, 1959).

Below is my version of the lyrics, based on Leadbelly’s, but there are many others by different artists. I also recently wrote a satirical version where George Bush and Tony Blair discuss starting the war in Iraq out of political and financial self interest (a fiction of course).

*when I was a cowboy out on the western plains x2
I made a half a million pulling on a bridal reins
come a cow-cow-yicky - come a cow-cow-yicky-yicky-yeah*

*fought the hardest battle was ever on the western plains x2
when me and a bunch of Indians ran into Jesse James*

*when your house catches on fire and there ain’t no water round x2
throw your jelly out the window let the doggone shack burn down*

*so come all you cowboys and don't you wanna go x2
meet the Lone Ranger on the plains of the buffalo*

'Huddie Ledbetter, better known as Leadbelly, is one of the most accessible musicians who recorded the 19th Century music of trail-riding blacks. He was born in 1888 on the Jeter Plantation near the Caddo Lake, which is on the Louisiana/Texas border. His father was a share-cropper who later managed to buy a small farm. The singer grew up absorbing many different styles of American song, and when he began performing in the first decade of the 20th century, his repertory consisted of cowboy songs, ballads, children's songs, work songs, and blues. He played the 12-string guitar primarily, though he had some ability on the piano and concertina. The East Texas area contained a goodly number of African American cowboys. Leadbelly said "There was right smart of 'em; they was just country cowboys." The singer himself worked at herding cattle, and for his 16th birthday was given a horse and saddle. He was also the recipient of a Protection Special Colt revolver, a gift from his father. When the young Leadbelly attended country dances around the Caddo district he carried the Colt revolver along with his guitar. While the carrying of firearms is not alien to blues performers, that particular weapon had a pleasant notoriety associated with the West, enhancing Leadbelly's black cowboy image. This was a rough, rural district that hadn't completely let go of the 19th Century. Leadbelly landed in prison for murder in 1918. While in his late teens, Leadbelly eventually left the farm for Shreveport, playing his music on the notorious Fannin Street. Wolfe and Lornell write "the blues songs...were more popular on Fannin Street than the older country songs, work songs and ballads." This was in 1904, after the days of the cattle drives, and it showed the beginning of change that was sweeping across America's musical tastes. Leadbelly's inability to alter his material to appeal to urban blacks was a factor throughout his career. In later years Leadbelly, for the most part, had a greater audience in white America. He was first recorded by John and Alan Lomax at Angola State Prison in 1933 for the Archive of American Folk Song.'

'Cowboy Blues: Early Black Music In The West' by Patrick Joseph O'Connor
Studies In Popular Culture (University of Louisville) April 1994.

Alan Lomax, *The Folk Songs Of North America* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960)

(4) The ping-pong recording technique, also called 'ping-ponging' or 'bouncing' tracks and 'reduction mixing', is used in sound recording to condense program material by dubbing multiple parts to just one or two tracks, allowing more room for overdubbing or to simplify mixdowns. This was done mostly in the days before multiple track recorders, especially before digital technology arrived, and was either achieved by linking two or more tape recorders or dubbing tracks internally through a mixer. The two main problems with ping-ponging were loss of quality on each copy and inability to go back and change or modify a track once it had been bounced (and subsequently recorded over). On the other hand, before the days of multi-tracked recorders, it enabled ambitious producers to achieve some remarkable sounds, e.g. the Beatles, ELO, Phil Spectre, etc, all utilised ping-ponging.
www.guitarnoise.com

(5) Although some celebrities have appeared with skin complaints such as acne, e.g. Britney Spears, Cameron Diaz, Bad Pitt, etc, none have actual birthmarks on their faces (excluding moles). Some do, however, have them on other parts of the body such as:

Tina Turner – port wine stain (PWS) birthmark on her shoulder

Richard Gere – birthmark (Becker's nevus) on left upper back

Billy Corgan (Smashing Pumpkins) – PWS fro hand to elbow

Mikhail Gorbachev – PWS on upper forehead

Christina Aguilera – small birthmark on her lower back

Catherine Zeta Jones – birthmark on left shin

Matt Luke (Dodger's baseball player) – had skin grafts for facial birthmarks

Tempest Bledsoe (Vanessa of the Cosby Show) – PWS on arm

Joshua Jackson (actor) – small birthmark next to belly button

Antonio Sabato Jr (actor) – small birthmarks on right arm