

Just Give it a Go

A Story...
... for a Book, a Film and a Soundtrack

Tate Jakes

A rollicking, bollocking tale of a rock band and a multi-squillionaire who trade access to life through money and reputation with access to life through grabbing it by the scruff of the scrotum.

It's a crossover between... lots of dough and a more relaxed way of life. Sprinkled with ridiculous extravagances with a few beers and a few surprises along the wayward way. Life's for living and learning when you just give it a go.

The message is about success coming from the ambition to try. It's about how to enjoy life, to enjoy love and how to just loll about.

And with a music soundtrack supplied...



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Dramatis Personae

- ❖ Me ~ The Narrator, “TC”, (after Top Cat), Singer
- ❖ Him ~ Matt Pewter, Rich Guy - our Hero
- ❖ “She” ~ GiGi Rose - French TV Journalist
- ❖ Justin Fitzallen ~ Assistant to Matt (Finance, etc.)
- ❖ Nikka Jackson ~ Assistant to Matt (Communications, etc.)
- ❖ Morgan La Faye ~ AKA “Goldie”, My Best Friend, Bass
- ❖ Other Members of the Beverly Hills Colourful Cats Band
 - Blackie ~ Backing Singer
 - Whitie ~ Backing Singer
 - Bluesman Billie ~ Guitar
 - Green Fingers ~ Keyboards
 - Dog ~ Drums
- ❖ Alan the Accountant ~ Alan Schneeberg - Matt’s Money Man
- ❖ Myriad of small business hopefuls, starters and dreamers
 - ♣ Outriders (Buzz and Cookie) ♣ Giles Estate Agent/Estate Manager ♣ Pete the Pool (Pierre) ♣ Dong of Gouljyun Animal Rescue ♣ Bonnie Titfert Hat ♣ Tree Man ♣ Etc... ♣ Etc... And ♣ Failed Applicants
- ❖ Bankers, Wankers, Cameramen, Protesters, Waiters and Waitresses, Skiers and Members of the General Public...



Playlist ~ Soundtrack

- ❖ **A Little Help From My Friends:** Joe Cocker. (Ch.1)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCrlyX6XbTU>
- ❖ **Gimme Shelter:** Rolling Stones. (Ch.1)
 - <https://youtu.be/wy3RdCd9zAM> (live)
- ❖ **Carry On:** Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. (Ch.3)
 - <https://youtu.be/yTTTU0V3OEc>
- ❖ **Waterloo Sunset:** The Kinks. (Ch.4)
 - https://youtu.be/Cyh_QQD2js
- ❖ **Land of 1000 Dances:** (Ch.5)
 - <https://youtu.be/pMkQ94tIcgM> - Walker Brothers
 - https://youtu.be/3mz_EXHKGHs - Wilson Picket
- ❖ **I Say a Little Prayer for You:** Aretha Franklin (Ch.7)
 - <https://youtu.be/STKkWj2WpWM>
- ❖ **I'm Not in Love:** 10cc (Ch.7)
 - <https://youtu.be/2rgepWg4rzw>
- ❖ **The Good, The Bad & The Ugly/The Ecstasy of Gold:** both by Ennio Morricone (Ch.8)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1PfrmCGFnk>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wV0wPBYDQ6Y>
- ❖ **For What It's Worth:** Buffalo Springfield. (Ch.9)
 - <https://youtu.be/gp5JCrSXkJY>
- ❖ **All I Want To Be (Is By Your Side):** Peter Frampton (Ch.15)
 - <https://youtu.be/77s5KqKToWM> - Acoustic
 - <https://youtu.be/5Xijo6Xf4g0> - Comes Alive album
- ❖ **Just Give it a Go:** Tate Jakes (Ch.16)

A Special Note about this Edition

You know, this story would make a stunning film... I tell it here in my own words but occasionally there's a [square bracketed] *italic* note to set the scene or give you an idea of what it might look like (or sound like) if you were watching it rather than just reading it. I don't know much about writing films... Mind I don't know much about writing books either, but I thought it might help.

Nikka arranged a rather cute girl to come in and I just told it all out loud to her, sitting by the pool at "Shatteau Bolleaux". It just came out while we drank some cold beer in the sunny old sunshine. And I managed to avoid telling the "can I use your Dictaphone" joke...

So the other thing about this story is that there's so much amazing music here, what with the band, my band, The Beverly Hills Colourful Cats Gang. We've never had the time or the money to record anything (we tried a cd once but it was more trouble than it was worth and to be honest we made more cash and more friends by people coming back for more live shows, rather than buying a cd that they'd never play at home), So we've added links to this story with someone else playing the same songs that we play, just to give you an idea. Perhaps with Matt around we should give recording another go...?

You don't have to read those bits in brackets and italics if you don't want to. But remember I'm just telling a story and you may get it better to "hear" and to "see" what it was like at the time...

And by the way, I'm sorry for any bad language if you don't like it. I've always been a potty mouth. I've always liked bad jokes too. If we took that stuff out, it wouldn't be a true story, would it...?

Enjoy...

Chapters ~Just Give it a Go...

- ❖ 1. Beginnings. TC meets Matt...
- ❖ 2. Hatching Plans. Back at Band HQ...
- ❖ 3. Hitting the Road and Café Stop...
- ❖ 4. More Wheels in Motion
- ❖ 5. Chateau Boulles and (5.ii) Pete the Pool
- ❖ 6. Meet Dong and the Zebras and (6.ii) Preparation...
- ❖ 7. The Interview... Not So Good
- ❖ 8. Virginité and the Loss of...and (8.ii) The Big Gig
- ❖ 9. Just Give it a Go Finance, Part A
- ❖ 10. Small Bollocks Banking
- ❖ 11. Interlude: GIAG, Château, Nikka's Knickers, Alan
- ❖ 12. Big Bollocks Big Top Road Show...
- ❖ 13. There is No Chapter 13
- ❖ 14. The 2nd Interview... Better...
- ❖ 15. A Private Dinner Dance
- ❖ 16. Wedding Balls

Chapter 1: Beginnings

*[We're in The Happy Hermit Bar, The French Alps, busy, scruffy, and boozy. The band is playing **A Little Help From My Friends**: (Hear <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCrlyX6XbTU>). We see the setting, the audience and the drinkers... We see Matt sitting by himself at the corner of the bar. The song and the reference to “friends” are poignantly juxtaposed with the lone guy.]*

This story, like all my best stories, starts in a bar.

This particular bar was in a crazy old, crazy pretty and crazy expensive ski resort in the French Alps. The band had been playing the Happy Hermit bar for six weeks and tonight was our last night. The resort was about to shut down for the end of the season and we were enjoying ourselves. So were the crowd.

I'm TC by the way, the band leader and occasional singer...



We finished up the first set with a Joe Cocker style version of *A Little Help from My Friends*. I stepped straight off the stage towards the bar. I like beer and I love beer in the Happy Hermit (i) because it was cold and (ii) let's face it,

because it was free ~ as long as we were the resident band. Waste not want not, as my old man used to say... And there wasn't much time to waste.

So I was heading for the bar through the crowd. I was being slapped on the back by the happy Happy Hermit crowd. They were also drifting towards the bar for an interval top-up or two. I was rushing. I popped around the corner of the busy bar where the crush was thinned out a bit. Just a little group of three people here in a small group, in this quiet corner. This handsome young guy was talking to two even younger youngsters (by my standards) but it looked like quite a serious-ish talk, not a happy “hey we’re at a gig and we’re drunk” talk. They were not “whooo... we’re skiing and we’ve done for the day and we’re so happy” looking people.

And that’s when I met our hero. Well, it’s when I met Matt and he’s the hero of our story... But he wasn’t looking like the hero kind of guy tonight. I mean he wasn’t in the crowd, he wasn’t dancing, he wasn’t doing that cheerful shouting and hugging that people do in ski bars when all the skiing is done and all the music has stopped. He wasn’t raising his voice, he wasn’t sweaty and nor was he in dressed-down and danced-up and having-fun mode. Nope. He was talking business to two young colleagues. No group of mates, no loud banter, no girl. His two companions looked like he was the boss. They were listening to him and they were taking stuff in but it wasn’t a chat, if you know what I mean. When the two others left him, he was quite by himself again at the quiet end of the bar...

“Good set” he says to me quietly. “I like that last one... With a little help from your friends”. “Yeah” I said slapping him on the back, perhaps a bit too enthusiastically “Thanks. And which ones are yours?”

“Which what?” he says. “Friends” I throw back at him. I’d just played a blinder set and I felt in a back-slapping-happy-give-me-a-beer mood. But I also felt that mood slip a bit now I was with this guy in his quiet

corner. Some people just aren't "going-up" people. More "coming-down." And I felt that this was going to be a going down moment... "Oh..." he says and I knew there was a story coming. And he starts talking...

So this guy, our hero to be, is incalculably well off - we'll come back to that. But he was so obviously not a happy man at this point in time. He just wasn't looking, sounding or acting like a happy rich guy. I mean you might as well be poor as shit if you're going to be like that.

I had a fifteen-minute break so I started beer number 2 - number 6 for the night but number 2 for the break. I always count my beers ~ not so much to monitor my intake but more as a habit, counting things. But then I count the duration of my pissing too. Seventy-four seconds is my best this season. Beat that!

Anyway, we carried on talking... he was a smart, articulate guy and he explained very precisely and easily what he'd been here for. It was to network with other rich guys. It had been some rich guys annual meet. They'd all been staying in the very best rented chalets, some in their own chalets, some in hotels and some in their own hotels. Some of them were here in the bar in the crowd. Some of them here at the Happy Hermit were sort of friends of his. And his "people" as he called them, were the two assistants that just left. They worked for him. No Shit Sherlock, I thought...

So he wasn't here for the skiing or the beer or the getting drunk and he certainly wasn't getting sweaty like the rest of us. What a waste. At least most of the rich guys and their sugar-daddy-baby girls were dancing and getting sweaty. But not Matt. He'd been left to his own thoughts tonight. Or he'd taken himself aside tonight. He said he wasn't in the mood. But then he said that he rarely was these days.

He'd been discussing what to do next week with his two assistants. He hadn't decided where to go and that was rare for him and it made him feel unsettled. He liked to know what was going on but he was in a strange between-things place. And he was not in the best of moods. Not the best company. Not the most cheerful he'd ever been. Not the life and soul of the party... Not the...

"OK I get the picture!" I interrupt. He looks back at me with an apologetic smile and with a look I didn't know quite what to make of. "It's pretty weird" he says, "I've been talking all week to the other "entrepreneurs" but I don't feel like I've enjoyed one minute of it. I've learned nothing and I have probably said nothing of interest to them. Whatever I've been talking about isn't even of interest to me. And now I'm rabbiting on to you, Sorry..."

"No man," I counter "don't apologise. I'm interested. Carry on."

He told me about his career and his abso-fucking-lutely (my words) stunningly, globally, financially and in every big-bollocking way, his amazingly successful business. He didn't put it like that. He just said what it was and what he'd done. I'd heard about it. Even I knew about the big wide world on the tinternet and on social media. *Anti-social media* as the gang and I called it. Knew about it - but didn't do it. Maybe that's why he had more money than some small countries and that's why we were playing ski bars and off to the next music festival tomorrow in a beat up 1982 bus to pay for the fuel and beer to get to the next gig. So even I knew how rich he must be. It was in all the news - even on the music stations that we listened to. He'd recently sold his share in the business. I even knew his name. He was Matt Pewter of California in the big "ol' US of A". A Silicon Valley wonder boy.

He talked about what he did now. He travelled. He read. And he studied. But he was looking for something else. He'd been offered a dozen very respectable non-executive directorships I never understood what that meant until he explained it to me. It meant that he had to do sweet Fanny Adams for about million dollars a year. Each! That's twelve million dollars a year for twelve nothings. Just show up here and there and be dot.com savvy once in a while. I choked on beer-break beer number three...

But he said he'd turned them all down or put them all on hold. He wanted to do something more meaningful. And I'm afraid to tell you he did actually use the words "looking for something meaningful".

Goldie, my old lady (my best friend, my heart-throb and she's not so old... my God she's a beautiful woman) waved over to me. We were about to start the second set.

"Matt", I said, "great to meet you. Can you stay here a while, while I finish the gig? I hear what you're saying and I'm really genuinely interested. I do hear what you're saying and I want to hear more, OK. Stay here... I'll see you after." He looked kind of pleased.

So *The Beverly Hills Colourful Cats Gang*, to give the band their full title, play the last set on the last night at the end of the ski season. And being the last night, we give it some. More sweat, more hot and happy people. Lots of dancing. It's a fun place to be. Everyone is lapping it up - the band, the beer and the brandy. Everyone except Matt.

We play for about 40 minutes before we start our version of *Gimme Shelter*. This scrotum-achingly good Stones song gives the band a chance to do their big finale and play out the night... And the girls ~ Blackie and Whitie ~ are on top form with their vocals. Two better

backing girls there ain't. And this song is a gift for singers... going all the way back Merry Clayton, remember her? Never mind...

And we use the song to introduce the band and to say farewell to the Alps for a year...

*[Hear **Gimme Shelter**: <https://youtu.be/wy3RdCd9zAM>. The band and the singers do little solo flourishes during the intros]*

“OK Mesdames et Messieurs, ladies and gentlemen, skiers and skivers, drinkers and thinkers, you’ve had the best of us all season and now it’s nearly time to go... I don’t know about you lot but we’ve got another job to go to...”

“So it’s good bye, goodnight (... in a minute) and farewell from me, TC. That’s TC for Top Cat... Don’t forget”

“And the band... *The. Beverly. Hills. Colourful. Cats. Gang.* But you can call us The Colourful Cats, if you’re short of time. But we’re not, short of time, we got bags of time so we use the whole name... even though we’re not from Beverly Hills (but Top Cat and *his* gang were¹), and we’re not really a gang. But hey, we are quite colourful – as you can see and as will be revealed... *[Lead guitar solo, under]* Thank you for that Mr Bluesman Billie... yes ladies and gentlefolk, that’s Bluesman Billie, Billie Bluesman, whichever way round you want him... on guitar...”

“And we have Mr Green Fingers on keyboards..., Mr Green Fingers ~ so called because he’s a better gardener than a piano player... And no, he’s not called Red despite that great mane of red hair across his face... Do you know lovely people here tonight; I haven’t seen his face

¹ See later note in Chapter 3, in the café, on this infactual statement!

all year. And he doesn't talk either but... *[piano solo]* thank you... he does play a mean keyboard... he must be a top gardener."

"Now this lovely lady on my left and also on the bass guitar... is also the woman by my side as the sun sets each day. Morgan le Fey, ladies and gentlemen, but we call her Goldie... God is she not a beautiful thing to behold... and I do love to behold her... hold her and behold her... yes indeed."

"I said that we weren't from Beverly Hills. No... we're from Tooting, Yes thank you; some of you might know it. We are like all the best bands or brands, and as the famous description goes, alive and well in Paris, New York and *Tooting*. *[The two baking singers start oohing and aahing behind]* And these two lovely ladies are indeed from Root'n Toot'n Tooting, in sunny South London, Englandshire... You have Blackie – the lady there with the black hair. Take a bow, Blackie. And Whitie, with the white hair, please take a bow as well. Pretty ladies and pretty mean singers too..."

"Lastly but not least... well maybe... I'm just joking man... lastly, we have Dog on drums. That's his name and even though we wanted to call him something more colourful (and less animal) he wasn't having any of it! When we suggested a few alternative nicknames, he just disappeared for two weeks. And when he came back he said "It's Dog OK. Just Dog". So we left it at that. OK Just Dog, show us what you got. *[Dog plays a brief drum solo]*

"Damen und Herren, and all the others, we are the Beverly Hills Colourful Cats Gang and that's all for tonight... And for the season. And for this year... God Bless you, and thank you, break-a-leg, because this is the place to do it... and safe journeys home!"

And with the slightly over the top rock band bashing, crashing and smashing finale, we leave the stage. To huge applause of course. Job done.

But my evening isn't over. I have to get back to Matt who's patiently waiting for me. As I walk over, I see a few faint farewells in his direction from his friends or rather acquaintances. But it's not like the rest of the Happy Hermit crowd. Everyone else making up the real rowdy crowd lot are hugging and kissing and sharing the sweat about.

I take Goldie over with me this time and I introduce her to Matt. He is charming and polite but he looks less easy with the two of us and after we talk about how good the band is (he says so but we manage to agree) and he's all very charming he stands and says "TC, Goldie, it's been my pleasure but I really must be going to bed." Now the band, we're on for a big night ahead. So I try to persuade him to stay and join in with the gang but it's so obviously not his scene. And he excuses himself. He shakes our hands and leaves.

Goldie takes my hand and says "TC, if that's your new friend, you've got to help him. He's as tight as a tightness can be. Like a tight thing, too tight. Help him. He's cute but he's tight. Do you know what I mean?" "Do you think he's up-tight then?" I ask. She goes to slap me but that move turns to a stroke on my cheek. She kisses me, like a child on my forehead. "I love you TC. Don't mess with me. And sort that guy out. Go talk to him"



I always take Goldie's advice on matters such as these, so I say OK and I skip off to catch Matt before he can get right away. "Matt" I shout over the dance music, "Come and see me tomorrow. We've got digs round the back of the hotel. I want to

talk to you some more". He nods and shakes my hand again. I try to give him a hug but it falls short, awkwardly². And off he goes. And I turn back into the bar for what proves to be quite some night...

² *Have you ever noticed, like I just have when reading a proof of this, that word awkwardly? If someone said to you, is there a word with the letters ...wkw... in it, you'd be hard pushed wouldn't you to think of it.*

Chapter 2: Hatching Plans

Picture this... In the morning there's a knock on our apartment door. It's 8 in the morning and some of us have been in bed for at least three hours. Green Fingers is up first, hearing the knock. He's not *the first* up, more like he's *the only one* up. No-one else would have heard the knock, let alone would've opened the door. But Green Fingers being green fingers gets up, opens the door and sees a spick and span Matt Pewter about to knock again. Green Fingers moves aside and beckons him in, without speaking. Matt can't tell if he's making a face because his face, as always, is behind his hair. Matt isn't disarmed: He comes in.

"Good Morning Mr Green Fingers. Is TC about?" Matt asks. He remembered his name from last night. Hellfire, that's good recall! GF (as we sometimes call him for short) waves his thumb to one of the bedroom doors so that Matt knows which room I'm in, though whether I'm up is an unanswered question.

Matt crosses the sitting room, carefully weaving between the clothes on the floor. And when I say clothes, I mean we're talking coats and hats and scarves for winter-wonderland, then normal stuff like shoes, shirts, jumpers and trousers and then unsurprisingly in this total floordrobe situation, underwear – ladies, gents and socks, plus bottles (clear, green, brown, beer, wine and spirits), guitars (two electric, one acoustic, one bass and three more in cases), stuffed toys (elephants mostly and none of us except the owner knew whose they were, though most of us thought they were probably GF's but only because he's the only one who'd say nothing about them), jewellery (black and gold for Goldie and red for Blackie and Whitie and some we didn't recognise), shoes (did I say shoes?), plates and then more shoes. Our

mess always includes many more shoes than you'd think possible. I sometimes count them – always individually, as shoes do not always come in pairs in our gang - and I've got up to counting 37 shoes in our digs or on the bus. And there's only seven of us - I think...

Big Hairy Ball Bags... I've just realised in talking about this that I count absolutely everything and yet, I have never in my whole days, counted the members of the band before. How did that one get by? But yes there are seven of us; I just re-checked (me, Goldie, Bluesman, GF, Blackie and Whitie, Dog. That's 7.). Anyway, that's over fives shoes each on average and those are just the ones which have escaped the feet that they belong to.

Basically it's *Shitsville, Arizona* in there. Matt hasn't been in a room like that since he left university 15 years ago. And even then, *his* room was never less than tidy. So Mr Tidy Mr Matt elegantly tip-toes his way through the room and he taps on my door.

No chance. He knows it (now he's here) and GF knows it – and GF shows he knows it by coming back with an instant coffee in a blue cup for Matt. He thumbs Matt towards a sofa and GF goes back to bed.

When I appear half an hour later, after Matt's fourth knock, he's cleaned up the room for us. All the shoes in pairs bar three odd ones. All the clothes folded in a pile. All the jewellery in a collecting dish on the table. All the bottles and the plates gone - into the kitchen I presume. All the rest collected ready to be claimed by the owner later, like a well-organised lost property office. My first words to Matt are not "My God man why so early" which is what I would have said, but "Morning Matt, wow, thanks... I presume you did this." He acknowledges my thanks and asks if I want to stay here or go out for a coffee. I notice an undrunk coffee in a blue cup. I guess he wants to

go out for coffee. Doesn't he like our coffee or doesn't he like our domestic cleanliness (or lack of) situation...?

We walk around the corner to the Happy Hermit, now all daytime and morning-coffee chirpy. I'm wearing my dressing gown even though he'd offered to wait while I changed. When we sit down he smiles and says "Now I could never do that." I ask what he means. "Go out in my dressing gown. I mean you seem to have a way about you that just says confidence and *take me or leave me*. I always worry what other people think. Even on a normal day when I'm dressed to go out I would always want to be careful and consider what I was wearing. And I have to think it through, depending on what I'm doing or who I'm meeting with. Nikka, my assistant, you met her last night, she usually helps me if it's something important." Considering that he looks just like he did last night I just stay schtum. I can't even remember what he was wearing the night before and now even though I'm trying to remember what he was wearing, I can't. Immaculate but forgettable. Dark blue I think. Maybe dark grey but for sure dull ~ just like his surname.

So I ask him where it comes from, *Pewter*, his surname. It's an unusual name, isn't it? Like the metal, dark grey, colourless but expensive when made with silver... or is it tin...? Not shiny, not showy. "Yes" he concedes, "But also toughened with antimony to make something malleable quite strong."

"Is that you?" I ask "malleable but strong?". But really my mind is struggling with how to make a joke (or how not to make a joke) about antimony maybe being a pun for "anti-money". I let it go. Instead I ask him to tell me about his money. The "antimony" thing, I can return to later... I'm sure I can work it in somewhere.

He's candid with me. This guy has no sides. He's straight in every way. It's good even if it's not colourful. I like colourful but I also like his dead straightness – as it comes with honesty, even if not with any flourish. He explains that at the moment he had more money than most people can ever imagine. Well off people, rich people, millionaires and even billionaires, they dream of having that much money. Normal people didn't understand how much money he had. They confused the number of zeros and lost whole decimal places (up to three, he said). There were only a few hundred people in the world that had as much money as he had. He had enough money for him (and pretty much most other people) to live off virtually for ever. Even after he bought me a few coffees that morning (and they're fuck-a-doodle-do high-priced in The Happy Hermit, let me tell you) he still had money left. I had a hairpin in my dressing gown pocket.

"But..." he started... but he didn't continue and that *But...* just sat in the air between us for a minute: Maybe two. Or maybe I'm exaggerating because in reality it was probably only twenty seconds. "But..." he re-started himself, "but... I don't have that many friends. I don't have many people to talk to. And usually I find it very hard to talk about myself and (pause) and how I feel. But... (that hanging *But...* again) but, for some strange reason, TC, I find I want be open with you. I think it's two things. Or maybe three... One, I don't know you from Adam and you're not connected to anyone I may be connected to. So, if you don't think it's rude, what I say to you doesn't matter. Or rather it won't come back and damage me later. I have to think of these things usually. Secondly, you're kind of like a mad guru figure. You're slightly surreal. I mean you are here at the scene of the just-finished world's richest forum... in your dressing gown. But I saw you with the band and with the audience last night and you command this space that I like and you have this natural authority in a way that I can

do in a board meeting. But... (again) I don't do that, not in my own life, outside of the board room or the meeting room. My money gets respect but the Matt behind the money seems to get very little attention. You know, last night, this last week, I've made my mind up to get on with my own life a bit more and leave the grey successful ~ but dull ~ me behind. I want to shine a bit. I want my Pewter (as you brought it up) to be polished and to shine. Maybe I need a re-spray. Or at least a bit of a buff-up..."

"And three... You said maybe three?" I asked. "Well", he said, "Let's leave it at two for now. Suffice to say that I enjoy the idea of the digital-nerd and the musical front man getting along. I like opposites, I like dissonance. Sometimes it offers solutions..."

"Hey Mr. Matt Pewter... Go easy on the nerd bit. And the board room talk. You're just not very relaxed, but you're not a nerd." He nods a thank you.

"And man you wouldn't have been who you are," I continue, "if you weren't quite so switched on."

I liked him and his straight-ness even with his reservations. And I was flattered. He was open to me and I liked that. He explained that on top of not having anyone special to talk to, he didn't have anywhere special to go, anything special to do... anything that was meaningful. (That word again "meaningful".) I usually found it hard to engage with people who talked like that (therapy bollocks) but I still wanted to hear more, maybe to help him.

I look at him straight in the eye "Well, Mr Moneybags, my lady, Goldie, saw something in you that made us want to help out in some way. Even though you got all the resources in the world at your gold fingertips. So what's the plan? Gonna save the world or buy the world?"

Hey, I mean if you're thinking like that, then you are on the edge of a spring board ... You are about to mount the crest of a wave... you're about to dive in, to mix up several watery metaphors, you're in the right place to start all over and shall want for nothing... your arseholiness..." I looked up to check the profanity hadn't upset him. "Are you going to grab life by the scrotum?!"

But he smiled. He got me. And he put a pause on that discussion. "So what about you?" he asked.

"Well you tell me," I said, "What do you think? I don't really spend much time thinking about What I am or What I'm doing or What should I be doing," I answered. "But I'll just say one thing, you've got to look into the key areas of your life... I mean "ones" life..."

He waited for my wisdom...

"First. What you do for a living and for dosh (I just get by but I love my work). Do you? Two. Domestic arrangements - hey man I live on a bus and sometimes in hotel rooms (but I just about get by - and I have Goldie and I have the rest of the band to share it with) And Three. Love-life and friends (and here I think I'm pretty hunky dory, sorted and damn well off. All AOK on that front). And I make new friends every day. Hey, look at us sitting here all dressing gowned, chatty and coffee..."

"You know ~ once upon a time ~ and don't you ever tell the others, I had a job like a pain in the arse boring job with half decent money but I wanted to get out and play with a band, so I did it. I just gave it a go ~ and it worked out pretty well. You and me are pretty different in every which way, if you know what I mean but you could be where I was then. Except richer by a gazillion-fold. Maybe it's time you ran away with the circus."

“You know what you have to do my friend (he looks at me here to see if I mean “Friend” or if it’s a turn of phrase) and that’s look to a life with some *life* in it. Take some risks. I mean, what have you got to lose? Sweet FA I’d say. (*Pause*). You can’t lose all your money, right?”

“So all that is not an answer to your big question (I can’t remember if you actually asked one...) but it may be an answer to the big question about the big-goddam-hole in your sorry-for-yourself soul man.”

“Number four on the list I started before is giving back. Most rich people only start to enjoy themselves... Correction most *people*... only start to enjoy themselves when they give up their time, money or energy to something better than work or even play. Maybe we’re singing from the same hymn sheet when you use that arse-achingly bad word *meaningful*. You’re looking for that aren’t you, making a good deed come true?”

“And another thing and then I’ll shut up... Please Matt, excuse my bad language... It’s a habit of mine and it suits me but it’s not always suitable for everyone... Now what have you got to say? Are you going to give it a go?”

“OK”, he agrees “let’s do this thing. Whatever this thing is, let’s do it. I’m going to run away with the circus. Well tag along with you guys for a while, if that’s OK, TC. Is it?”

“Abso-bollocking-lutely great” I say shaking hands. “Two large beers coming up...” “Beer?!” he queries, “It’s still only 10.30 in the morning.” I do not have to say anything: The look over the top of my sunglasses does the trick and I stroll over to the bar and get two large beers. I put them on his account.

An hour later (and only one other beer; I am driving...) we have a plan. It's not a big plan but we agree it has the virtue of being quite simple. And a plan. It hadn't taken a lot to persuade Matt but had it been any more complex, detailed or even more defined he would have bailed out. Whilst it was just a concept (and as long as he could bring their car and stay in good hotels and while he could always bail out) he agreed to come on the road with us.

Tomorrow we leave this Alpine paradise and head off to our next gig ~ a music festival. We have a week to get there. Matt and his two assistants, Justin and Nikka will come with us, ("in our car") and tag along, and maybe try and have some fun and see what happens... It's all good, I say. "Yes," said Matt, "It sounds... It sounds... err..." but he doesn't know what. And that was the first time I heard him stumped for words.

Chapter 3: Hitting the Road and Café Stop

So this little adventure of ours is now set up. Matt and his people will follow the band bus in their big black 4-wheel-drive hire car to our next port of call. We have this music festival to play but that's not for a week from today. We've got 100 miles or so to travel. The band and the band bus usually makes 100 miles in a week - easily. No sweat.

Matt and I arranged to start off first thing in the morning. One problem being, that we found out after this naïve set up, was their definition of "first thing" was quite different to ours. Over the weeks that followed we'd all get used to the differences - or even adapt to each other's ways in these things - but today we needed an interpreter for sure...

Because leaving our digs in a ski resort where we'd been in residence for six weeks was quite a big deal for the band. Leaving "early" was impossible. Looking at it from Matt's and his people's viewpoint, I guess the band's preparations for packing, looked like complete chaos. The first thing Matt and Justin and Nikka would think of, was pack (probably the night before) and be ready on time: The first thing that we thought of was coffee and maybe just a few beers. Let's get the priorities right. And then some music, so the girls put on Crosby Still Nash & Young... loud...

[This would be a good chance to edit what you're seeing between us and them. I imagine Matt and his guys looked something like the following. First, they'd be up early. They'd switch their alarms off and pack them neatly in their bags - or they'd probably use their mobile phones as alarms which would be on charge. They'd put uniform colour items (mostly black) into uniform colour bags (mostly black)...

Cut to our end: We're all still asleep...

Cut back to their end: Neat matching black cases all tidy on the bed. As they close their bags, their clothes are all neat and folded and packed efficiently. They check drawers and they check bathrooms. The only pause in this tidy and organised sequence is when we see Matt pack a newspaper cutting with a picture of an unknown blonde lady into his case...

Cut back to us: We're still asleep...

Cut back to them - hopefully this is not making anyone dizzy - and they're out of their rooms and into the lobby, cases lined up. Justin does the bill at reception and they go off to breakfast. They check their watches/phones for the time regularly...

Back to us (you get the idea)... GF gets up. Blackie gets up and puts the music on. Whitie gets up...

*Over music: **Carry On:** Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young; see <https://youtu.be/yTTTU0V3OEc> . The members of the band are all singing along with the music...*

Cut back to them having breakfast (The same music under, but muted like hotel background music). No chatting - just phones...

Cut back to us, having our coffees and beers. All our bedrooms are a tragic mess. Progress looks slow if at all... Everywhere is a confusion and disorder - except in the sitting room where Matt cleared up the day before. People dip into the lost property pile that Matt had left so orderly. Slowly and with a few beers dealt with, the cases start to get packed. Nothing matches. Nothing is folded. Nothing is orderly. Mismatched bags, grips, plastic shopping bags, big laundry bags and odd items are carried out to the bus but there's still plenty to do...

I get up.../

It's always the same with us but usually we don't have anyone waiting for us... Each one of us has charms and skills and good characteristics (except perhaps GF) but no-one has the skill to motivate mornings. We're night people and our natural complacency in the a.m. department is compounded. But we're having fun. Sorry Matt...

And the girls' singing over the music is magical and delightful.

So that's how I imagine it would have gone. Anyway, suffice to say that after we see them getting their rather formal Alpine hand shake from the director of the hotel, they walk over to us. We're still a long way from ready. Most of the luggage is still on the pavement.

We greet them. The two assistants, Nikka and Justin, keep a distance like they don't want to be infected with disorder (*Bandus Dysorderitus?*). They sit on the wall by our digs and wait. Nikka and Justin (have we met them properly yet?) get their phones out and start organising (*Strictus Digitalis?* Or is that a foxglove plant?)

Matt walks over to me. His wry smile shows that he kind of understands the situation. I'm not going to say sorry for us being us. Nor does he expect it. Underneath the formality of his look (all in dark clothes and smartness) he has a little suspicion of, a little hint of, naughtiness about him. He knows that this mix up of us and them is going to be fun and/or a challenge. That's the thing that we agreed. It's what his tidy, monochrome and organised world needed. In the parlance of someone great, but bollocks if I know who, said... We were going to rock his world. And maybe roll it too.

Matt says good morning. He's so polite. I hug him (he's still awkward). And on top of the awkwardness, I squash his something in his hand...

a gift-wrapped-something. Someone gave him a gift, I guess, for spending so much money here?

“For you” he says and hands over an expensive Alpine-resort-smart-store-carry-bag with all its fancy wrapping. Inside is a pork pie hat like Top Cat’s. Just like Top Cat’s, in the cartoon. In purple. “Well thanks Matt. I shall not only cherish this great and beautiful gift in all its perfection, I shall wear it too.”

He says that he’s been doing some research and that Top Cat’s gang were not from Beverly Hills but from Manhattan. “Are you sure”, I ask. “Yup” he states quite categorically. “Damn... A friend of mine, The Saint, we used to call him, told me when I was about 12 that they were the Beverly Hills gang. And I believed him. It was him and our mates that first gave me the nick-name TC”. “No,” says Matt, “it’s a fact that they were the Manhattan Alley Cats”. “Damn, bollocking damnation and more bollocks” I say. “But thanks for the hat”...



As the band get closer to being ready and before the bus can take off, people gather. Some are from the Happy Hermit, some are ski bums and some are a few of the many local barmen, waiters and waitresses and some the odds and sods from the town. They’ve turned up to say goodbye. There’s still twenty or more people kissing, hugging, swapping numbers and generally slowing us down until we eventually, all of us, get on the bus. They stand there and wave goodbye. The band on the bus and are blowing kisses and waving and finally throwing beer cans at them. Shit, I love it the way the band collects all these new friends...

Matt, Nikka and Justin get into their hire car. The hotel manager waves politely. The contrast is obvious and they know it. We all feel it.

Finally, I get on the bus. I always drive the bus. I'm wearing my new hat. Before I start, I turn round to ask the others about Beverly Hills/Manhattan Alley/Cats/Gang etcetera. We thought you knew, they said. We always knew and we thought you did but that you had some special reason. "Hmm," I say. "Shit no..! I did not know that..."

I have briefly explained to the gang about the Matt/Justin/Nikka idea. No details yet but the band were cool with it. I think they were impressed that I, cheapskate and renowned broke-as-a-joke TC had a new friend who just happened to be the wealthiest man any of us could ever think of meeting, let alone befriend.

I drive off and the black car follows closely. You can see by the way their car starts to drive off that they're impatient to hit the road. It's 11.30am already and they'd have normally done half a day's work by now or would have driven 300 miles or something shit-off-a-shovel efficient. We'd normally still be in bed.

Au revoir Happy Hermit and Skisville... We round the corner, waving our fading goodbyes to the temporarily loved ones that we were leaving behind. Me wearing my new hat. The gang settling into their seats. The black car behind us. It looks like it's going to be a fine day and we have a drive ahead.

Around the corner and exactly 850 yards down the road, I pull the bus over and I climb out. The others follow, cheerful and expectant, like schoolchildren on a day out. Justin on the other hand, who is driving Matt and Nikka doesn't park up at first - assuming it's just a

temporary glitch. Matt rolls down the window but before he can ask...
 “Lunch!” I shout.

Have you been here before, I ask. No, all three of them say. “Well Matt”, tipping my hat, my head and my sunglasses all at the same time, “We like it and you guys have to give it a go. Anyway, these guys haven’t really met yet have they? Let’s get a table and do the introductions, get to know each other, like nicely.”

It’s a big old-fashioned corner gas station with some car sales and a café truck stop. I notice amongst the cars for sale there’s a big old beautiful white Rolls Royce. Its glorious promise of mildly showy grandeur and opulence is only let down by the orange plastic letters across its front window, making it clear that this is “FOR SALE”. “Now that’s a car”, I say to Matt as we walk past.

There’s also half a dozen motor bikes out front with polished black paint and gleaming much-loved chrome. A couple of bikers say hello. I don’t know them but one offers “Hey, Good gig at the Happy Hermit, TC.”

Inside and all the others are sitting down. Three tables, two with the band and one with Justin and Nikka. “OK” I call out, “This is no good at all. First rule is we’re on a trip together and we’re not having this split. I know you guys don’t know each other *yet* ~ and we’ll get to this in a minute ~ but you guys have to mix it up. So everyone stand up”. The band stand. Matt has to nod to his guys to get them up. I’m not sure what he’s briefed them yet.

“Now push the tables together and then sit back down but mix it up. I know there’s more of us than you but you know what I mean. I am going to order ten small drinks to get us going. Local speciality...

Génépy. And when they arrive, its hold on to it until it's your turn to drink. Now sit, sit, sit..."

"Better... We're going round the table and we're going to do our introductions. And the form of introduction ~ hold on ~ is your name, (and your real name if different), a fact about yourself that no-one else here knows... I know that's tricky for the band but... whatever. Then you down your génépy with all its loveliness and its local herbal delights, in *one*. And then you have to point to someone else who hasn't been yet and you order them their next drink – one that you think they might like. Or not?!"

"Me first... And, it's Nikka, isn't it(?), would you please write down the drinks so we don't mess that bit up. You, lovely smart young thing that you are, look like you'd never mess anything up". Nikka, looks to Matt who gives the authority nod again. Matt says to his people "Nikka, Justin, please let's just go along with this. With everything TC says. We're here for the ride and I for one am going to try to enjoy it. The first rule is just give it a go..." He looks to me for approval and asks, "Is that the only rule?"

"Yes Matt, I think so for the moment. We like the KISS principle in the band. Keep it Simple Stoopid!"

"So my name is TC, Top Cat for short – and he had a hat like my beautiful new one, Thank You Matt. My real name is Tom. Yes, like the male cat, Clarke. My yet undisclosed secret is that I was until today unaware that Top Cat's gang were from Manhattan and that means that all you members of the band have been trading under false pretences for over seven years. Shame on you all. Watch out for Officer Dibble... And I nominate Nikka next who will be drinking a

... pause for thought... will be drinking a Tom Collins in honour of my very own self's forename and initials."

"OK. Thank you TC... My name as you have just heard is Nikka. N.I.K.K again, A. My full name is Nicola Jackson. I'm 27 years old and I have a first class degree from NYU in Integrated Digital Media. I know you didn't ask for all that info (*smiley face*) but I thought I'd let you know. I work for Matt as his communications assistant. The special fact about me that no-one knows is that although I may seem a little bit up-tight at the moment in your company, I find the prospect of this trip rather exciting, even though I don't know what it's all about yet. Just don't push me too hard, OK. Oh and I nominate a drink for that guy with the hair, there. An Asti Spumante or something similarly sweet and fizzy which I believe will be highly inappropriate (*cheeky face*). Let me just write that down..."

Green Fingers doesn't stand or acknowledge that the buck has been passed too him. He just thumbs away the honour to his immediate right to Dog.

"OK, that's GF or Green Fingers" says Dog. "Real name unknown but I think it's Derek Something. He doesn't speak much Nikka. And he would like to nominate me and my drink as a Tom Collins too. OK GF?" GF gives him the thumbs up.

"My name, now that we come to me and I come to think of it, is Dog and if you really want to know, really want to know..., Rex is the name, Rex Harrison. Yes I know... like the actor. My fact is that I don't much like speaking either. OK you know that... My fact unknown as yet then, if you really, really want to know is... that I sometimes wash old cheese. You guys probably throw it away, but I wash it... all the mouldy bits... and then I continue to eat it until it's all gone. Hasn't killed me yet. It's just the sort of guy I am. It's not regular or even recommended

but why not... it works for me. Hey guys don't you do stuff that other people do or don't do or don't do stuff that other people do do..? Not because they do do it or don't do it! Just because to you it seems right. Do your own thing. Know what I mean? Be your own man! I know cheese isn't a big deal right, I know but I'm making a point. So get that."

"And I think that Goldie should have a fancy spirit with little bits of gold in... really real gold, if they have it here. Who's paying the bill?!"

"Why thank you Dog. I would be delighted to have a drink with real gold in it. Meanwhile, I am delighted to meet you Nikka, and, Justin is it (?) and you Matt. TC talks highly of you. My name is Goldie, because I like gold jewellery as you can see, gold clothes, as you can see, and gold accessories, even in my hair. As you can see. I'm a straight-forward woman: What you see is what you get. Except that what you can't see is that... I don't think I have told anyone before... I also have Cherokee blood in my veins. Great grandma. My name which is quite bizarre, even I will admit, is Morgan le Fey, so some people have called me Morgan, some Fey but mostly it's just plain old, or better still, glittering and shiny old, Goldie. And I think that Matt should join me with a vodka with a splash of gold."

"Hi everyone. I'm Matt. Matt Pewter. It's some contrast with Goldie too. Goldie you are a glittering prize and I nod to you... and I'm an old dull receptacle, like a tankard to your shining goblet. I don't even have a nickname. The fact is that I've never had a nickname. And please don't give me one at this late stage. Another fact is that, as may become clear on this trip, but I think it fair to say that none of you know this yet, but I'm currently open to suggestions and novelty. Within limits. My business life in the digital media world is over and I'm now going to live in the real world. You guys are real!"

“Like Nikka,” Matt continues, “I would like you to be gentle with me but TC and I have agreed that we’re going to have some fun. “Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll”, as TC would say. Except ~ and another fact perhaps even less known is that I’m in love ~ so no sex, unless the very unlikely situation occurs where we meet the girl I’ve fallen for. And no drugs for me. So it’s just rock and roll... And I expect we’ll be eating quite well, once we get on the road. No questions about the love interest thank you or I’ll take it back. I just think that if I become a bit less like the old me that love might just, given time, be reciprocated back at me. OK. Now Justin would like a brown bitter beer. Well he wouldn’t... but I’d like to see him drink one.”

“Thank you Matt. Hello Everyone. My name as you’ve just heard is Justin. Justin Fitzallen. I’m 28 and a graduate of MIT in finance and accounting. I assist Matt in money matters. I’ll probably be sorting the bill for these drinks out. LOL. I don’t have a nickname either but people joke about my name anyway. I’m sure that you’ve all heard a variation but Justin Fitzallen/and/Alan fits Justin... ha-ha-ha. LOL. But who knows...” “because the fact about me (...the biggest pause of the day), is that I am a virgin. There I’ve said it. But I’m not alone because Nikka is too, I bet.”

Nikka stands up immediately and that makes that awful chair-scraping noise. She is angry. But she’s not angry enough to stay and fight ... only angry enough to turn and run. Goldie gives Justin a look. “Unnecessary” she says to Justin in passing as she follows Nikka out.

Nikka has left the drinks list on the table so I take the list to the bar and I order our 2nd drinks, those already nominated and another round of génépys for good measure. Those who have introduced themselves have had a drink but not the others, so I suggest that in this lull in the intros, everyone gets rid of the first génépy. Blackie and

Whitie go outside for some air and to catch Goldie and Nikka. Girl power...

Goldie is a beautiful lady inside and out. That's why I love her. Goddam, she's a good woman and a real sweet-talker. And bless her she brings Nikka back after 20 minutes. Justin stands and apologises to Nikka. Nikka says "You're welcome Justin. And before anyone else says it, yes my name has been associated in the past with getting my *knickers* in a twist. And thank you Goldie for helping to untwist them. Now, Justin who are you getting a drink for? Where's the list gone? Oh, thanks TC".

Justin says "Sorry Niks. I'm going to suggest that the two ladies whose names I don't yet know have a pair of brandies. Ladies? You do look like a pair that travel well together."

Blackie stands up with her pale white skin, glossy black hair and red lipstick. "Indeedy Mr Justin. My name is Blackie, after my hair. And as you can see I'm almost Snow White. Confusing innit?"

And this is my best friend since we were five, Whitie. So-called, coz she's got white hair. We're both called Jessica. My mum calls me Jess. So does her mum. But she's always been Jessica, in full, like. We met at school in Tooting – that's South London. I think Whitie knows everything about me so I can't give you much of a fact about me but I'll tell you one thing... That bloke outside is just my cup of tea and I'm going talk to him in a minute. Whitie, what you got to say for yourself?"



“Hello everyone. Whitie here. See that bloke next to the one she likes. Well the fact is, I like that one! Next up is... oh we’re done. Well TC you were first so you need a special drink. How about a cup of coffee? You are driving aintcha? Come on Blackie, let’s say hello to the boys outside. ’Scuse us everybody.”



No-one noticed that we’d totally forgotten Bluesman Billie... he didn’t mind. He didn’t like talking much either and he got to choose his own drink.

[Cavalcade: I’m going to list the vehicles in our story, so I can keep track of things. I like to count so this is good by me. At the moment it’s The Bus and the Hire Car]

Chapter 4: More Wheels in Motion

That was the first we saw of Buzz and Cookie. But not the last. These motorbike guys were the ones that the girls went outside to meet. They must have met them very well because when we left, the two shiny motor bikes followed. They caught up with us at the next stop... but I'm getting ahead of our little tale...

After the intros and the first couple of rounds of drink in the bar we left the others inside to carry on the goodwill (and the good swill). The tipsiness helped them all along a bit. I guess Billie had eventually introduced himself.

I nodded over to Matt and I took him outside. I took him across to the big white Roller. “Now see that car, Matt? That’s the sort of car a man like you should be enjoying. You’ve got all that money (and all that sense, it has to be said) but you’re driving a big black boring hire car. Just like all the other big black cars. Smart it may be but stylish and a bit individual, it ain’t! You need less sense and a bit more feeling...”



“Between me and you, this beauty would definitely be a bit of a fanny-magnet... (pardon the phrase) and after what you said in there about the unrequited love thing, this might just help, you know.”

“No. Not at all on the love interest front,” said Matt. “Not this lady. I don’t know her that well. I’ve only met her twice but she seems to be pretty set against the showy, rich personality type. Hey TC, I love this car but I wouldn’t have it for that.”

“OK well let’s get it anyway then, shall we? Matt you need to start showing that you’re enjoying yourself or else no-one else will notice you ~ or enjoy you. And the more they enjoy you, the more you’ll enjoy yourself. You can’t buy good luck or magic, or love for that matter, but you can place yourself in its way.”

“You’re kidding, aren’t you...?”

“Matt, *get with the program*, as you Yankees would say. Now how do we go about this? Cash or credit card? Or does Justin just supernaturally sort it out?”

“Matt,” I say, again looking him in the eye (it seemed to work last time), “This is only a car but it says that you are in the game. Yesterday you talked about leaving the corporate life behind. Welcome to the real world ~ or at least some version of it. Think John Lennon... Just give it a go, Matt? Yeah?”

He pauses and then gives the smiley shrug that I got to know in the following weeks, meaning *What-the-hell-Am-I-in-charge-of-myself-anymore....?* “OK, brilliant! Let’s get Justin out here.”

And the magic of wealth takes over at this point. Justin comes out, makes one phone call to a guy in the states ~ to Alan the Accountant ~ speaks for one minute and then nods. Then he goes inside with his briefcase and buys the car on a credit card. Just like that. “One thing...” Justin throws to Matt, along with the key fob for the Rolls Royce “... Alan wants to speak to you about this trip and the idea of the Rolls Royce. And.... er... stuff...you know...”

“Alan, Schmalan,” Matt tries his hand at humour. “We’ll work on your delivery.” I counter. But Matt isn’t going to phone Alan. He’s cutting loose a bit and I seem to be his advisor at the moment, not the

usual bean-counters. Matt looks like a weight has lifted a little and he's playing for the first time in a long while. The Rolls Royce has been the first step in un-tightening Matt and there's a glimmer, just a glimmer of something in his eye.

Justin does all the paperwork and sorts out the return of the hire car. We just leave that there where Matt's money has sorted out any niggly detail. We drive off, the bus, the Rolls and at a slight distance behind, two motorbikes keeping up the rear.

While we're on the bus, Blackie comes up to me and starts to tell me about Buzz and Cookie and their frustration in trying to start up a business. They've been bikers all their lives. It *is* their lives. They're not violent guys or nothing. They're regular good guys who like bikes, that's all. And they want to start a business hiring out motorcycle outriders for important persons (*very* important or just regular important, I guess), visiting dignitaries, rock and roll bands and so on. They want to rent out one guy and his bike, two guys, four guys, up to twenty outriders. They can be dressed up in your company colours or they can fly pennants and flags. It's cool... She'd taken a lot in, in the short time she'd had with Buzz and/or Cookie.

"The whole thing adds a bit of dignity," she continues "A bit of showmanship *and* also, often quite importantly, security. They want to call it Marshal Patrol, with a badge reading MP, a bit like Military Police" she continues. Jeez, by the sound of it these guys hadn't even tried on a bit of how's your father with the girls, instead it seems they'd given them the whole business pitch. What's the world coming to?

"Buzz says that small businesses just can't get loans since 2008... So they can't start their businesses... So they sit on their hands and they don't get on with it and they don't make money for their spouses and for their kids."

“Buzz doesn’t have a spouse or kids by the way.” She adds quickly. “He’s single.”

“He says that the game is loaded against the small guy... he kept quoting some bigwig somewhere, at some time... *Banks are run by big business guys who don’t have a clue about small businesses. They don’t understand them so they don’t trust them.* So they don’t lend to them. It sounds awful bad for the small guy. Is he right TC?”

“Jeez Blackie,” I reply, “I don’t know... You sound like you just did a term at The London School of Economics! Buzz said all that back there? And I thought you guys were making out... Listen, we’ll talk to Matt about all that later, OK. He knows that stuff.”

But something else caught all my attention at that point... “Oh, shit-a-brick, look at that castle! Flaming hell and balls on fire! Just look at that!”

That was our first view of what came to be known as Châteaux Bolleaux (or The Bowling Cat, or the Cat’s balls as I sometimes call it³), but for now it was just *Château Boules*. Derelict, massive and a fire-trucking-fantasy of a building. Even from the distance, you could see it was falling apart ~ and for some of us that just adds to the attraction.

³ Chateau Boules or “Chat au boules” translates as “bowling cat”



The brakes on the bus were given a full worthiness test - I stopped just in time to turn into the big iron gates. Some of the band fell off their seats (literally and I mean literally) and small stuff flew down the

aisle of the bus. But as soon as the others saw what I saw, they started to woo and coo too. (*Look at all those pairs of O's.*)

My big bollocked aunt, I thought... Now this is one in a million.

Later when we talked to the agent we found out that in fact there were hundreds - or thousands - of these types of places, just falling apart. What they needed were rich Americans, driving a white Rolls Royce and looking for adventure to buy them up and save them. And we just happened to have one of those with us... But again, I'm getting ahead of myself and our rolling (and rollicking?) tale.

We drove up the drive. The place was obviously empty. There was a track, like an old overgrown gravel drive all around the building, leading out back to out-buildings and to land I guess. The land was probably now sold off to local farmers. But the place still had dozens or scores, if not more, of acres or hectares or whatever they used in France. The Rolls followed. The motorbikes followed. We parked up, out of sight from the road. It was the most curious and super-stunning camp site in the world.

So naturally we set up camp for the night. The bus would sleep most of us and we had tents and lean-tos. As it turned out, the girls and the bike boys slept inside in the library, inside the chateau. The Matt gang seemed to take it for granted that we'd be doing something like this. Maybe they thought too much of us. We'd never camped in the

grounds of a Château before. But they started making noises about hotels and food and running water. They expected us to be camping but not themselves. Justin set off by himself to find a hotel, leaving Matt and Nikka with us to explore.

Once we were set up, we all wandered round in the dusk. We lit a camp fire and got out the beers from the bus fridge. The band may not have been organised like Nikka would have had us: But we always had beer in the fridge on the bus. It wasn't a rule but it was always the case. Without fail.

The girls brought Buzz and Cookie into the circle. I asked Matt about what Blackie had said that Buzz had said. Yes, said Matt that sounds about right. It's not good for small businesses, out there.



So the biker boys told us more about their business plan and it seemed to make a lot of sense. Not around here in the middle of nowhere but for sure in Paris and in some of the other European Capital cities where money knew no bounds. There was no competition. No-one else was doing this. Matt was impressed by their plan. He asked if no-one else was doing it, was that a bad sign but they argued that it was happening in the States and someone was going to do it here. It might as well be us they argued.

Buzz got on his hobby horse about how hard it was to start up... and he started talking again. "There are five million small businesses in the UK, probably the same or a bit less in France and five times that in the US? They account for half the money being earned in those countries and probably more than half the jobs. And... and this is the

key, over a quarter of them can't get any money, "finance", loans or whatever, any kind of break from any of the banks. And then Governments and Europe and Councils of this, that and the other keep setting up stuff and promising money but those plans wither or get stuffed by "the man" in due course. Politics and shit get in the way. The only way to sort this out is to go direct. But you can't because the banks don't lend."

"How much do you need to get going," Matt asked Buzz and Cookie. "About three," said Buzz. "Maybe four? We really want to give it a go," said Cookie. "Three hundred thousand!?" asked Matt. "No just three or four thousand... to get going" said Cookie.

"OK" said Matt "Here's my proposal to you guys. You look after all our Marshall Patrol needs for the next eight weeks (*what?! I thought*) and I'll seed you the four thousand dollars or Euros, which is it? And we'll help you with the marketing and with a web site that you're going to need. Talk to Justin and Nikka in the morning about details. Two thousand is a loan and two is salary for the outriding. And I'll pay your fuel. OK?"

Hands were shaken, currencies were agreed and times in the morning to talk were fixed. Beer was drunk. Everyone was charged with the idea. Not only were Marshal Patrol given a chance to give it a go but Matt was giving it a go too. What we were going to need motorcycle outriders for, Heaven and Hell knows, but Matt was going to test out the idea. I kind of liked the idea. The girls loved it. Both kissed Matt.

Matt, Goldie and I talked more that night about the concept of helping guys ("and gals" added Goldie) like that. Charge a reasonable interest rate but make it happen and help them to start. It all sounded cock-a-doodle big-balls-brilliant to me. And I was glad to be a part of what

was happening. Matt had jumped at it. Was this what he was looking for or was the amount so little it was back-pocket money to him?

Meanwhile, Justin has come back from the nearest town where he's booked a hotel for Matt and Nikka. "What about you?" Matt asks. "I might just stick around here, if you don't mind," says Justin.

Before bedtime (if there was such a thing for the band) I called us together to practice a new song. How handy to end the day, the evening on a great new song for the band...?!

*[Picture the scene: The campfire, the sun sets over the Château: The band plays, rehearsal style: Music **Waterloo Sunset**: The Kinks: Hear https://youtu.be/Cyh_QQD2js]*

After a while and after the band finished rehearsal, Matt starts to get up to go. Goldie and I (holding hands) walk Matt and Nikka (holding themselves a bit awkwardly) to the car. Matt gets in to drive and opens the driver's window. "Thanks TC," he says, "Thank you for an interesting day. I hope we didn't cramp your style." "Man, look at you in your Roller," I reply, "How could anyone with a car like that cramp anyone's style. You're the style-man today Mr. Matt". He looked pleased as he started off.

"Goodnight", we all chip in together. "Thanks Goldie," Nikka calls out, "Goodnight."

[Cavalcade: Band Bus, White RR, 2x Bikers]

Chapter 5: Chateau Boules

Justin has ~ amazingly ~ called up the agent that is selling the Château. Justin has ~ amazingly ~ been into town, on the back of Buzz's bike early this morning. Now that would have been a sight-and-a-half... He found out who's selling the Château and he has arranged to meet him back here, at the Château, later in the morning. He's coming soon. Justin and Buzz have also brought back croissants and bread and apricot jam and we're all picnicking in the springy sunny morning by the bus. Hip hip hooray, the sun has got his hat on and is coming out to play!

Justin was up late last night with us and ended up sleeping on the bus. Yet he still ~ amazingly ~ managed all that this morning. I admired his zuzz. "Does Matt know about this?" I ask. "The croissants or the Château!" jokes Justin. "Not really... Or to be more accurate, No." he clarifies.

"Wow Man," I say, "You are with the program, Justin. And quite possibly far out ahead of it! I hadn't dreamt that the Château would be up for grabs. I mean I think that this is possibly the most beautiful place that I've been in years but Matt... does he like this sort of thing? Would he ever go for it?"

"Well," Justin starts, "Matt was telling us a bit about what you and he talked about and it sounds like just what Matt needs. I mean he's the one that has to get with the program right? I mean he didn't tell us all of it but the gist. The "living" a bit... And I just thought that if he was going to buy a Rolls Royce he might as well buy a big French castle too. I mean guys like him buys big yachts which cost twenty, forty or more millions of dollars. And they're ghastly! So tasteless! So tacky!

And this Château, believe it or not, is less than a million dollars. Even Alan, who I called this morning (and he wasn't pleased about that call, at four in the morning, his time) even though Alan thinks that buying it is ridiculous, he agreed that it was cheap. Especially compared to a yacht."

"Yeah but Justin," Goldie asked, "Was Matt ever thinking of buying a yacht?" "No", replied Justin, "but he could if he wanted to. A dozen of them, if he wanted to..."

"OK," I chip in "Justin, I like your thinking but I question the logic somewhat... but hey ho..."

Soon after this little discussion, Matt arrives with Nikka. He's amazed and he's pleased that we're all up. It's amazing what a croissant or two can do! Justin takes the opportunity to introduce the subject of the agent coming to meet us here. Matt is certainly shocked by that news but he's certainly not dumbfounded. "You did what?" he asks Justin, who replies, "Well it's only a million dollars and there's nothing wrong with window shopping, is there?" he argues.

"And there are ninety-four windows," I chip in. Unhelpfully at this point, I have to say.

Matt raises his eyebrows. "Look all of you, I know I said I'd give this a go, but this may just be a bit too crazy. I have a house in California and a house in New York. What would I do with a house in France? I only said we were here for another week."

"We could look after it for you," said Whitie. "Yeah, we can help paint it up too," added Blackie.

"Paint it up?!" queried Matt. "This place would cost millions to do up. I mean it would take an army to get it up to scratch."

“Yes. But we’ll help,” said Blackie and Whitie together, rather hurt that their previous offer to paint had been dismissed as so insignificant.

“Right.” says Matt. “Let’s take a proper look at it when the agent comes and then we can discuss the painting schedule,” he added. I could not tell if he was being sarcastic, though it didn’t sound like it. As I said, Matt had no sides and I hadn’t detected sarcasm or the like before. I think he just meant it diplomatically - as a way to punctuate the end of the conversation for now.

At noon, on the dot, an old Land Rover pulls into the gates. It drives all around the Château, round to the side to find us in our supposedly hidden camp. And out jumps one of the jolliest and poshest blokes you can ever imagine. He looks like he’s in his middle thirties, all dressed in slightly horticultural greens and browns like he’s shooting or farming. Neat hair, good face, a woolly tie and muddy brown brogue shoes. It’s like we’d ordered an English “Country Life” bloke from central casting.

“Good day everybody and welcome to Château Boulles,” he says loudly and clearly, in his Kensington/Home Counties accent as though to confirm all our initial observations. “Oh my goodness,” says Nikka, “is he gorgeous or what? And I mean could he be more English?” And it was true, he couldn’t have been more English - for an American. But not to us, those of us from the less hunting-shooting-and-fishing parts of England: We might have lived within five miles of each other in London but his Englishness was not our Tooting English. It was five miles... but it was worlds apart. I’m English too chips in Dog who’d walked over to say hello. “Yes but you’re...” starts Nikka. “You’re more...” She is struggling as Dog looks into her eyes, awaiting a final judgement. “You’re more complex.” Says Nikka finally

which seems to please Dog who shuffles off to shake hands with the “proper” Englishman. “Hi Man, I’m Dog. I’m complex”.

“I’m glad to see that you have all made yourself familiar with the old place already. It’s all OK, Justin told me about the camping. And that’s fine: That’s all good. Shows willing... I trust that you all slept well. Now, I’m Giles and you must be Mr Pewter. So pleased to meet you, Sir”, he says to Matt. My initial thought was, how he knew which one of us was Matt. But then I realised that after meeting Dog and considering that maybe because some of us didn’t have our trousers on and I was in a dressing gown (again), that it wasn’t hard. Matt was in very dark charcoal/black again. He should have been *Matte Black*, not Matt Pewter...

“How do you do,” says Matt. “And let me introduce you to my friends.” And he introduces every single one of us to Giles, who repeats his own name to each of us... “Hello, I’m Giles. Pleased to meet you TC/Goldie/GF/*etc.*” x 10.

“And do you have a surname, Giles?” asks Matt. “No, no, just Giles. Like *Just William*,” comes the reply. We never found out his surname.

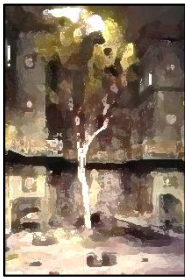
“And Giles, please call me Matt,” says Matt to cover the awkward pause from Giles With-no-surname. “Yes of course Mr Pewter,” says Giles absently-mindedly. Then back to business... and Giles strides off to lead the tour of the Château.

The grand tour starts in front of the front doors. Giles opens them with the largest key I have ever seen - outside of a cartoon, that is. Giles is now in full agent/curator mode.

“Château Boules.” He announces, “Built by Monsieur Boules in circa 1768. He was a successful printer and a failed philanthropist. He managed to escape losing his head in the Revolution and died at the ripe old age of 94. Pretty amazing age for those days,”

“Isn’t Boules the ball game, guys in berets play in car parks here?” asks Billie Bluesman. “Yes and No,” says Giles. “That’s boules with one L. Château *Boules* is with two.” Two balls in L, surely, I think.

“That’s still one hell of an easy jump from Boules, to boules, to balls. It’s certainly a name to juggle with...” I add but without any genuine contribution to anything. I’m wondering if Matt or the others have ever heard the posh boulangerie joke. Gateaux – Gattocks – bollocks – bolleaux... That one... Ask me later. It’s funny, to me at least⁴. And that’s when I coined the name *Châteaux Bolleaux*, which is still funny, to me ~ at least. Anyway it makes me smile...



We enter the Château hall and start the tour with the grand staircase. And it is grand: Cock-a-doodle-do grand. We enter the library (and find out that the girls and *Marshall Control* slept in there last night). There’s a sodding great big tree growing in the middle of it, under a leak in the roof, above. It’s both sad and stunningly beautiful in its little pool of light

⁴ *I am always quoting bits of jokes in the full expectation that other people are like me and will have remembered every joke they’ve ever heard. But often I find that I have to tell the joke anyway in an attempt to make my comments more relevant. So in this case, this joke goes... “A guy walks into a really wanky-swanky expensive looking patisserie. He points to the cake in the window that has the label stating Gateaux €7.90. He asks “Is that 7.90 for the whole Gateaux (pronounced **Gattocks**)?” “No that’s gateaux, pronounces the snobby assistant, and it’s 7.90 for a small slice.” “7.90 for a small slice of gateaux” he says, “Well bolleaux to that then!”*

and its little pool of rot. I, for one, am sold on the Château at this point. I like a tree in a library.

We parade through dozens and dozens of more rooms on the ground floor. It's like going around a derelict museum. Everyone on the tour is hushed by the faded and jaded size, scale and beauty of this great old pile. Even I shut up for a while.... Not even a bad joke for an hour or so... That would normally be hard for me but this place took my breath away.

We go upstairs and view the dozens of bedrooms (38 actually). But a distinct lack of bathrooms (two). "Can we all have a bedroom each?" says Goldie, as though talking to her kindly father. "Can we Matt?"

And instead of a straight *No*, Matt says, "Well it depends on what we're going to be doing here, doesn't it. Why would you want a room here Goldie?"

Goldie gets serious "Because Matt, this place is just about one of the loveliest places in the whole wide world. It's so beautiful and it's got a soul. And it's got so much room... It could be your French or your European headquarters... and maybe the band's quarters when we're not on tour... I mean that there's room enough for everyone and everything and then some... Matt this place is a whole world! Don't you love it?!"

"Everyone turns to Matt, who pauses and then says, "Yes, I do love it. And IF we decide to get a Château, this would be it. And Yes, Goldie, IF we do buy this Château, you can each have a room. If we do this, I wouldn't do this without you." The wide-eyed-open-mouthed hush that we had adopted for the tour now became absolute silence in shock and amazement. No-one wanted to break the spell in case Matt undid what he had just said... Even though Matt had heavily

underlined the three *IFs* in that little speech, he had at least not been absolutely against it. Maybe he did love it. Maybe something had given. Even I hadn't expected Matt to jump on board this level of crazy-dudeness... *Fuck-a-doodle-do*, I thought...

We returned down to the main hall. I had counted 52 rooms in the house, over and above the main rooms downstairs like the hall, the library, the ball room and the kitchens and so on in the cellars. One for every week in the year.

"You know," said Matt, "there are 52 regular rooms in this house, plus the big ones. That's one for every week of the year." *I just thought that*, I thought... It's when I found out that Matt and I shared more than I thought, including the counting things thing. Maybe we were more alike... "But we'd need at least twenty bathrooms, some en-suite of course" he added. Maybe we weren't alike... I'd have never thought of that.

Matt asks, "Giles, just supposing that this beautiful place was to be restored, how much would it cost?" "I'd say that you were in for at least another million, Mr Pewter," said Giles who'd obviously already had that figure in his head. He was an agent after all. "And how long would it take do you suppose Giles?" continued Matt. Giles supposed that it would take about a year, maybe more or maybe less depending on the requirements and the budget being flexible. "How long is a piece of string, Mr Pewter?" he added for no real benefit. I nearly made a joke in response but held off...

Justin looked pleased with things. Nikka was heard to mutter the word "crazy" under her breath. Not once but six times that I heard. And I counted. But her saying of the word changed as we went around from an outright Mad-Crazy to a wonderful Fantasy-Crazy. Even Nikka was

softening to the idea. The guys in the band all loved the place. I've not seen them so enamoured... No-one said anything out loud.

Matt asked me and Goldie and Justin to come for a walk around the grounds with Giles. "Giles", he started as we got outside and as the others went off to find some lunch and maybe some beer, "I'm slightly out of my depth here. I could value a business of most sizes and types and in most sectors or I could value a property - in the States. But this isn't any of those. I am also in the unusual territory of not knowing why at all, I should want to buy something that I don't need. I don't need this place. It makes no sense. So I need to understand the value and I need to understand the potential. What would it be worth done up?"

"Well Mr Pewter, I believe that it would be in the five million Dollars/Euros bracket. But to be honest with you, I have shown this property to several wealthy people and indeed to some not so wealthy people and no-one has ever had the courage to take it on. In my personal opinion, you'd have to take this on as a labour of love. On a personal note, I love this place and the more I show it to other people, the more I love it. I'd love to see her done up. I'd love to see that, Mr Pewter. Someone needs to give it a go with the old girl!" My ears prick up at this phrase and I look to see if Matt has registered it too. Yes, he has picked it up... but he's still thinking about it. He's not tempted quite enough by that challenge. Yet...

"Interestingly and as an aside," adds Giles, "we had that Gigi Rose from *TVGauche* news here last month. I thought that if I got Château Bouilles on TV, it might help to sell it. Quite a coup to get her here, even though I say so myself. Anyway she loved it too... but unfortunately it didn't help to sell it. She said she'd give her right arm

to live in a place like this. Or at least the French equivalent of the phrase.”

Something twigged in Matt and he turned directly to Giles and in the most no-nonsense manner said to Giles, “I’ll take it. Giles, how fast can we do this before I change my mind?”

Big hairy bollocks in hell fire, I thought. *What’s got into this guy?!* I’m actually worried now that Matt has turned from Mr Tidy, Mr Straight, Mr Careful, Mr Uptight into Mr Cavalier or even Mr Crazy in just 24 hours... and that I’m responsible for this. “Matt, are you sure about this..?” I query.

“Hush TC,” says Goldie, “the man has his reasons, trust me. And trust Matt. It’s all going to be for the best.” I look at Goldie; she looks at me. I love Goldie. I trust her. I hope she’s right. But she always is.

“Well Mr Pewter,” says Giles, “We already have the contract drawn up but French administration can be a bit slow and difficult. But I think I could speed it up for you. In principle and with a few extra Pounds, or Euros I mean, if you could get the money into a French bank account, we could close and sign the deal at that point. Are you really interested Mr Pewter?”

“Yes, I am going to buy it. Please will you start the process today, to be completed within one week. I shall organise the money. Please note though Giles, I will proceed only with the following three conditions. One, confidentiality: Total. I don’t want the media to hear about this. Two, we retire to Mr TC’s Colourful bus for a beer to finalise the other details and to hear your story, Giles. And three, that you stop calling me Mr Pewter: Please call me Matt as we are now working together on this project.” He walks to Giles and they shake hands. I silently high-five Goldie.

We get to the bus and the beers break out. The band starts to set up for a song. We relax, all except Justin who is on the phone to Alan, in New York. We can't hear the actual conversation as Justin has wandered off to a confidential distance but it's quite obviously an involved and difficult call. There's a fair amount of gesticulation and pacing up-and-down. Justin comes back and tells Matt that it's sorted but he needs to call Alan. "Alan-Schmalan!" I quip before Matt can get there.

"So what's your story Giles?" I say, "We can't do the deal without that. I believe that was condition two in the process that we have all just witnessed. Please let's keep this deal going..."

"Well TC and *Matt*, to fulfil conditions two and three in one fell swoop, Cheers!" he raises his beer, "My story is very brief. Born, bred



and educated in London and the South of England. I studied *Estate Management* at Agricultural College. I married one of the most beautiful and most eligible ladies from Uni. She divorced me five years later which is now five years

ago. Sorry to put a damper on the tale... I then got in a bit of trouble at home after that (nothing dodgy or financial, more of a social faux-pas) and I thought, I've always loved France (love it to death actually) and I don't want to stay in England under the circs, so I moved here. I thought, I'll give that a go..."

"Ah one of us already then," said Justin, never slow to jump in... "What do you mean?" says Giles. "Never mind that now. Please go on with your story," says Matt. "Well, I couldn't get work running an estate here in France," continued Giles "but I got a job selling them

and the larger style properties. I would however dearly love to manage an estate. It was what I was born to do. Well, at least, it's what I trained to do. And that's it really. To date that is. I can't bear to see all these old places falling into disrepair. Can I please have another beer?"

Matt looks to Goldie and to me. I shrug my shoulders (*what does he mean by that look?*) but Goldie is on the case. She gently nods to Matt with her big eyes wide open and her beautiful eyebrows raised...

[The band is starting to play a song, a little away from us. Hear: Land of 1000 Dances: <https://youtu.be/pMkQ94tIcgM>. At first it's just drums, then keyboards, then Goldie leaves us - after her nod to Matt - takes up her bass guitar and starts playing. The bass really gets the song going. The band start to play a long intro and I get up to join them to start the vocals, leaving Matt, Giles and Justin who carry on their talk until they turn to listen to the band...]

"Giles," Matt says when Giles comes back with his new beer, "Would you like to project-manage Château Bouilles' restoration? The house and the grounds." So that's what Matt meant (and what Goldie of course understood that he meant. Why was I so slow...?)

"Would I?!" Giles comes back instantly. "I'd love to but that's impossible, isn't it? I mean, how would that happen?" "Well," says Matt, "I think it's a good idea all round. And we're practicing doing the impossible. Help us. Phone your boss now and tell him or her to start the deal going. Tell him or her that I'll pay double the usual commission for a swift and efficient service - as a completion bonus. Tell him or her that if and when that deal is signed within a week, that you are leaving and then you come to work with me. In fact as we know this is all going to happen, you can start with me tomorrow. Tell him or her that you resign with immediate effect. You can manage the

purchase from our side. That'll make things easier. You'll have to join our little entourage for the next few days so that we can make plans"

Giles sits back and drinks his beer down in one and gets up to shake Matt by the hand. He looks like he's in heaven. I like this new world we're living in.

As the band plays the Land of 1000 Dances. Matt stands up and blow me down with sparrow fart, he nearly dances - or at least jiggles his legs a little now and then. Small steps...

Do I see Giles waltzing with Nikka?!

Chapter 5.ii: Pete the Pool

Hey everybody... it's a bonus chapter...! Well it's half a chapter. Either way, we're still at the Chateau which is a bonus in itself and I've still got to tell you about Pete the Pool.

So, it's the next morning and we are awake and (eventually) up and about. That includes Matt and Nikka who also stayed here last night, having checked out of their hotel. They actually spurned running hot water etcetera to instead enjoy the decay of decaying Château life... Since the deal to buy it, Matt thought it only fitting that he stayed. He would be the proud owner in just days from now but whilst in the groove, he wanted to try it for size. Nikka, who was less keen than Matt but reluctantly agreed (what else could she do?), had organised some bedding from town and so they each had one of the 52 rooms in the Château...

So when I appear scratching my balls through the front of my dressing gown, Matt and Nikka and Justin and Giles are already there meeting and scheming outside by the bus. They're not in deck chairs from the bus but somehow there's a French dining table and formal chairs arranged on the grass. Coffee is available and again we have croissants. Boy these guys are efficient. No complaints on that front. In fact, I have no complaints on any fronts.

As I said, I couldn't leave this episode without a mention of Pete the Pool, as he would become known to us. When he arrived at the

Château that morning he was plain French Pierre⁵. The whole thing started because Billie Bluesman, Dog and GF wanted to swim in the moat. Wild swimming in the moat – at this time of the year, just as spring was sprunging but not yet established... Too damn cold man... “We need a heated pool, already!” Justin spurted out in his best fake NY accent.

Matt turned to Giles and asked him about a pool. Let me call Pierre he said. So Giles called Pierre... Pierre came round. The offer of work or business with Pewter-money makes people move fast.

The first thing to note about Pierre was that Nikka immediately got her knickers in a twist about him... “Oh my goodness,” says Nikka, when he arrives “Is he gorgeous or what? I mean could he be more French?” I thought... *isn't that what she said about Giles but English only yesterday???* No matter... She took a look at his French-ness and went quite wobbly at the knees. And I mean that literally. And I want you all to know that when I say “*Literally*” that I mean it. I can't stand the casual use of “literally”. I may not be the most literate one around here but I have my pet hates, like the next man. And misuse of *literally* is one of them. It makes me literally mad.

In my eyes Pierre wasn't particularly French - not in a caricature Frenchman way at any rate. Nor in my eyes was he especially gorgeous. He didn't have a stripy shirt on and he did have a tattoo or two. But he was pleasant looking and he was genial. The one thing we

⁵ *Did you know that “Pierre” is stone in French, as in rock? Something to do with St Peter from the Bible who has something to do with rock... The same is true of Pedro in Spanish, which though the name sounds like a dog's name, also means rock. Of all the vaguely romance languages, it's only in English that the equivalent name doesn't actually mean rock or stone. C'est la vie...*



all saw about him immediately was his smile. He hardly ever went about without that smile. Even when serious stuff was being discussed, he had a hint of it, just hanging on in there. And normally he had the full smile on. (Jeez and when he laughed it was a sight - and sound - to behold.) This guy just looked happy all the time. Maybe it was that that Nikka liked. Maybe Nikka had a whiff of his French happy *je ne sais quoi*. (Yeah, I know some French.) Maybe that's what we were all missing. So we all met Pierre the pool-man and Nikka started her thing about him. She never commented on Giles or his Englishness again.

So we walk Pierre around the moat, the gardens and the outer estate. Nikka accompanies Pierre, Matt, Giles, Goldie and me. We ask him for suggestions. "OK Gentlemen," Pierre starts. He's talking in English with a very gentle French accent and smiling all the way. "I think that the best thing for you is twice-fold. The first is a large natural swimming lake down there where the meadow-field dips into the valley. There is natural water coming in. And so we dig a lake and line it with... argile, "clay" I think is the English. And we separate the cleaning area with the plants on one side of an underwater wall. And the rest, about 60% of the total, is for swimming. It will be very natural and very restful on the eyes."

"And then I think that for quick speed, you can have one of my special *Pierre Piscine* inventions with a pool in an old shipping container very quickly. I can have this here and installed for you in one week. It can also be very good for the eye. I show you some pictures of my ideas and some I have made before now..."

"So *Pierre Piscine*," I say, "Or *Pete the Pool* as we might say in Englandshire, I think we like the idea of the swimming lake, yes

Matt?” Matt nods, so I continue “but I like the idea of the container pool very much. Sounds pretty cool man. An instant pool. Is it your idea?” Pierre/Pete shows us a few container pools that he’s done before and explains that he’d like to protect the idea and develop it further. He starts to talk about the bank being difficult and we know where he’s going. He can’t get finance for the scheme, to kick start the business. We have all looked at each other and exchanged glances as if to say “we’ve heard that before...” but it was Nikka that jumped in. “We could maybe help..?” she says eagerly, looking hopefully to Matt.

“Let’s hear more about the container pools Pierre” says Matt. So Pete the Pool starts telling us about the linings he’s made to fit both 20ft and 40ft containers. It means that with a day’s work he can deliver a pool and install it. He explains the costs and the work involved and



interestingly for Matt, the profits. He explains about the mobility of the pools and how they can even go on the back of a lorry for jumping-jeez-sake (my exclamation). Lorries are supposed to carry containers.

There were great advantages with these pools and there were even social projects like a Pierre-piscine-pool-lorry to visit remote schools and housing estates.

Matt asked for a few minutes to talk with Nikka and Justin. The three of them walked off for twenty minutes. I chilled with Pool-Man-Pete. He smiled all the time. When Matt came back he was brisk and business-like but also had a smile on his face. Maybe it was Pierre’s smile rubbing off or maybe Matt was just enjoying himself.

“OK Pierre,” Matt starts, flanked by Justin and by Nikka, who does not take her eyes off Pete. “I’m looking for a pool when we return back here in a week and I want the swimming pond ready for the summer. But perhaps more importantly, I’d like to become an investor in your business. I will put up the money to develop your ideas into a real business and I will keep 20% of the company. We will help you with marketing and the company set up. OK? But I want to see a container pool on a truck in a week from today. You said you could do that and I’d like you to bring it to the festival where we’ll be. I presume it can be heated?”

Pete is jaw-droppingly, eye-poppingly gob-smacked. “I feel so lucky,” he says to us all. And turning to Matt “I would like this Mister Matt, very much. I can set up the pools for here and I can have one ready for the lorry, heated, yes. But you will need to help with the costs of the lorry. In all other-wise things, I totally would like to do this please. I welcome your participation.”

As I was getting used to seeing, Justin took over at this point to detail the deals Matt had made. Nikka however stayed at his side while they talked, taking notes⁶. With deals done we got back to the bus for some beers. Boy it’d been a day or two and I needed a sit down to churn it all over in my head. And maybe drink a beer. Maybe two...

Wow, I’m thinking... this is like business and pleasure all rolled up into one crazy but good thing going on here. Matt could really make a go of this. He doesn’t need the money but he does need the engagement with these good folk and their crazy businesses. And they need the

⁶ *I saw her usually schoolgirl-tidy notebook later and I noticed small hearts drawn around the margins...*

money. And they're gonna get a chance to give their ideas a go. What's not to like?!

We decided to camp in the grounds again that night and head off in the morning. We hadn't really got very far towards our festival-engagement and we should hit the road. We would leave Pete here to get going on the pools. But we'd take Giles with us to help speed up the plans for both buying and for restoring Castle Bigballs.

Pete and Nikka hadn't really spoken directly to each other much but it was pretty obvious to us onlookers that they were both quite interested in each other. Despite Pete's perma-smile and Nikka's general confidence they both seemed to be shy around the other. That's a sure sign of attraction in my book. And Nikka neither says nor does anything to let Pete know she very much likes the look of him. And Pete neither lets on nor shows that he could quite like her if only she would give him a sign that she was interested. As Justin had blurted out on our first morning, some of us now suspected that Nikka was indeed still a virgin. There was something about her primness and her caution that said, *I've never had passion in my life*.

Before we get to bed I got Matt alone for a little catch up... I didn't want to wait for the next morning when it would be time to be back on the road. "Hey Matt, how are you feeling? This has been some trip so far..." I say, "I hope that you're not getting carried away." "No, no, no." Matt comes back straight away, "I'm good. You know, TC this IS all quite quick but I like it. I can feel bits of the old Matt dropping by the wayside. And I'm pretty relaxed - which is the big surprise because we're doing some crazy stuff here. I'm not worried about it. The only thing that worries me is that I'm not worried about it."

"It all feels a bit like what I imagine when people talk about holiday romances. You know the magic that seems possible when you're not

at home or in your own environment. But for me it's falling for this *what the hell* attitude. Not a romance as such. Not yet..."

I said that doing business with Pete had certainly put a smile on his face... And obviously Castle Bigballs was a mighty big adventure. But I guess that the money side was no worry for him.

Matt, who hardly ever paused to think, like he'd already got there, said quickly in response "You know the curious thing, TC, is that I never talk about myself or how I feel... Normally when asked by about anything personal, I clam up, go slow and I start to lose my usual ability to converse properly. But this experience is starting to loosen me up considerably. Something of that holiday romance feeling is affecting all those areas of my life that you mentioned when we first met. Look what's happening: my domestic life is getting much more exciting and on the engaging work front, I've invested or supported two businesses so far and that feels rewarding. And on the friends front, I feel more comfortable with you guys and even with Giles and Pierre than I ever do with the rich guys all conferencing, or even when we're all skiing."

"The only bit that's missing from your formula TC, is the love interest..." he concludes slightly less positively, for obvious reasons

"And you know TC, I have a feeling that this small business start-up problem that we keep confronting may be the germ of a serious project. It could be good business. It could be a whole new business for me. So you can't say that this is all about frippery and indulgence. Some of it is really quite positive in the real world. I'm going to speak to Alan about that in the morning and see if we can't do something more formally. He'll be helpful and maybe he can set up a meeting for me with our bankers, the French branch of the bank that is. I may see what I can pull off. I think it's worth giving it a go, don't you TC?"

/Cavalcade: Band Bus, White RR, 2xOutriders, Giles/

Chapter 6: Meet Dong and the Zebras

It's the next morning and it's time to leave the Château. And yeah, it is a big deal all over again to get the band up and ready - even with the Matt/Justin/Nikka efficiency machine helping us all along. The whole process is slowed down a bit because there's a discussion about who goes with who... Giles has phoned his boss and has resigned already. So he's joining the group and Matt wants to talk to him today, in the car. And Matt needs Justin with him in the Rolls too - especially for the discussion with Alan. This puts pressure on the space in the Rolls, because there are phones and laptops, chargers, bags and cases, papers and all sorts... plus the people.

I look through the window of the Roller before we're ready to set off, while they're loading up and getting in and out... "You know for a big car, this ain't so big. I think that I've got more space to breathe in my dressing gown. Nikka darling, why don't you ride with us today? Problem solved. And Matt, why don't you think about stretching the old Silver Lady." I added the last bit in an attempt at humour and it was in no way meant to be a real life suggestion...

Bingo and blow me sideways... before we set off, Matt has talked to Justin who hops out to speak to Pete the Pool to see if he knows someone who stretches cars. They then get Pete/Pierre to phone this stretch limo guy and they book the car in for a 48-hour stretch job. From tonight...

"Well, we will need a driver too," says Matt by way of an explanation. None of them want to drive and to have to think about all the various projects and make phone calls and so on all at the same time. *Hellfire*,

I thought, I'd better keep my mouth shut from now on. "Furry muff!"⁷
 I exhale, on my way back to the bus.

So Nikka joins us on the bus, sitting next to Goldie at the front. She looks out of the bus window back at Pete, as we drive off. Goldie sees this. I see Goldie watching Nikka and I think *Goldie's going sort that one out too... Bless!* I overhear Nikka say later in the middle of a hushed chat with Goldie, "The next time I meet a guy I like, I'm..." ... but I miss the end.

Next stop is about 40 miles up the road. This is where the stretch-limo man is going to fix up the Roller. He's promised to fix it up in the agreed 48 hours which I can't believe. But then I can't believe how everything happens so fast when these guys sort stuff out. Money doesn't just talk, it says "you can do this if you want to and if that means fast, then fast it is."

Listen, I know that money doesn't buy happiness. You know you just got to remember how this whole tale started in the bar. Matts got the money. I got the happiness. But Matt's money does make things easy. He'd probably say it "facilitates" things. So don't get me wrong, I'm not changing my tune but I am amazed to see what money can buy. And hey, Matt's had a smile on his face for 24 hours now...

I also find out later that day that they've spoken to Alan the Accountant and between them, they've set up the meeting with the big balls bankers in Paris (no less) ~ just two days after the music festival. *More fun and games*, I think.

⁷ As in "fair enough".

But first we have to manage the 40 miles to the next town, find the stretch-limo man, have lunch of course and then get on a bit closer to our festival gig site. That was the plan anyway...

But nothing in this tale is quite like that. Stuff still happens, even when you've got the Pewter machinery with you...

We managed 39 miles. But when we arrived on the edge of the town, the first thing we saw after the Welcome sign was a protest blocking the road, filling the route. There were dozens of banners, hundreds of protesters and half a dozen camera crews from news channels including TV news from France and from abroad. As we got closer, we work out that there's a zoo at the centre of the protest. We can't get the through the blocked road so we park our little convoy and get out and walk into the melee to see what's going on.

Apparently there are two protests going on... One lot are trying to stop this old zoo from closing down and the other lot are protesting about the zoo's treatment of caged animals – and they want it closed. From what I can make out there's a muddle of who wants what and to be honest, I can't quite make it out. I ask Goldie what she makes of it and she agrees that there seems to be at least two sides but the gist is that the zoos going to be closed and that something has to be done



with the animals. So the protesting is all a bit academic. There's a fair amount of pushing and shoving and to-ing and fro-ing and the only space is further back where the TV news lot are. They're set up across the square and they're all busy interviewing protesters or busy reporting to camera. Some wonderfully distracting people suddenly run into the middle of everything. They're all body-painted up as animals, disrupt

the reporters and join the throng. They look naked under the paint. It's crazy time...

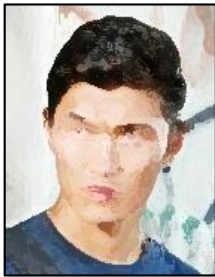
"I just hope that we don't end up buying a zoo now," I say to Goldie. "No I doubt it," she says, "But quick, let's talk to that guy... Over there, that guy who's just been interviewed. He may know what's going on."

We wave at the others to say that we'll be over there and to meet us for a drink later at the café across the other side of the square. We make our way through and catch the guy who's just leaving the *TVGauche* stand. "Hi," I say, "TC, Goldie," by way of introduction... "Say, you look like you know what's going on here. What's happening? Can you tell us?"

"Hi, I'm Dong" he bounces back to us. "Yeah, I sort of know what's going on but it's a mad situation, a bad situation," he says. "This would not be allowed to happen in China. I am Chinese by the way." It's a fair point to make as he speaks perfect English. "Listen, I've been here all morning and I'm starving. I'm a vegetarian but if I weren't, I'd say that I could eat a horse. So I have to go and eat so sorry... Or maybe, we can carry on in the café, while I eat and I'll tell you?" So we walk over to the café. The only ones from our gang who are there already are Buzz and Cookie and the girls who had presumably woven through the crowds on the bikes and presumably had given a ride to Blackie and Whitie, who were sat with them. We said hello and introduced Dong but we sat on another table to give the four of them and the three of us a little bit of privacy and a bit of quiet respectively. We all had things to talk about.

"Dong, before we go any further, please can we get the name issue out of the way?" I say, setting myself up for the obvious joke to follow. "Yes, I remember that you are TC and this is Goldie. What issue?" says Dong.

He knows what's coming and he's smart enough to head it off at the pass... "Well, first of all Dong, it's great to meet a young, regular looking Chinese man." He was in fact a very good looking guy. "There's nothing caricature about you, you're smart, good looking and speak perfect English. So there's nothing about you to take the piss out of... But the name Dong! Why the name..? Why did you choose such a name, man?!"



"OK," says Dong acknowledging both the partial flattery and the potential joke in the name. "It's only the English and the Americans who joke about the name. The Europeans don't have that word. It actually means *From the East* which is fairly appropriate here in Europe. And as it's my name, I don't plan to change it. And I didn't choose my name, my parents did. So Mr. TC, does that answer your question?" "Fair-does Dong," I reply and extend my hand for one of those friendly conciliatory handshakes that bar people do and business people don't do. "And in tribute to your eminent sensibleness and in recognition of the fact that we've only just met, I'm not even going to mention the *Which Kung Fu that?* joke..."⁸

"Enough TC," says Goldie, gently. "Dong, please tell us about the zoo and how you came to be here. Are you involved in the zoo?"

"Well I came to Europe to study further degrees. I am an environmental biologist and I have two degrees from China. Once in Europe, I became involved in the animal rights world, especially in the ivory trade. You see, I am not your regular stereotype, TC. My

⁸ *Do I need to tell that joke too? OK, it's the old blind guy in the TV series (1970's.?) who is blinded because some kid threw one of those metal star things at him. Being blinded, all he can ask is "Which kung fu that?"*

main interest here is the treatment of zoo animals but I also care about the way that exotic animals are abused in the West (as well as in the East). I would like to rescue all the zoo animals, but that unfortunately is impossible. My father who is a very rich man back in China has cut me off because of my position on things that he thinks foolish and wrong in his way of thinking. He thinks I should have more respect for the way things are and of my elders' opinions. If he was behind me or if I had made my own fortune, I would make a sanctuary for these animals. It seems quite easy to rescue donkeys or dogs in this country. People give much money for these things. But these zoo animals are much more involved and the general public cares much less for them. And they give much less. So there is no easy way to help."

"Dong," I say, "We may just have a solution for you, but I need to talk to my friend Matt. Let me go and find him..." I wander off back into the crowd to find Matt who hasn't yet made it to the café. I leave Dong chatting with Goldie. As I cross the square, I meet the reporter from *TVGauche*, who had been interviewing Dong earlier. A very nice looking lady she was too. So she's trying to get my attention, followed by her cameraman.

She waves and gesticulates for me to hold on. "Excuse me!" she says as she approaches me, "Did I see you with Mr Pewter before?" "Yes you did," I say. And she asks me if he'd like an interview. Now, being a member of a working band, publicity has always been a good thing. So of course I agree on Matt's behalf and say that I'll set it up. In fact, I'm quite chuffed to have been helpful in this way. "You'd best find us I the morning at whatever the best hotel in town is", I tell her. I don't know where this is but I'm guessing that we're not getting out of here today. And Matt will be hotel-ing it again. "Fantastique," she says, "Please tell Mr Pewter that I, Gigi Rose that is, will be there at ten O'clock in the morning. I will find which hotel. Thank you..."

Monsieur... what is your name..?” “It’s TC”, I say “And I’ll tell him. And thank you.”

When I find Matt with Justin and Nikka a few minutes later and tell them about the interview, Matt is not pleased: Nor is Nikka. “TC, I usually look after all Matt’s public and press relations. You really shouldn’t have done that. We don’t know what she’ll be asking. I have no way of prepping for that. Please don’t do it again. We’ll have to do it Matt, I’m afraid, now or else she’ll hound you.” “No, TC,” agreed Matt, “You shouldn’t have done that.” He looked serious and I took the telling off as seriously as they meant it. “Sorry Guys,” I said. “I just thought all publicity is good right?” “Not in our business TC.” said Nikka. “Not with Mademoiselle Rose,” added Matt...

Back at the café with a quiet Matt and a slightly miffed Nikka... I introduce Matt to Dong. Matt has the good grace to put his poor mood (since I told him about the GiGi interview) to one side. I told you... he’s a good guy. And bigger than just his own self.

So I leave them to talk over Dong’s interest and of course Matt offers help. When I joined them after their chat, Justin is on the phone to Giles asking about acres or hectares or whatever and they’re talking fencing and so on. It turns out that Dong particularly wants to rescue the zebras. If he can house them, he can have them, says the zoo. Matt has said to Dong he can have however many fields or hectares rent free for six months at Château Bouilles. After that the animal enterprise has to wash its face. Matt doesn’t want a profit from this venture but he doesn’t want it to be a cost either. All the wheels are set in motion immediately.



Dong has a safari striped truck which can carry the four zebras. Blackie and Whitie are delighted with this new venture and they trot off with Dong and Justin to sort out the new additions to our crew. “Let’s call one *Spot* and the other *Red*, just to confuse them” says Whitie. Justin is telling them his only zebra joke as they walk off... “So the horse says to the zebra, take your pyjamas off baby and I’ll show you a good time.” I like that joke and save it for later for Goldie... I didn’t see Dong laugh though, he just gave a polite smile.

Matt asks Nikka to sort out a hotel for them and we park up the bus on the edge of town. But before we split up for the night, Matt asks us all to the hotel for a special meet to prepare for the meeting. *Oh my giddy Aunts got her tits caught in the mangle*, I think... it’s all because I set up the horse-shitting interview with Gigi Rose from *TVGauche*. Now we all have to work out what Matt has to say and prepare. Though why they need us for that, I wondered...

But of course I was completely on the wrong track... Read on...

Chapter 6ii; Prep for the Bank Meeting

So off we all trot at half past five that evening to a meeting room at their hotel where Matt is ready to chair his meeting. As I said, I thought this was all about the TV interview. But being Matt, he was thinking further ahead...

Matt is sitting at the front and we’re all sitting around. It’s a bit like a business meeting but it’s not that bad. Matt keeps it friendly, sensible and productive so it’s not too off-putting for us novices in the world of high-powered pow-wows...

“So,” Matt calls us all to attention, “Thank You all for coming. As you all know, we all embarked on a bit of an adventure only days ago. Since then things have gone pretty crazy on some fronts but the serious side has really grabbed my attention. There are some pretty big opportunities out there in the world of small business. In just a few days we’ve met Buzz and Cookie, Pete, Dong (just today), and the man who is, as we speak, stretching the Rolls wants to expand his business too and set himself up properly (as *Limousin Limousines* apparently!) This is in addition to having met Giles who doesn’t quite fall into the same criteria but who might have started something up if we hadn’t arrived. Now what all these people have in common, is that they can’t get start-up or expansion finance, money that is, for their businesses. And what is stopping them? It’s the banks.”

“Now as you may all know, I have a lot of money. And I want to keep it that way, though I do have enough to get involved. But I’m not going to do all this alone. I’ve started the process but there is much more to it than that. The banks have to give it a go too but they need encouragement. So we’re meeting with my bank’s French head office. With all my money and with a fair amount of influence, we can put pressure on this bank. We’re meeting with them after the festival. And I want some help from some of you please.”

“I know that this area is my territory but I want to signal to the bank that this is all new. It’s going to be challenging as it’s slightly different. And I want your help. So I want to go to Paris and meet with these very serious gentlemen (and rest assured that there won’t be many ladies there, I’m guessing) and as my friend TC might say, I want to *fuck with their heads*. [Some shock from the assembled folk at this language.] Let’s face it, they should want to go with it or else I pull my money from their bank and all my money-friends will do so too. So I

want to have some fun with them. And as I say, I want to signal some real changes.”

“So I have a starter list of what I want to happen at the bank meet...

1. Nikka, we’ve already discussed the look for the “Just Give it a Go Finance Co.” For those of you who haven’t heard about this yet, it’s going to have a big colourful rainbow feel about it. Cheerful banking for a change. It’s going to be colourful like the band, so thank you for that.
2. Nikka, I want *Just Give it a Go* pennants on the bikes and I’d like all the presentation materials to use the new colour look
3. Justin, you’re preparing the background documents, OK?
 - a. Alan wants to come over for this meeting by the way but I’ve said *No*. He’s not ready...
 - b. Justin, you’re going to handle all and any money matters and details, OK. You can always check with Alan as we go along, but this is your baby
4. I want a Marshall Patrol escort for the arrival at the bank.
 - a. We need an escort of four bikes, and that means that you guys have to have two new extra riders by Monday. I want them to have been previously unemployed. OK? Good.
 - b. Nikka has been working with you guys on your livery and that’ll be ready for the four of you. I want two of you in the meeting, whilst the other two stay outside with the newly stretched Rolls *[Matt smiles at the thought.]*
5. And Nikka, I want their Marshall Patrol website to be ready before the meet, OK? Good. We’re going to use it as an example

6. I am going to abandon my grey sartorial elegance. Nikka, I'd like a colourful shirt please. Yes, I know, "Shock, Horror!"
7. TC, I'd like you there please, in a suit which Nikka will organise. Again, I know, "Shock, Horror!"
8. And I'd like Blackie and Whitie too. In the meeting. I'll explain that nearer the time. Nikka will sort your clothes too
9. Goldie, and the rest of the band, you're welcome to come but I don't know at the moment what you bring to the party. Maybe you guys can just come and enjoy Paris and look after the bus
10. I've asked Pierre to bring the pool truck if it's ready
11. Dong, you and the zebras and Giles, you should come to the festival but then you'd better get back to the chateau. Paris is no place for zebras. But Dong and Giles I'd like you to flesh out some animal rescue numbers for Justin, just in case we need them for the bank."

"The band has its own prep for the festival. We'll handle everything for the meet. I just wanted to bring you all up to speed. OK, that's it from me... Any ideas?"

/Cavalcade: Band Bus, White RR, 2xOutriders, Giles, Dong and Zebras/

Chapter 7: The Interview. Not So Good...

*[For those of you who don't know the next song, you can hear **I Say a Little Prayer for You** sung by Aretha Franklin here: <https://youtu.be/STKkWj2WpWM> . And the lyrics are as follows:*

The moment I wake up/Before I put on my makeup/I say a little pray for you/While combing my hair now/And wondering what dress to wear now/I say a little prayer for you.

Forever and ever, you'll stay in my heart/And I will love you/Forever and ever, we never will part/Oh, how I love you/Together, forever, that's how it must be/To live without you/Would only mean heartbreak for me.

I run for the bus, dear/While riding I think of us, dear/I say a little prayer for you/At work I just take time/And all through my coffee break time/I say a little prayer for you

Forever and ever, you'll stay in my heart/And I will love you/Forever and ever, we never will part/Oh, how I love you/Together, forever, that's how it must be/To live without you/Would only mean heartbreak for me.

I'd love to see this scene like this if this were a film... where we'd cut between seeing the band in practice/rehearsal session doing the above song and seeing GiGi Rose getting ready and putting on her make-up, to coincide with the lyrics. And cutting to Matt getting up and not looking his best - during the chorus and the mentions of heartbreak. Cutting back to GiGi in the outside broadcast van on the way to the hotel, drinking coffee, waiting for Matt to arrive, etcetera... you get the idea... all very filmic... He arrives in the band rehearsal scene...]

We're having a band rehearsal. I'm not really needed in this song. It's a girl's song: The girls and Goldie have it covered, but the song is finishing as Matt interrupts, abruptly: *Interruptly* you could say... if you were in the business of making-up new words. He was shouting to me... "TC, come on, you're in this. You started it. You can come and watch the car-crash interview and then pick me up afterwards!" The song finishes... I hop out of rehearsal to go with Matt.

Matt hasn't prepared much for this interview. This is mainly because he was with his people last night working through all the details of the bank meet, after he'd given us all that little talk in the evening. We'd all left to go to the hotel bar but he looked worse for wear than I did for a change. He seemed to have lost a little of the glow that he'd had for the last few days. This interview seemed to be getting to him.

The interview is in a small meeting room in the hotel basement and I walk down there with Nikka and Matt. Nikka is fussing with Matt and trying to give him last minute tips about relaxing and taking control of the interview. She tells him that he's done this hundreds of times and that he's good at it. He looks nervous to me. Neither Nikka, nor Matt have yet told me that Matt has been interviewed before by this reporter and that she has it in for him big time...

We go in. Matt is unusually nervous. I punch his shoulder... "Give her hell, big boy," I say, still not aware of how badly this could go. Nikka, brushes his hair and his jacket and she and I stand to one side behind the camera...

Off we go. The camera man counts it down...three... two... (and a silent *One* and *Go...* with his fingers only)

“Good Morning. Today I’m with American Billionaire Matthew Pewter, one of the architects of what many commentators call *anti-social media*” She then turns from the camera to Matt.



“Mr Pewter, I understand that after selling out from your previous business which helped to turn many nations’ children and young adults into anti-social screen addicts, that you’re now turning your time over to simply spending your wealth in the most absurd and frivolous manner but entirely in character – what with your history of making a zero contribution to the real world?”

“Hello Ms Rose,” he started positively and cheerfully. “And thank you and *TVGauche* for talking to me this morning.” That’s my boy, I thought. Bright and breezy. But GiGi was straight back in there...

“Well we’re very grateful that you have the time. I understand that you spent yesterday buying zebras. And as we speak, I understand that your new Rolls Royce luxury motorcar is being stretched for you as it wasn’t big enough for you and your friends.?”

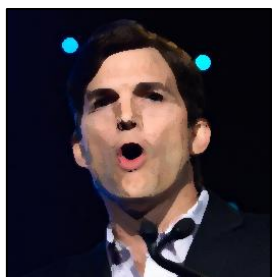
“Go on...” says Matt. And I realise that he’s not going to rise to any of this but Nikka does not look comfortable. She knows that he has a long way to go to *take control*. Matt looks a smidge resigned while GiGi is speaking.

“I can see that your rich smug playboy position is not going to be tarnished by your having bought a chateau recently with over one hundred bedrooms. Do you really need another house, Mr. Pewter? And if so, do you really need over one hundred bedrooms? And that your new friends seem to be Hells Angels and a rock band on tour. Are you setting a good example Mr. Pewter?”

He knew this was going to be tough. I don't want him to look like one of those business guys on TV, always on the back foot. But he stayed with the program...

"You know Ms Rose, I could explain to you about my new European project helping small businesses but it's early days at the moment. And I could explain that the Château is derelict and that no-one in France is prepared to take it on and that I shall be saving a valuable piece of French history from ruin and that I shall be running my business from there..." Matt comes back calmly. But you can hear in his voice that he is genuinely hurt by her attacks...

"You mean that you are turning a beautiful French ancestral home into something corporate from where you can make more money?" attacks GiGi, changing tack to keep up the volley of abuse.



"No," says Matt, "I said that I could explain but I won't bother, if you don't let me have some time to speak - I had imagined that you asked me here to talk? But it doesn't seem so..." GiGi opens her hand to say, Go on then... Matt continues "But I won't explain because I don't feel that you're interested. You attack me yet

you and your TV station are no better or worse than other businesses that I have run to date, so please don't get righteous with me." *[He looks slightly sheepish to be the one attacking now.]*

Matt pauses... "I'm planning a new project with small businesses who can't get a break because of the big banks' and the big businesses' attitude. The same banks and businesses who advertise on your TV channel. And they advertise because you have enough people watching, in turn because of your sensationalist tabloid-style news

which incidentally has no shades and no depth.” Matt’s voice is rising...

He starts to pull off his microphone and to leave the interview. But instead he begs a question of this tormenting angel, “You may be a beautiful woman and I know you are intelligent, and you may have many followers out there, but all your efforts are going into shallow attacks on something that you haven’t investigated properly. Have you ever thought of helping people, supporting them, encouraging them or is your only position one of knocking people down? Especially successful people. Have you ever tried to be decent or positive yourself? Have you ever tried to give that a chance?”

Matt puts up his hand to stop her answering. She is taken aback somewhat. Matt continues, “When you interviewed me last time, although critical of our work and product, I gave you the benefit of the doubt as I thought you were making some fair points. But now I think that you are just out to attack anything and everything that I say or do. That’s poor journalism Miss Rose... And I was previously quite impressed by you.”

She looks confused... Matt finishes, “I want you to talk to me in six months when I’ve got this project under way and when you’ve had a chance to examine the facts and possibly yourself or your motives or those of your tabloid news company, Ms Rose. Thank you.” And then he takes off his microphone and leaves and GiGi makes a flustered end to wrap up the interview – without the interviewee – to try to retain her dignity and hide her surprise.

“Boy-Oh-Boy”, I say to Matt as we whisk out of the room, with Nikka who is fuming. I am so amazed by the interview’s showdown that I can’t even swear with any profanity! We continue to whisk ourselves through the corridors and out the front door of the hotel. Once you

start to whisk and be brisk, you have a momentum to use up. But as the pace slowly slows outside, we have nowhere to go or nothing to do but slow down and so we eventually plump ourselves down, to sit in the garden.

“Hey Matt,” I stutter to fill the uncomfortable silence, “I’m sorry to have got you involved in. But I sure am impressed by your... by your taking her on.” I say. I know that Nikka wants to blame me but my apology has taken away her opportunity and she shrugs. We all three stare into space for a while.

“You know what?” says Matt, and looks at Nikka and I with raised eyebrows for twenty seconds... “that’s the woman that I had the almighty crush on. That’s the reporter that Giles got to the Château. I wanted her to see me with it all restored and beautiful. I wanted to impress her. Instead she attacks me for malicious rubbish that’s not even close to the truth and she didn’t listen or even want to know about the new things that we’re starting. I feel stupid and let down. And angry.”

“Well,” Nikka says, “In actual fact I think that you did quite well. I think that that little interview will be good for you. But Matt..., I’m sorry about GiGi. I didn’t realise...”

“Yeah man, I’m sorry too.” I added. “Why didn’t you give us the heads up on who the secret chick was...?”

“Oh that was in the old days, at least a week ago,” said Matt half joking, starting to thaw. “My goodness, what a long way we’ve come in these few miles...”

Changing the subject slightly I want to ask Matt some things while he’s a bit open... “Listen Matt, I want to thank you for those few days and

those few miles. This giving it a go thing isn't all one way you know. I'm getting a lot from you. You know you're a pretty game guy. Much more game than I'd have thought from the way you were back in skisville..."

I really want him to appreciate this, "Matt, it's not just your money that gets this stuff going, it's your enthusiasm and conviction. You're an amazing guy."

"Thanks TC," says Matt, "You know I never said that I wasn't an enthusiast. It's just that my efforts were only focused on business success regardless of whether I enjoyed it. I'm now starting to use my enthusiasm in a new direction that's engaging me more than anything. That's why I seem like such an instant convert. I just needed the cause..."

"... And I've never used any of that enthusiasm in my personal life. I guess I didn't have the time ~ or the will. And perhaps I wasn't imaginative enough to think that enthusiasm and guile could help. I thought that being clever about your own life was cheating."

"Shit Matt," I said. "What are you going to do now? And what do you think about Miss Rose now or what you want to do about it? Can I help: Can we help. I mean as I ..."

Matt considered whether to be candid, especially in front of Nikka, but decides to be. "To be honest Matt., Nikka, I don't know if I hate her or perhaps have the opposite feelings. I know she attacked me but she was just doing her job, right?"

"Matt, let's get you to talk to Goldie, she'll know what to do. She's an angel when it comes to these things. Now I have a little errand to do,

so I'll catch you later. We're going to leave here today, right? OK let's plan to leave at 12. See you out front."

"Yeah, sure," says Matt, "I'm going to take a little walk. See you later."

[Music: I hear the band playing; I'm Not in Love: an old 10cc song. It fits like a glove at this point... Click here: <https://youtu.be/2rgepWg4rzw>]

My little errand involved sprinting back down the corridors to try to catch *MistressGiGi of TVGauche*. I saw her leaving out the back and called out "Hey Miss Rose, Madame! GiGi!" She stopped. "Have you got a minute?" She nodded. "Listen, you really shouldn't have done that. I've taken some shit for that interview, s I set it up and you have Matt all wrong. He's even just defended you for *"Only doing your job"*. He's that nice a guy. I don't know what you have on him but he is deeply upset by that... by you, you know."

"No," she says "I don't know what you mean. Do you mean personally? You know Mister TC, I do feel bad about that attack... and it was poorly researched if what Mr Pewter says is true. I would like to give him another chance. Did he mean it about the six months for another interview?"

"Yes, Yes and Yes," I replied. "He's planning some seriously good shit, you know and you might be interested. But you have to do your homework properly, OK. And be nice to him. Could you do that?" "Yes, I can Mister TC. Please will you, if you think that you can phrase it well for me, send Mr Pewter my apologies for my "tabloid" attack. I will speak to my editors in the meantime and see if I can do a more positive piece next time. Au revoir. Here is my card."

[Cut to band finishing the song...]

Chapter 8: Virginity and the Loss of...

It seems like an age that we've been trying to get here to our next gig, but we're here... So our tale continues... and our convoy arrives at the festival. We are our own little cavalcade arriving at the festival performers' camp site... Including our band bus, the newly stretched



white RR, four Marshall Patrol outriders, Dong and his zebras in his zebra-striped truck. And hey, surprise, surprise... We attract quite a lot of attention... And that was all

before Pete the Pool and the *Pierre Piscine* arrived...

The camp site is for all the musical acts, dance acts and generally bonkers-whatever acts from all around Europe and from the Whole Wide-World. The site is huge and it's littered with buses, caravans, camper-vans, campers and tents. And people: Loads and loads of people. People from everywhere... in all shades, all nationalities and my giddy-aunt some weird and wonderful costumes.

After we park and settle into our patch we hear a *hello-I'm-here* horn-honking to announce the arrival of Pete the Pool. And the pool! The big white lorry is carrying the prototype *Pierre-Piscine-Pool-Piece-de-Resistance!* As it parks up it's hard for anyone to actually tell what it is. Unless you know, you have to be above it to see what's really going on. It's not yet completely full of water... so it has to be topped up before it's fully operational. But after an hour or so, it's all plugged in to the water supply and into its generator for a bit of heating. By late afternoon (and as soon as Dog starts splashing around in the pool),

people start to cotton on about the Pete-Pool-Mobile and slowly there's a drift of the curious and of the friendly towards us and our amazing pool.



Some people jump straight in: Others go off to get their swimming togs. The thing is an instant and an amazing success. Our little bit of the world at this world festival camp site becomes the hot spot. Performers and crew

and hangers on just flood round to get a look ~ or to get a swim. Now, we're always quite popular at these kind of events... but the pool and the super-stretch Rolls (and the zebras of course) make us the superstar destination. Beers flow and the party mood is growing. We're all in holiday heaven with knobs on...

Well nearly all of us... Matt is settling down and is not quite so visibly upset about GiGi. A little bit of the camp-site mood rubs off on him. I didn't tell him *all* about my chat but I did say that I'd bumped into her (GiGi, who else am I talking about?) and that she'd asked me to say that she was truly sorry for being quite so ferocious and unnecessarily so. Matt had taken this with some comfort.

Matt was now getting busy doing some drawings and planning with Justin and Giles. He was good at compartmentalising his life and nothing stopped him getting on with things. He did at least have a beer. Bless!

Nikka had been surprisingly bright and breezy since we had arrived. She had talked to GiGi on the phone and she had put the interview behind her... She had not forgiven GiGi for the last interview but she

felt more relaxed having heard GiGi's tone of voice on the phone. And she was pleased to have sorted out the next interview to set the record straight. They had set out provisional dates and some definitive rules of engagement! She and Matt had caught up on this part of the situation. But that obviously hadn't or didn't cover the Matt-has-a-crush-on-Gigi side of things.

Matt hadn't yet had his GiGi-chat with Goldie. Goldie knew about my chat with GiGi though... and unusually, she had praised me for that. I may be an arse but my heart is in the right place. Goldie, like everyone else it seemed, hadn't been too pleased with me for setting up the interview in the first place... Hell, I'm just the singer and bus-driver.

Apart from the pool, Dong was also quite an attraction: Himself and his zebras. He was talking to a Chinese dance troupe and some Brazilians. And the zebras, now out of the truck and grazing in a temporary pen behind the bus, were making their own friends and admirers. Zebras, it seemed, were even better than a dog in a city park for attracting and making new friends...

Goldie and I walk away from the party pool zone to have a little time... We chat as we wander aimlessly, holding hands. Shoot me if I ever stop wanting to hold Goldie's hand. Goldie said that she'd talk to Matt later about GiGi but meanwhile, according to Goldie, Nikka had fallen head over heels for Pete the Pool. He was of course here now. The trouble was that Nikka had perversely made other plans. And these plans involved having a good time at the festival but just not with Pete. Goldie said that she had advised Nikka against this plan or at least cautioned her... but to no avail. Nikka's plan was to declare herself to Pete in a few weeks but not yet. She had plans, plans that involved making herself more of "a complete woman". She said she wanted to practice (just a little bit, she said) so that when she turned

her love and attention to Pete he'd see the whole woman... he'd get the whole woman. The words *Recipe* and *Disaster* came to mind but Goldie felt that things would work out and, as I've said before⁹ she knows best in these matters.

While we walked around the site we met and said hello to some of the other bands and the other acts. Most were of the folk or "national" variety. There were a lot of national dress costumes at any rate. We seemed to be the only regular rock band. We were here, I guess, as typically "English". Old school ~ but not folk-old, more late 20th Century old. There was also another UK element here... some Morris Dancers... Not our cup of tea but it takes all sorts and that was what this festival was all about.

I won't trouble you with all the folk (as I now thought of them) that we met. Suffice to say they were pretty varied and some of them were



pretty weird. Some of the strangest and the most interesting of them all were the stilt-walkers from the French Landes region. These guys apparently used stilts in the flat swamp lands in the old days. The shepherds used them so they could see further across the swamps. Regular folk used them to be able to walk across the swamps. I don't know what the ones without

stilts did...? Waded? Boated? Now of course, since the whole area has been drained and became forested¹⁰ there's no need for stilts. And I guess they have cars and roads now... But the tradition lives on... but nowadays only really at folk lore level and at folk festivals and fairs. So

⁹ *Did I say this before? Even if I didn't, you know what I mean. Goldie has the golden touch for knowing what will work or not...*

¹⁰ *The re-forestation was supposed to be to preserve the land. It was planted with coastal pine trees - or maritime pine - Pinus Pinaster. I looked this up later...*

there's these guys standing around on hand-held stilts about six foot in the air and when they perform they walk, dance and then walk some more, I guess. Nice guys though.

As we left this group of stilted Frenchies, we see Nikka walk up to them to start a chat. One of them gets down off his stilts to talk to her. And that, my friends, is the last we see of her for the next how-ever-many hours! I'll tell you more later...

So that's enough scene setting. You know all the important bits that we need to carry our story along. You don't really need to know more. This isn't a travel guide after-all. Shit-on-a-stick though, it was a pretty place... The town was all decked out head to toe. (Should that be roof to pavement...?) Crowds of tourists and locals and visitors were everywhere. On every corner there was a troupe doing their thing. Goans or Peruvians or Morris Dancers... No road traffic: The whole place was festival-city this weekend. With food and drink and flags and music and a lot of drumming and fairy lighting and happy laughs in the air. All weekend there was that happy sound effect just above all the general hubbub. It was the sort of laughing that you can only get when thousands of people are gathered for something really lively like this...



Beyond the streets there were two or three bigger stages. We were on tomorrow night on the main stage in a circus big top, as the second to last act. We could relax and enjoy the rest of the festival until then.

The camp site was across one of the town's bridges, in the meadows down by the river edge. It was all very idyllic, very French and very

festive. We were very much at home. And we had a day to enjoy ourselves as long as we got one good rehearsal done before tomorrow.

When we get back to the bus, I call a rehearsal. I'm trying to think of a good number for our finale tomorrow night. I can't think of anything new so we run through our regular set. Matt and Justin sit in for the rehearsal. Matt makes approving noises and Justin seems to be impressed as we play. I guess they'd got used to our disarray.

I call down to Justin, asking him, as he's there, could he please make himself useful by getting a few beers for us and one for himself and Matt ~ if they so choose. Justin comes back with the beers and as he hands mine over, he complements the band. I thank him on the two counts (the beer and the compliment) and hop down to stand with him and chink our bottles with a "santé/cheers/salud and up your bum!" I wave to the band to carry on. I'm still trying to think of a song that I think would work here...

I sit with Matt and Justin and Matt nods his approval. "You know," I say to them, "We may be a bunch of beer-y booze-heads but we're a tight band. When we rehearse, we're efficient and when we're on stage we're good. Getting up and getting to the venues, we're a bit sloppy but once we're here it's different. It's why we always get gigs ... because we're a tight band and musically we're friggin' ace! Tight as a virgin's arsehole. Sorry Nikka, no offence..," I say looking around for Nikka but she's not there of course. She's still off with the fair-ground stilt walkers... Justin sniggers at the reference anyway.

"Talking of being tight and getting things done," says Matt, as he gets up to leave, "I have work to do. See you later TC. It's a good band. Maybe you should write something of your own, you know. Justin,

please don't forget the leaflets. Where is Nikka by the way?" We both shrug.

Goldie joins Justin and me and we three start to chat. Justin tells us about the leaflets. He's full of beans... like an eager eager-thing... Nikka was supposed to be organising the leaflet distribution but she hadn't reappeared since we saw the stilt man get off his stilts...

So Justin steps in and he organises the giving out of the leaflets. Everybody, the audience, the locals, the public, the whole festival will get one. The leaflets themselves ask anyone interested in starting or generally interested in supporting small businesses to email info@bigballsbanque (I've changed the name to "protect their identity") The message to email are just the words "Just Give It A Go" or in French simply "*L'essayer*"

When Justin is back from all the initial leaflet-drop, Goldie and I share another beer with him. He's grown on me a lot and Goldie, well, she likes everybody. We both compliment him on his enthusiasm. We've obviously hit a button... he's been thinking about this and he starts off (enthusiastically) explaining where he is at the moment. He has embraced the *Give It A Go* idea because it fits with what he's always felt.

He's in love with the idea of doing stuff that makes sense in the moment. He's had a tough life growing up less than middle-of-the-road. He's not a macho guy and I guess he was bullied or at least teased a lot as a kid. He explains that through everything in his life he loves to do what feels right but is often seen as wrong by the majority. He does nothing, he says, because everyone else is doing it. That attitude sucks.

He starts another beer (enthusiastically) and continues “People always used to do the things that either other people already did – especially in boring old business. *Balls achingly boring!*” he says and he looks to me to approve of his swearing”. I tip my bottle to him as an encouragement... “That’s why I wanted to work for Matt in the new business world. The digital world was so new and different but in due course it got corporate. It quickly became the same. So when we met you guys, I knew that I was going to be on board but I also hoped that it would re-invigorate Matt. He’s bored too but couldn’t see what to do next. He needed this now.”

“My whole life,” says Justin, slowing down a bit, “has been guided by other people doing or telling other people to do stuff that they call “conventional wisdom” But it’s just lacking in imagination. I love what’s happening to Matt because he’s using his imagination again. And his guts, not just cold fiscal judgement. And I’m loving the liberation. I’ve always tried to avoid what other people thought I should do. But sometimes I balked and it just made me odd. Outside of that suited and booted world, with you guys, I feel that doing different stuff is actually rewarded and it’s rewarding. We all feel so much better...”

As he pauses to think about what he’s just said, guess who shows up. Yup, Nikka. And guess some more... what’s been going on? Well if you read the chapter title right, you’d have guessed. And the second that Nikka strolls towards us you can tell. It’s happened. She has become a woman! Goldie nudges me, “Look at the way she’s walking,” Goldie says.

Justin whoops when he sees her and just by looking at her approach we all know what’s happened - even Justin who lives on the other side of the sexual fence... As she approaches she holds up the palm of her

hand. It's like it has a big "NO!" written on it... "Don't ask!" she says. She's not angry with us or our big silly beaming smiles. She knows we know and she doesn't want to get angry with us for wanting the detail or even a confirmation, as such. We all know and we all understand...

She sits down, grabs a beer and starts swigging. She sits and doesn't say anything... She's more feisty. She's more physical. She's more moody and she's more soulful. (Has she had a beer before, I can't remember?)

And, what is it... She's more sexy, dammit!

Now I understand why she wanted to clear out the old cobwebs downstairs... It wasn't for the fact of it or even for the practice. It was so that she was more sexy - more sexy for Pete and for his Frenchness to respond to when the time came...

She sits with us without saying anything for a while. Then she starts talking about the stilts guys. Not particularly about the one she has been with but more generally. About the sheep and the Landes and the swamps. She tells us about the Gascony heritage, how they invented the beret and about the Basque influences... She is proud of her knowledge. She is proud of herself and as she drinks her second beer, she leans into the back of her chair with a whole new body language.



Goldie smiles to her and pats her knee. "Welcome back, my dear," she says to Nikka. It's just the right thing to say.

"Fuck me, that was good!" Nikka suddenly blurts from the quietness. "... Justin, I strongly recommend it. You should try. Not with

Bertrand. But with someone. I'd offer to help myself but I don't think it would be right under the circumstances. Fuck no!" she finishes.

So, that's another recruit to the potty-mouth club. It's like I'm gathering foul-mouthed disciples...

Goldie leans towards our new recruit to the world of beer and bonking and says quite gently "That's good, Nikka. But the swearing, that's bad... It's kind of ugly Darling..."

"Shit a brick!" I jump up, "That's it Goldie, how genius - whether you meant it or not... I got the song we're playing tomorrow night, our big finale number. A real world music number... Billie, Fingers! Girls...! I got jobs for you! Justin, Nikka if you're not leafletting you can help too - or do both at the same time... I'll list what we need..."

I send them off to find us musicians that we need for the finale tomorrow. Jumping Jack Flash and his Big Bollocks it's going to be good. One rehearsal tomorrow is all it'll take. We'll slay them with that finish...!"

Now I'm not telling you what the number is but you'll know soon... First we get through the night. Beers, some exotic weed is smoked by some, lots of new friends around the camp and there's dancing into the small hours under the fairy lights. Heavenly heaven.

Some of the found musicians that we need for tomorrow pop around for an initial chat and we give them beer and ask them to a rehearsal tomorrow, early. Well 2pm...

Pete shuts the pool down at midnight to avoid any silly accidents. Pete and Nikka haven't really caught up yet but I see him watching her... More closely than before. He's seen how she's moving around... He looks like he likes it.

Chapter 8ii: The Big Gig...

This really isn't worth a whole or even half a chapter... It's certainly not even worth putting into the index¹¹... It covers the next morning (we're asleep), lunch (beer and Emmental sandwiches), the rehearsal (in secret) and lolling around until we get to set up in the big top.

Now the big top is a whole other thing... The guys who set it up and will have to take it down when we finish are all talking about the end of the road for their little crew. It sounded like a lot of doom and gloom for them. The big man who owns the big top hasn't paid them recently and he's closing down the tent-renting business...

Step in Justin and Matt. Da daah! Boy these guys are really on the case. It's no surprise then that Matt buys the tent and takes on the three main tent-putter-uppers who will run another new "Give It A Go!" business, based at Chateau Bolleau... Justin and Nikka have to take pictures tonight to include in the bank presentation. None of that lot even seem to have hang overs...

OK, so the big scene of this mini-chapter is our gig. It's in the big top. They've built like a huge Western Bar inside and the whole thing has a glorious end of festival extravaganza feel about it. The place smells of beer and of joy.



¹¹ *Is there an index? The list of Chapters at the beginning... Is it in the index...?!*

We've played the set and so it's time for the finale. Lights out! All dark and silent... I start to whistle in the huge expanse of quiet expectation. That in itself had a certain drama... I'm whistling the intro to *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*... (that's the song) Then the pan pipes (well done to our new friends from Peru) come in and I start the big finale final finalities...

"Ladies and Gents, Mesdames et Messieurs, Signoritas Y Senors, Citizens of the World, The Good, The Bad and even those of you who are maybe just plain old Ugly...We've been the Beverly Hills Colourful Cats Gang and I want to thank you from the heart of my bottom for supporting us tonight and for coming to this piece of Global Gloriousness this weekend." It doesn't matter what I say. People are happy and they know it's the end of a great weekend... They cheer. They whoop. I carry on... The music is building up...

[Hear: Ecstasy of Gold (The Good, The Bad and The Ugly) by Ennio Morricone -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkM71JPHfjk> Or
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhSWF2OYzm8/>

"And to be truly or at least partially worldwide, we are playing our own little tribute to Ennio Morricone... And when I say Ennio Morricone, I don't just mean "Any ol' Morricone..." I leave the rest unsaid. There is a built-in self defeat in that joke...

"And we're joined by *[hear the pan pipes]* Los Trios Sublimos from their Peruvian hill top - all the way from, well Peru! You may have seen them already this weekend. They are fabulously Jose, Jose and Pedro..."

“And all the way from Paris France, our special brass section *[hit the brass]*, Les Trois Trompettes, Jean, Jean and Pierre.” The song is



building up and my girls are starting their amazingly heavenly chorally angelic vocals... They don't do the gruff Western men's "hoo-hah"s as in the original from the film, but a more ladylike version - three octaves up.

“And more hill top travellers, from Tibet, our drummers and our bell ringers *[cue bells, both church bells and little finger cymbals, here and later on in the song...]* please welcome Tenzin, Tashi and Dolma. Welcome guys and thank you for helping us out!”

“And in a minute you're going to hear the mouth organ tones of our Bulgarian guest Borislav... Hold your breath for that in due course...” I have another whistle and the band and our guests play their hearts out... We stretch out the *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* theme and we play for about ten minutes with (it seems like) everyone in the world crowded into the big top, singing the various vocals, melodies and sound effects. I can honestly say (which never bodes well when people say that... but I think it stands here...) that I have never seen so many arms in the air at one of our gigs. The whole world is joining in...

It's a shame that we didn't video it. Even if I say so myself, it was classic. It was world class. It was fun.

We had a ball. The whole gig had been great. We would fade to black *[in our movie version]* as the crowd swayed their way to the end of our performance. Did I see GiGi there, or was that just my fuzzy vision in low lighting?

When we leave in the morning we've grown a new vehicle in our cavalcade, which is not so little anymore. We've been joined by the big top and its own truck.

Some of us are going back to the *Chat on a Matt Castle* and some of us to Paris.

[Cavalcade: Band Bus, White RR, 4xOutriders, Dong + Zebras, Pete's Piscine Lorry, Big Top Wagon] NB Put in helicopter shot of cavalcade here.

Chapter 9: Big Bollocks Banking:

Give It A Go Finance, Part A

I have to say here and now that I've been waiting for ever to tell this part of our story... It's one of the best bits of the whole shebang, the whole long (but quick) tale of ours... It's when we turn up at the bank and these serious square guys all come in and we're sitting there a bit like a weird circus troupe – though Matt and Justin and Nikka are all back in black and pretty squared up themselves. Anyway we sit on one side of this ginormous table and when Matt gets to the key parts of his talk, Blackie and Whitie stand up and he has backing singers in a meeting with a bank! They punctuate what he says by singing back-up vocals at key moments. It's pure magic, I can tell you... It's like the best thing I've ever seen!

Matt is so cool; I mean the guy has backing singers in a business meeting with the squarest of bankers. And it stops them dead. They haven't got a clue! These guys who are so boring, I won't even bother to tell you their names – and you've got to remember that I love recalling names, it's one of my things... They're just a Wunch of Bankers, which is I think, the collective noun in the common parlance of today... And anyway, none of their names were memorable or funny, so sod them. And they all looked the same save for a small age difference. Nameless, faceless, humourless.

To get to the meeting, we have arrived in Paris in the glassy and classy banking district. We pull up in front of this mega-bank building with our four motorcycling escorts decorated with their new rainbow flags for “Just Give it a Go”. The stretch Rolls which is a sight in itself, has got new pennants on the front wings to match. The band bus looks a

bit scruffy but Nikka has had ads made for the side panels to match the rainbow designs. We're a big rainbow cavalcade. Next to all that is the Pete-Pool-Mobile. We're parked in the street outside the bank in a spot so that we can see them all from the meeting room inside.

Nikka has hired a few promo-girls to give out leaflets in the street while we're inside and to add some glamour and glitz along with a couple of rainbow parasols, tables and chairs. It's pretty and it's a pretty jolly looking event.

The guys on the door look a bit like they're not going to let us in. (Is this a protest? Are we from Greenpeace or something similarly evil in their minds?) But someone from upstairs arrives and tells them we're all with M. Pewter and the doors swing open. Matt's money and his reputation is literally opening doors today. I love that. I swagger in the with the gang...

Once inside we set up in a big meeting room. It's on the umpteenth floor and it has big windows along the whole of one side. You can see half of Paris from there but importantly we can look down and see the pool truck and the rest of the rainbow cavalcade – which is all part of the “show” as Justin has started to describe it....

When the boring *Wunch of Bankers* come into the meeting room, they see our two Marshal Patrol marshals (Buzz and Cookie in their MP uniforms with little GIAG¹² badges) standing just inside the door. The head suit says to Matt, as he comes over to shake his hand, but referring to Marshall Patrol, “Are you expecting trouble, Mr Pewter?” “No,” says Matt, “Are you?” It's all a bit frosty from my point of view.

¹² *GIAG becomes the short version of Give It A Go. The whole meeting is to set up GIAG Finance*

Matt suggests that we skip a whole round of introductions and handshakes as this point and that we should get down to business.

There are five of them, all in blue suits and muted ties. They are by the window, sitting in a uniform row like the squarest gang you ever saw...

Matt stands in the centre of our side of the long table. We have Matt (dark suit, white shirt, no tie) in the centre, flanked by Blackie and Whitie (dressed in black and white striped suits – very smart tailored affairs). The head suit acknowledges them with a small head nod and a polite “Ladies...” as a greeting. Outside of the girls are Justin and Nikka (dark suits, white shirts). They get a nod from the head suit too. I’m on the far right (in a beautiful purple suit which makes me look quite respectable). I’m in charge of the music! But no-one knows about the music yet... On the far left is Louis, who is Mister Limousin Limousines himself and who has driven the Rolls today. He is in full chauffeur uniform and he doesn’t take off either his shades or his chauffeur cap for the whole meeting. He’s kind of cool for a mechanic-cum-engineer. There are seven of us. At least if there’s a fight, we outnumber the suits.

Justin has set up a laptop on the table in front of him. Apparently we’re going to have Alan the Accountant on speakerphone. Alan had wanted to come over from NY for this meeting but Matt had said not. “No, Alan, we’ve got it covered...” Matt said when they discussed it last week. “We...!” screamed Alan “What’s going on Matt?” “I don’t know” says Matt “but it feels good... (quizzically) But really Alan it’s OK. We’re *giving it a go!*” Alan had to settle to be on a speakerphone.

The head suit, who is the only one to have said anything yet, is signalling the start of the meeting now that we’re all settled into our seats... “So Mr Pewter, welcome to the Paris branch of your bank.

You and your friends are most welcome. And good day to Mr Schneeberg who we have on line from New York.” “Hello Everyone. Bonjour!” shouts Alan through the laptop speakerphone. “Hey Matt don’t forget when they say “your bank” that not only do you have over five hundred million with them, but you also own about 17% of their stock. So it is kind of your bank, hah!”

Head Wunch proceeds and I thought that he was skating on thin ice after Alan’s thinly veiled “positioning” opening statement! “We have seen your latest TV appearance so we are expecting something slightly different today. Interestingly, we have had over 3000 emails in the last few days telling us to *Give it a go*. I know that it is something to do with you but what does that mean?”

“Well,” says Matt “thank you. Yes, we are talking about something different and I mean to signal the changes. It’s about time and some changes are well overdue. I have been meeting tens and hundreds of people that you and you colleagues in the local banking world have been blanking out for years and years.”

“Can I ask all of your gentlemen to look out of the window and to pay special attention to the stretched Rolls Royce and to the mobile swimming pool.” They all get up and look out of the window. They sit back down with a bit of head waggling and Gallic shrugging of the shoulders as if to say “And...?”

“Mr Louis Leblanc here on my left, stretched that beautiful car for me. He could only do that because I paid him up front. He has, in the past, had to turn away other customers and other work because of cash flow difficulties and the inability to expand his staff because of finance restrictions. He’s been able to make a fraction of what he could have made if he’d had a decent bank behind him. He has the potential to run a great business which he is starting - as of today - with

your help, and with my help. With the help of the (*pauses for emphasis*) “Give it a Go finance scheme.”

[Blackie and Whitie sing “Oooh, With a little help from my friends”. The assembled wunch cannot believe this...]

Matt stands up at this point, as does Blackie, Whitie, Justin and Nikka. In a very calm but perfectly timed choreography they all take off their jackets. Each has the most amazing rainbow shirt on. The fronts (the only visible part of their shirts when



their jackets were buttoned up) are a white bib and they have white cuffs. But the rest of the shirts are in the most fabulously cheerful rainbow colours. They all sit back down again except Matt who continues standing, “And the two marshals here are starting a business for the security and escort of VIPS who need support during visits to French cities. With *your help*. And the two marshals outside will be working for them, full time. Thanks to you. Both of them have been unemployed for over a year... until yesterday.”

[Blackie and Whitie sing “Oooh, With a little help from my friends”]

Each time Matt stresses the words of thanks, the wunch of bankers look at each other in quizzical ignorance. The singing just makes their ignorance and incomprehension worse. I can also hear Alan on the laptop shouting “What’s going on there? Will someone please turn the screen round so I can see this madness...” No-one turns the screen round.

Matt explains, “We, that is the bank and I, are setting up a new finance scheme which will help people like this to set up very sound businesses. They need a little help from a friendly finance scheme.”

[Blackie and Whitie sing “Oooh, With a little help from my friends”]

“And the man who made our swimming pool outside, which I trust you also saw out of the window, is starting a business today also with your help. Part of his business has a social aspect. As well as the commerce of supplying inexpensive swimming pools made from shipping containers, for clients who want a pool within a few weeks, he is also going to make and to take pools on trucks to remote communities where local learning-to-swim programs will take them over. That’s all with a little help from our scheme.

[Blackie and Whitie sing “Oooh, With a little help from my friends”]

“Listen you lot” continues Matt, and it sounds a little threatening to me, “I’m giving back. And you’re giving back too. It’s mostly on a commercial basis (I’ll come back to that...) but also partly on a charitable basis and you can use that to pump up your tarnished banking reputation. I’ve been looking at different ways to help people with all my wealth but it’s not going to be foreign aid. That’s pretty much covered, as is help for kids and for medical research and most other areas for potential benevolence. No. I want to help regular everyday people who want to work hard and who have good ideas and who have been for ever frustrated by the banks.”

“So the deal is that we set this up. Today. Together. We go fifty-fifty, between the bank and I. Justin has documented all the details but the gist is that we back start-ups with low-interest loans or direct equity investments, fixed interest, repayable between one and five years. There are no set up fees, no cancellation fees and no repayment fees.

And they bring their business banking accounts to us (that's you) and you give them free banking for two years. We give them free business support, business planning frameworks, mentoring and all the start-up help that they need."

"Some of the businesses are entirely for profit, some are mixed like the pool initiative and some are entirely charitable or worthy and in this case the fund will help to fund them. And that means



that all the *Give it a Go* businesses are in effect doing good, backing good causes. We don't give to other charities or good works, only to those inside the scheme. But that'll be more than enough. And many, like the animal rescue scheme that you can read about in your information pack, will slowly turn to commercial interests in due course. **BUT** we have to back them to get them going or else they'll never start. And 5% of the profits from our purely commercial businesses will go into those good causes."

We have documented everything in the document packs. We want your agreement within 24 hours. No ifs or buts. You guys have to give it a go, like I'm giving it a go, like these people who want to give it a go. And believe you me, this will work.

These guys haven't yet said a word since Matt started talking. What a wunch, I think... But now I've got my small job to do (apart from looking cool all the while of course). I lean down to cue the music. Now this is going to be even better, I think...

The music starts. Matt is standing: Blackie and Whitie stand up: Justin passes out the prepared packs.

[Now would be a good time to remind yourself or to introduce yourself to “For What It’s Worth” by Buffalo Springfield. Listen here - <https://youtu.be/gp5JCrSXkIY>.]

Over the music coming from under the desk, Matt continues. He does this quite dramatically for an amateur I have to say, “*There’s something happening here...*” he says, avoiding the temptation to sing. The vocals start...

*And what it is ain’t exactly clear....
There’s a man with a gun over there...
Telling me I’ve got to be ware...
I think it’s time we STOP [Backing vocals from the girls]
Children, what’s that sound
Everybody look what’s going down...*

The music continues but Matt pauses. We all stand up and again we’re perfectly coordinated and choreographed. Matt makes his parting statement, “Gentlemen, all the details you need are in the packs. Alan, Mr Schneeberg and Justin will be in touch but just to let you know, you’re going to give this a go. You don’t need Mr Schneeberg to remind you again about my stake in this bank, let alone some of my friends that I’ve just left in the Alps all wondering about their banking facilities... Good day to you.”

We step into a line and we walk once around the table and out of the door while the music plays on, the girls still adding their backing to the recorded track. We’re so cool and so perfectly choreographed. We leave the music playing. And we leave the laptop with Alan from the States, now shouting to know what the hell’s going on. Maybe they’re going to talk more after we’ve gone – maybe about Matt’s

influence on the bank and maybe about their careers from here on in...

Once we're out of sight of the suits in the meeting room we can't keep up the cool act nor the choreography... we trip and bang into each other and fall into laughing, back-slapping, hugs, high fives and general end-of-term excitement. It's been a strange and unusual hour – even apart from the musical accompaniment: I have not said a word since we entered...

All of us, including Matt run out of the building back to the cavalcade. Boy that was good. I really think it's my favourite day in this whole saga.

[Cavalcade: Band Bus, White Stretched RR, 4xOutriders, Pool Lorry]

Chapter 10: Small Bollocks Banking: *Give It A Go Finance, Part B*

Back to Château ShatOh... And everyone's back. It's like a real club reunion. But it was also time to make things happen. Enough messing around with the bank guys... and no more buying ridiculous stuff for a while... Matt and I had a serious sit down chat the first day back at the Old Jolly Bolly Shatteau...

Luckily (or by design - but not mine, mind), most of what needed to be done had someone in charge. The beautiful but derelict grounds and buildings were under Giles and he was already doing an amazing job. At least he'd had everything cut back and tidied up so we could see what was what. The business side was being looked after by the bank (who had confirmed through Alan that it all was tickety-boo - before we'd even got back to our country retreat) and by Justin who was so engaged with everything and everyone that I thought he'd collapse with good cheer, goodwill and with exhaustion. He never did. Youth and a good attitude kept him going, I guess...

Matt was busy on all of it: He was on top of abso-bollocking-lutely everything. He had mini-meetings all the time throughout the whole of every day¹³ - but only 5 minutes or so each at a time and he always came away with a smile as did whoever he met with. Everyone knew what they had to do. And for the next few days Matt was as cheerful as King Larry with a big swinging dick... as long as no-one mentioned GiGi.

¹³ Not every day. We all had to have all of every Sunday off. It was our "family day" ... see later... And Saturdays were cool too.

And talking of GiGi; Nikka had taken a call from her and she wanted to interview Matt again. The GIAG Finance scheme has been mentioned in the business press and because it was Matt, the general media and public seem to be quite interested and now they know about it too. But Nikka said that we already had a deal and that they'd meet at the agreed date and that that was not yet awhile. We had lots to do, said Nikka, before Matt would be able and willing to talk about it and to do so with her. GiGi actually begged Nikka. She pleaded that she could already make such a good story. Supposedly because she already knew Matt, Mr Pewter that is... "Right..." I heard Nikka say before hanging up. Nikka didn't forgive easily.

Otherwise Nikka was an amazing convert to the Give It A Go creative chaos that we'd all collectively brought to be... and that we were collectively sorting out. She moved from the business side to the décor side and back again to the business side whenever her skills were in demand. She was thoroughly involved in the domestic side of the Château. And that was a tough call because we all had an opinion on nearly everything.

Matt and I chatted through all this. Then I asked, "Matt, what's my role in all this then from now on?" Matt paused, but not for long. His brain worked fast. He smiled gently before starting.

"Well apart from keeping everybody cheerful and "laid back"¹⁴ and being full of the joys of spring with your music and your working on the Give it a Go Roadshow¹⁵, there are three things that I'd like you to do while resident at the Château. (And you know that you're all

¹⁴ *I hadn't heard that phrase for a while... Maybe not since I'd left home some 40 years ago...*

¹⁵ *Matt hadn't mentioned this before but I let it go at the time...*

welcome to reside here for as long as you want.) The three special projects for you TC, my friend are...

1. Sit on the panel with me to review the businesses and ideas that come to GIAG
2. Write some original songs of your own
3. And teach me a song on the guitar..."

Well, I thought that's all good. "Matt, you are a delight. You really are giving it a go aren't you? What's the song? And what should I write and why do you say that anyway man?" "Because your talents go beyond singing, driving a bus and running a band", said Matt. "You should write your own music. And I would, at some point, like a song about the whole "Give it a Go" theme. I want to use it to help inspire the people that we're motivating. Plus, I think that it lives at the heart and soul of the Colourful Cats Band... It's just not said. So Mr TC. Give it a go... in every sense."

"And the song that I'd like you to teach me to play... well I haven't definitely decided yet though I have a few candidates. We can start with just playing the guitar and some singing lessons or exercises. I'd like to get it right. I'd like us to meet twice a week, say Monday and Thursday at the same time, say 6 O'clock and I'd like to start next week. Will you please buy me a guitar in the meantime? Justin will sort out the finance. I mean *pay for it*. Just tell him what I should get."

"And don't forget that we start meeting our first GIAG people tomorrow. Ten O'clock sharp."

The Hopefuls...

Tree Guy: The first one in on *Day One* for the first finance hopefuls was Tree Guy. As he explained to the so-called "panel" (Matt, me,

Nikka and Justin), Tree Guy does trees (obviously) and he'd brought one along to show us... The tree that he'd brought was one that he'd been showing at garden shows and country fairs and the tree itself was in a slowly-turning barrel. This was designed to show how lovely the 6-metre-tall tree was and how straight it was from all sides. As it turned the tree trunk stayed in line and the branches above slowly turned.

We were supposed to be admiring the tree but we all got a bit stuck on the barrel and on the turning. We loved the slow spinning effect. Tree Guy tried to get on with his spiel but we kept quizzing him about the barrels. "Yes," he said "I could get more spinning barrels, but they have to be made especially. Would you like one soon?" Matt turned to Nikka for a quick chat and check and they decided they rather fancied the whole avenue/drive up to the château to be lined with spinning trees. Nikka rushed off to talk quickly with Giles and came back with the answer... "No, we don't want one" she said and Tree Guys face fell... "we want thirty-six please. Trees and spinning planters," she added quickly before he could be too disappointed. His face did whatever the opposite of falling is. Flying? Climbing? Rose? None of those will do. His face lit up with a beam. Had his face darkened in the first place. Maybe that's what I should have said...



"Well," said Matt, "that's your first order this week! Now let's hear the rest of your business plan. What do you need from us? Oh and after, I'd like you to look at the tree in the library."

"You have a tree in the library?!" says Tree Guy, slightly bemused. He wasn't used to selling thirty-six barrelled trees in a day (thirty-six trees maybe, but not spinning ones) nor was he used to trees in libraries. Before he could ask more I said to Matt, looking to Nikka

for support (in her role as chief decorator) “Hey man, *please* don’t move the tree in the library, it’s part of the Château... I mean, surely man, you can keep the tree. Tree Guy can sort out a watering system or something and the library can have a sky light even after the roof’s been fixed. I mean you’re buying new ones for outside! So you’ve already got one in here, in the library... I mean, come on... this one’s free! Keep it! It’s part of the whole scene thing here...”

“OK, OK, OK” said Matt. “You win. We’ll keep the tree in the library as long as Giles OK’s it too. Now back to the business plans for trees. We can’t divert every business that comes to us with a big order for ourselves and be such a big nuisance. We have to work with them on their existing business plans. Please, tell us about your business plans.”

So Tree Guy goes through his plans and we listen to him carefully. His needs, apart from some marketing help (all easily covered by Nikka and Justin), are that he wants to buy some more inexpensive land to grow more trees. “How’s your tree business?” I chip in... No-one looks like they’ll answer... “Growing!” I add with a flourish. Still no-one looks like they’re joining in my one man wit-fest...

The Successful and The Refusals...

So with a few jokes (on my part) and some astute business questions and answers (from the others) we see a variety of small or non-existent businesses. We’re seeing about six a day in the morning slot, signing up more than three-quarters of them.

I asked Matt after the first day (four taken on/two refused) about the ones that we refuse. The trouble is that the publicity has made the concept so popular that everyone thinks it’s free money for any old idea. Matt explained to me and to those that were initially refused, that

they should listen to the comments made in the meeting and book to come and see us again with an improved plan. We couldn't take on everyone and they had to actually have a workable idea, even if it were charitable or "social". Everybody we backed had to be backable in the eyes of Matt, Nikka and Justin. And funnily enough, in my eyes too. So (jokes aside) they trusted me to contribute and I did. I'm a little more left field than these three, even though they were dealing with some new and challenging businesses and they were getting quite free-thinking, and so I made my contribution, sometimes just by keeping up the enthusiasm and in some cases just the optimism.

It was in these sessions that I started to write the new song that Matt had asked me to, using the whole enthusiasm/optimism thing. It was encouraging to be so encouraging...

Yoga Girl: During the course of the next few weeks we saw dozens and dozens of people. I did of course keep an exact count in my head (37 in the first week, 38 in the second week, 35 in the third week,) but dozens and dozens will do in the general sense... Some of them didn't even need money and that always struck me as odd. Justin was good on these cases as he really seemed to understand the value of some "moral support" (as my old Mum would have said).

A good example was Yoga Girl. I'm being a bit generous here with the nomenclature as she was to all intents and purposes a lady but I always think of ladies as girls.¹⁶ Now this girl was really into authentic yoga. Not all the latest in-fashion, latest colour-supplement-fads but the real proper spiritual end of yoga. She wanted to teach it but she simply didn't have the confidence in the face of all the latest hot yoga/yoga and dance/yoga apps/rage yoga¹⁷/power yoga competition. And even

¹⁶ *If you see what I mean...*

¹⁷ *Yes really, there is such a thing apparently...*

more ridiculously there's dog yoga... which isn't just for the dog but you go along with the dog. It's a craze that may well be called "doga" by now.

Goldie, who was sitting in with us that day, as she did sometimes, said that she quite understood and that she quite sympathised. (But that's Goldie, all over: Understanding and sympathy.) The five of us therefore all decided that we'd take on Yoga Girl but we thought it best to put it on some financial basis, so we persuaded her to promote her genuine yoga stance (no pun intended) and to push her classes with some help from the team (websites and promotion and dare I say it, some social media). And then we'd help her franchise the classes to other genuine yoga teachers to grow the business later once she'd established the demand for "old-fashioned" yoga classes. We backed her which also meant that she could add the GIAG flag to her promo materials and that she knew we were always there for advice. GIAG Finance would take a ten per-cent stake in the franchise business when and if it got going.

She was delighted with the support... as I said, it wasn't (as was often the case) actually a money thing: It was more of a confidence and support and an optimism issue....

And before we let her go, we got the whole gang together after lunch that day for an example yoga class. We tried to do it properly and there was a lot of shushing and "*behave!*" looks from Goldie but we genuinely enjoyed it. This was often the case with those we were backing. We liked them. We liked what they wanted to do and we enjoyed the sampling of their products. The Château grounds were illuminated with such spontaneous events.

Call-Centre-Twins: Another useful project was the call centre that we had to set up. Small, high quality call centres for either incoming calls

or friendly sales approaches were a good business according to the locally based twin girls who came to see us in the second week. We had already realised that we needed to set up the business on a business-like basis and handling enquiries was a real necessity. So we backed their business and they helped us set up a little reception team to handle the hundreds of calls we were getting every week.

Joshua's Shoestring Shrubbery: this guy had such a good idea that we backed it immediately. It's another growing business but unlike Tree Guy, it's going to be here at the château but because the business plan is so good we're not allowed to talk about it until it's proven and the franchise model is there for sale. We don't want anyone pinching the whole damn thing...

Titfert Hats (Bonnie): One of my favourite hopefuls was Bonnie who came to see us in the third week. She had a burning desire to be a famous hat maker – or a milliner as she described it. And to be honest I'd never in all my however-many years, known what that meant before. I must have read it or heard it many times and I'd always thought that it was something to do with flour milling. Some confused dude, I am... Goodness knows what I must have been imagining when I heard on the news about the Queen's milliner...!

The two main reasons that I really loved Bonnie (and that's on top of teaching me a new word) were [i] her chosen name, *Titfert Hat*. Even in my best (or worst) moments, I couldn't have made such a good (or bad) pun! (Apparently though it's old rhyming slang though I'd never heard it before. It did take a few goes for some of the others to get it...¹⁸ And even then, the cheek of the girl to use such a joke name for a grown-up business. And [ii] the fact that she came back a week after

¹⁸ *Tit for tat* = "*Titfert Hat*" ... for those of you as slow as Nikka!

she first came in (of course we backed her) and brought all of us a new hat each. They were just like my purple one that Matt had bought me back in the Alps all that time ago...¹⁹ Everyone on the Château estate got one, in a range of rainbow colours with a little personal twist. Goldie's was gold with leopard pattern, Blackie's and Whitie's were (no surprise) black and white but with microphones on top. Bluesman Billie's was blue, Green Fingers was green with plant-life, Dog's had a collar and soft floppy ears. She even made one for Giles (tweed with a feather!) and Dong (faux zebra skin).

She had for some reason (and I found out later, that Goldie had been doing a bit of "fixing" and planning) made an extra one which she gave to Matt "as a spare". What he didn't know then (as none of us did - except Goldie) was that it was a perfect fit for GiGi and would suit her colouring to a T. Matt put it away, without a word. We wondered if he had an inkling....?

And all the others: I haven't got the inclination to list all the other businesses and people that we met in those first few weeks back at the Château. If you really want to know, ask Justin or you can wait until the accounts get published because that's what's going to happen apparently. This business is for real apart from the fact that it's actually a foundation, which isn't a business. Frig-a-doodle-do. Don't ask me...

Suffice to say that we met all-sorts. Some notables (and they may appear later, I'm not sure...) include the following as well as many more: Mad Scandinavian artist Hett Witedski whose art is on the cover of this book and who was despite his history of depression, doom, gloom and weird artistic past was now quite cheerful and working quite happily. He didn't want help really, he was just passing

¹⁹ *It must have been about 5 or 6 weeks since we'd started this adventure but it seemed like years already...*

on his way to Spain with his girlfriend and they'd heard about us on the news. He came for the fun of it and to drink our beer. He drunk a lot of our beer. But he did give me the picture for the covers of the work when I phoned him up a year later. A then there was a stand up etymologist who wanted to mix his wry humour with his amazing knowledge of language and the roots of words, every word you can think of: He wanted money to publish a book but we said no. he wasn't very funny anyway.

Oh, and I'd like to mention Henri who made little leather pixie boots because I immediately ordered three pairs for myself, a red pair, a blue pair and a snakeskin pair. He worked hard in the summer and could never make enough boots for the holiday-makers who all wanted their boots (made to your own colour designs and size) straight away or at least before they went home. His business could be dramatically expanded by sales all year round on the internet.

Quite a few of the businesses we were to help needed this access to funds and to the tinternet. They could sell so much more. We ended up supporting them and we backed three different website maker set-ups as we started to appreciate how much call for them there was...

Quite a few people came asking for money to study and we said no, as that's not our bag and there are other places for that.

We invited anyone who came to see the GIAG panel to pitch their ideas to us, if they wanted to stay at the château. After all we had room. But Matt insisted that we ask them to pay ~ at least a nominal rate of €20. He said that it was an almost universally accepted rule that people appreciated things more if they paid a little, instead of when it was completely free. They valued it more that way. Or the other way, they didn't value it if it were free.

We invited those who stayed to eat and drink with us and got to know them all better that way.

In between the meetings Matt and I used to chat, usually with Goldie. He was always candid with me but when Goldie was there he opened up more about himself. We (Goldie and I that is) were having a beer on the terrace, the day they were setting up the trees along the drive and we were surveying the fine view down the drive as the trees took their places like Avenue sentinels. Matt had some sort of non-alcoholic drink, whatever that is... He started “You know, when we met back in the Alps, I hadn’t a clue about what to do with myself. And you know what else? This is it! This is what I want to do. I never knew it then and I’d have never found it without you lot, you TC in particular. After I sold up my business (which I can tell you I was so glad to do) I was relieved not to have to mix in that world anymore. And people kept asking me what I was going to do and they all speculated about me starting up a new on-line or a new media business. But this, with these people who want a start in life with small business ideas, or even those who just want to keep busy or do something creative, it’s so much better. It’s a relief. It’s refreshing. It’s rewarding.” “It’s all sorts of words that begin with re-, I thought”

“Are you sure that you don’t want a beer Matt?” I asked. “No thank you TC. This is good. Maybe later, after the guitar class. He carried on with his introspection about his fine new career choice... “Those people at the rich-man-symposium we left just a few weeks ago, they have no idea about life and business at this level. And nor did I to be honest. But I didn’t know what else to do. I was just treading water, in limbo, waiting for the big idea. And now I know that it’s the little idea that’s making this all happen. And the *giving it a go*, to coin a phrase”

“I mean when I ran one of the biggest businesses in the world, the people who worked for us were having a great time. They were being looked after and they had the time and the incentives to be creative. But at the top it just became “Corporate”. And that, as you’d probably say TC, was “Dullsville, Arizona!”

“I told you about the non-exec positions didn’t I?” asked Matt.²⁰ “I mean a million dollars a year for doing nothing! How crazy is that compared to these guys needing a few thousand here and there to start up really productive businesses...”

“And meanwhile, look at us now. We’re here and we’re re- building this Château and just look at it!” We all glanced around. Matt’s speech had ended on this happy note and the subject was put on hold with no comment from Goldie or from me. None was necessary... There were roofers ahead fixing all the many rooves – including a specially designed skylight for the library to light the tree. (I’d given that tree a name by now and we had all started to refer to it by name. “Knowles”. It meant very little but I think it came from my thinking about the tree of knowledge – being in the library and all... I’d even looked up the name after and it was Old English for a hill top which wasn’t in the slightest but relevant. But no matter. And talking of relevant, back to the gist of my little diversion...) The big top had been put up in a far field alongside the beginnings of the swimming lake which was being dug. That was Nikka and Pete’s idea. His interests apparently went beyond pools, albeit a lake being a kind of big swimming pool. Giles jumped at the idea. He’d always wanted a swimming lake.

Even further down the little valley were grazing zebras. Out-buildings were starting to pop up here and there. The old stables were getting

²⁰ *Where did he? Did he?*

finished for workshops for some of the local GIAG businesses who didn't have premises. It was some kind of Disneyfied business and wildlife park fantasy with a bit of music festival thrown in for luck. The main gates now proclaimed "Château Boulles: Give it a Go Foundation". And it was beautiful as we sat there in the late afternoon sun.

This particular day was Matt's guitar lesson at 6 O'clock. I stubbed out my beer, grabbed another one, grabbing Matt as he got up.

"And are you all alright?" Matt asked. "Us?!" I said with surprise. "Matt, we're having the time of our lives. This is A1 frigging Ace!"

I hugged him. Goldie smiled. She must have seen his face... still slightly awkward at the very first and then relaxed and then laughing. It was another staging post in Matt's fully authorised Colourful Cats/Give it a Go therapy journey towards happiness. And the guitar lessons were another...

Chapter 11: Interlude: GIAG, Château, Nikka's Knickers, Alan

I have to cover a few months at a time now... Otherwise I'll bore you with all the detail. And I do mean it, I would bore you... I love all the detail and I could tell you about every new planting, every new type of historically accurate paint or roof tile, every new cornice or floor tile in the château. And of course I could list every new business that came in ~ especially the ones that we liked, then befriended and those who came to work at the château's stable blocks and outhouse studio-offices.

I could tell you about the changing seasons at the château but I don't have the poetry. Let me just say that the whole gig was a blast. And the place was just beautiful, every day.

The mood at the château was always good ~ thanks to somebody or to everybody. Maybe it was Matt, or maybe it was all of us... Because, we were all good and we were all in a good mood, all of the time. (Go on make faces and be cynical, I don't care because that's what it was. So suck on it, misery guts... It doesn't happen often in your life when a group of people who are united in a common pursuit (of what?), all get on together. But here things moved on apace, in the right direction. And so we never had the time nor the inclination to find fault with anyone or anything. Man-o-man, maybe that's the lesson here. Or maybe it was the lesson that Matt had brought with him from his old life. To surround yourself with good people. Anyway it worked and we were all chirpy-chirpy-cheep-cheep happy-chaps for months on end.

Meanwhile, the band had gigs to get on with too. A couple of times in those few summer and autumn months we'd have to leave the delightful Big Balls Castle and go out and do a gig or two in the real world. But that was fine too, as that's what we did ~ or we used to do at least... And when we went out to play live, we still had it. In fact, I'd say we were even better than before.

And any way that dovetailed perfectly with the big plan which was to work towards a rolling roadshow for GIAG finance. The concept was finalised by the team which was Matt in the back seat, with Justin and Nikka firmly in charge. Goldie and I were sort of token gestures but we were happy to be in the team. So we were all working towards the first show-cum-promotion at the château itself, set for later in the year.

And the band were a big part of the whole shebang, so we had to keep sharp and practice for the big top show, the big "Give it a Go" roadshow.

The tent had been let out quite a few times in the summer and in the autumn and so we when we wanted it for our own big top show in December we had to make sure it was free and we had to "book" it. The tent guys had by now, as their business was taking off, started to discuss investing a second tent already.

One original business idea (that in fact came from me believe it or not...) which Matt had cleverly insisted that we follow, was the idea that the GIAG businesses that could support other GIAG businesses were brought in as quickly as possible. They got established first and then they got instant work supporting each other. And each business got a discounted price from the other businesses. It's a big balls win all round. I was proud of that... my first real contribution to the business world.

And we gave these people the priority to be housed in our business centre in the stables and in the other outbuildings. So we had printers (one spanking new digital set up and one really old fashioned hand print for posh stuff); web design and web-site build; service companies for all the fancy side of marketing on the internet that they all knew about from old like SEO, PPC and loads of other TLA's²¹; And as mentioned, we had a call centre; Plus we had the more crafty things (not sneaky-crafty but arts and crafty) like promotional materials, mugs, T-shirts, banners and so on.

And when these small businesses started trading, they were allowed to use the GIAG badge as an endorsement which seemed to really help them. Because of the news coverage which had so far been positive (well done Nikka ~ and no thanks to the likes of GiGi she'd say), the new set up was popular with customers. Regular people really trusted the idea of the Give it a Go foundation and they liked doing business with our businesses. And they liked the charitable side too. Again win-win all round...

Meanwhile the animal park flourished and had started to have bucket-loads of both paying visitors and free trips for schools and the like.

Then apart from Tree Guy, we had the garden nursery Joshua's Shoestring Shrubbery which used all of Dong's Dung (and you don't know how much pleasure it gives to say that out loud). And they had fresh water from the estate, which was naturally flowing but had been landscaped by Pete and Giles while they were building the swimming ponds. Everything seemed all joined up...

²¹ *The latter (TLAs) was my joke rebuke about every frigging one of them talking in Three Letter Acronyms all the time! FFS!*

And those guys had, between them, planted up the estate so that it really started to look like an estate. Not like an old place in a state.²²

Giles could be seen driving around the estate in his old Land Rover, happy as a butcher's dog. And talking of dogs, Dog has made himself pretty useful in the building department too while GF has been very busy in the garden. He and Giles were now planning a rose garden for the spring. (Watch this space...)

We also had a cooking business with caterers and cooking classes all under one roof. They were training people for the catering trade and making a great deal of progress with their outside catering using students and graduates of their classes. Plus they were doing sales at local markets. They were going to cater all the food stands at the GIAG roadshow. Practice first here in December and then out on the road next year all being well.

And incidentally, though you shouldn't know this as it'll spoil the surprise for later, Matt is learning to cook too. Every Tuesday morning, at 9am sharp (and before we meet any new GIAG prospects) he goes off to school in the estate kitchens, in his little white coat, bless. And his guitar lessons are going a treat. He's getting on with it like a real student. Regardless of the actual skill levels he's achieving, he is the most diligent student you could imagine. /See <https://youtu.be/foujby33HoM> for sample guitar lesson./

²² *An estate/in a state. Get it?!*

The Marshall Patrol guys have been getting established and have been working ~ and working hard. The business now had over twenty guys



on the books ready to work when bookings came in. One job they did used all twenty of them together for a foreign leader's state visit. You should have seen them leave the château that morning... Mind, you should have seen us back at the château when we all watched them on the TV news. *That's our boys* we whooped...

Pete the Pool's business was great in the summer though it had slowed a little by the autumn so he was more office based. But more of that in a moment...

Preparing for the December big top promotion/roadshow has given us all a good way to review all the progress. All the businesses involved are sharpening their skills and plans for the event. The band is sharp with a lot of new material... And an original song ~ as requested by the great man himself. You'll get to hear it no doubt...

The château looks great and all the grounds are laid out, even if not perfect. The big top's going to be up in the big meadow by the swimming lake. There's going to be parking, food, seminars, presentations for 500 visitors, including the media. Most of the visitors will be small business hopefuls but a few will be from the wider business community and our bankers (the wunch of...) will be invited. The weekend will not include the normal interviewing of any prospective businesses. It's just to get them interested and to spread the word. They can always book a meeting at the château for later. (When we do go on the road next year, there'll be actual business interviews and applications with a new team set up specially.)

For the big top promotion/roadshow weekend the Château building itself will be closed. There'll be no VIP special reception. *Fuck 'em*, Matt said. *Let them eat cake*. I'm not sure if he got this exactly right but we knew what he meant. Even so the place inside is nearly ready. We've had over 100 tradesmen working on the interiors and several of them were new GIAG tradesmen who got priority. All of our bedrooms are ready. And yes as promised there's a room themed for every week of the year. The décor knocks your knickers off.

Having said that (*knocking your knickers off*), I should tell you about Pete and Nikka: Nikka in particular, when it comes to knickers off. We found them in the top of the tree in the library after the weekend when they finally got it together. That's a pair of her knickers in the tree ~ not the pair of them, Pete and Nikka...

No-one ever found out how the knickers got into the tree, nor how to get them down. To Nikka's embarrassment (or is she quietly proud to have outdone us all in her naughty knickerlessness?), the knickers are still there, though faded by the sunlight a little since then. They're not quite so visible now.

So we don't know how the knickers got there exactly but we do however know a little about the preliminaries to Nikka losing them in such a dramatic fashion. Of course Goldie had a little bit to do with it. In fact, she'd set up the evening and had been coaching Nikka over the last few months of "courting" her French beau.

Matt, for some reason that we didn't know then, insisted on cooking for their big date. As it turned out Matt had plans to repeat the menu or at least the idea and some of the evening's trappings for his own ends later... Matt had also insisted that they dined alone in the

ballroom, for the same reason. He was using their date as a dress rehearsal for his own at a later date.

Poor them (Pete and Nikka)... we all knew all about the date and the whole set up. We'd all been in the loop for a fortnight or so. It had been planned like a proper project and it had to go right. Had it gone wrong it would have been a major blow to all of us. A real group disaster. A real disaster for the group. In a way, it's amazing it all went off relatively smoothly, given the levels of anticipation. So there was a lot of scheming and planning, and after all that, we actually felt that the knickers in the tree was like a flag of honour for all of us.²³ Pete, the poor guy, didn't realise just how much pressure there was on him and it being a successful night. He'd been about the only guy on the estate not involved in the planning.

For the last few months Nikka had maintained her absolute knicker-twisting desire for Pete the Pool. But she had been keeping it under wraps to a large extent so as not to frighten Pete off. She'd used the time to get to know him better through the summer. From the day she had met him, she had planned to catch him but she wanted to do it right and that included the timing. She had had her fling at the festival but had, according to Goldie, not tried anything like that since. She was keeping her powder dry so to speak. (No smutty innuendos here...) At that time, she'd thought she'd move in on Pete after a few more weeks but this had become months as she wanted to learn more and more about him before she moved...

Every day she had met with him when they were both at base camp at the château. She had been kind and thoughtful towards him and they

²³ *My old man often used to quote the quip: She offered her honour: He honoured her offer: And all night long, he was on 'er and off 'er. Quite fitting really...*

had developed a great friendship. He had, in his smiling way, continued to please her but had never made a move himself. Goldie had managed to chat to him about Nikka and had found out that he was slightly apprehensive that, as part of “Mister Matt’s inside circle”, Nikka was off limits. In Goldie’s mind, and when she discussed this with Nikka, she too had agreed, that this gave her time to get to know him and to get him to know him better and better before she declared herself as a serious love match (she hoped for ever) and not as a fellow worker.

In the weeks that became months of Nikka’s preparations, she had changed and modelled herself more like she’d imagined Pete would find attractive. Every time they spoke to each other she picked up hints and tips and took them all on board. She treated the Pete Project... well, like a project.

The first step was when Nikka had asked Pete out for a drink a couple of times to which he had agreed and they had had two very agreeable evenings in a local bar-restaurant. Nothing too romantic but moving it in the right direction. We, of course, were all watching like hawks over the next days for signs of anything more but Nikka had passed the word that it was still all “just good friends”. She thought though (and hoped and prayed for all I know) that Pete was moving towards some romantic inclinations. He was so smiley and charming though, Nikka could never be 100% sure whether he was that nice to everybody or just to her.

Finally, Nikka set up the dinner at the château. The excuse was that Matt wanted to try out his cooking (we all knew about the cooking classes) and would Pete please join her for a special dinner. He arrived that evening a little more dressed up than usual and smelling of after shave. Nikka for her part was dressed to kill, classy and beautiful. She

had, since the festival, become a softer looking woman and she looked glorious.

We all said hello to Pete and we had a drink with them in the club room (as we called one of the salons). It was in November and there was a fire. It was warm and friendly but after one drink for Pete (and three for Nikka) they went off for their private dinner. No-one was allowed into the ball room after that. We'd all earlier decked it out with beautiful autumn decorations, like a private harvest festival made just for them by the fairies. In the centre of the vast ball room was one table, laid for two. Matt had done the cooking and the food and the drinks were served by two of the local girls, who were both studying at the cookery/catering business.

So... We only have a vague idea of what happened. We know because it obviously went so well (that is, knickers up a tree). But we don't know what was said and what was done so I can't retell the detail. Goldie knew that it was going to be along the lines of a full blown declaration of full blown love by Nikka, to Pete. Dinner was five courses (duck salad, egg mayonnaise, confit de canard with duck fat soaked roast potatoes, crème caramel and cheese). We (well I) counted the wine as five bottles, one of which was some local fizz. (That was made by a couple who worked on a local estate who we hoped would be making sparkling wine on our estate in a few years when the vines were ready. I wanted to call the new sparkling wine "Cool Boule"; and the idea wasn't yet written off.)

Goldie, bless her tactful heart, shuffled us all off to bed early that night so none of us would pester (or spy on) the hopefully-happy couple. In the morning, Pete's car was still parked outside and GF came in to breakfast and asked if anyone knew why there was a pair of lady's knickers in the tree in the library. Like a bunch of school children, we

all ran in there to look. No-one actually said a word. Some of us giggled and Dog howled, like a dog at the moon. GF had to keep asking, “Well? Why?” He only looked like he half understood when Nikka and Pete finally came into breakfast together, hand-in-hand.

She was perfectly composed and she was glowing. If she’d changed some, at the festival, she now looked like she’d had the make-over of a lifetime. Smiling, radiant and as I said, glowing. All that shit-heaps of money those women spend on make-up, I thought: All they need is a damn good loving from someone as happy and charming as Pete the Pool. Maybe we could bottle him?!

I spent the rest of breakfast trying to improve or adapt a new nickname for Pete the Pool to something more topical. The best I could come up with was “Pete the Pole” and the worst was “Pete the Ha! Penis”²⁴. But I never said anything or any of that out loud.

As December breaks and the plans are all in hand for the big show, Alan comes over from New York. He has been met at the airport with an appropriately ridiculous fanfare, mainly, Matt said, to embarrass him. We sent the white roller with Marshall Patrol outriders (only six of them) and we had banners made to line the road at one point nearing the château saying “Welcome Mr Schneeberg”.



Apparently Alan had only ever been to France once in his smart, man-about-town life: To Paris to do business. He’d only been to Europe to London and all the finance capitals, on business. He was so urban and so urbane, that when I met him, I actually laughed out loud,

²⁴ As in “Happiness” ...

remembering him on the speakerphone when we met the bankers. He just looked so smart and so business-like and tried to keep up the image of the smart New York finance director, that he just looked and acted out of place. I kept smirking to the point of embarrassing myself and I was in danger of embarrassing Alan, which wouldn't be fair as he wasn't a bad guy. He was just out of place. Goldie got fed up with me and poked me in the nuts. I calmed down after that and we all sat down in the club room for a chat. And a few beers. The two always go together in my book.

Justin, who had talked to Alan on the phone more than once a day since May, had never actually met Alan and when he saw him, it was like Nikka seeing Giles or even better seeing Pierre/Pete the Pool for the first time. But a gay version. Alan had come in protesting at the frivolousness of nearly everything, though I think he knew he was just keeping up his appearances as chief bean-counter in Matt's empire. After we'd all said hello and given him a drink, he stopped his protests and Justin adopted a protective stance over Alan.

It was strange that Alan, who'd been with us but at a distance all along, was so far so outside of the circle. Matt and Nikka and Justin had changed so much in dress and in manner since the beginning. Alan seemed like an alien in our new world. Justin put his arm around him and then walked him off saying he'd show him everything and explain everything... They went off to look around the place together.

Oh my giddy-frigging-absolutely-dizzy-aunt, I thought... "You couldn't write this stuff", I said to Goldie, almost pissing myself with excitement at the revelation to come... "Goldie, Goldie, you just couldn't make this up... I have just realised... What's Justin's surname?! Fitzallen, right. So Justin Fits Alan! Oh hallelujah, how good is that? But Goldie,

do you think that Alan fits Justin?!” Goldie slapped me gently and said to calm down. She got the joke. She even liked the joke. But she took off my hat, patted my cheek and as she put my hat back on my head and kissed me, she said, “Just keep that under your hat, Mr TC, OK.” I was still smiling with the thought of it as I went to bed that night.

As it was now December, you might have noticed that we haven’t yet seen GiGi again and the six months were up. Matt had been impatient to set the meeting up and to do the interview. He thought that he now had a solid case to present and to win GiGi’s approval, professionally and personally. But Nikka had forced the issue and insisted that we wait and get GiGi to the promotional roadshow with all the other media. There was a muted agreement from Matt that this might work.

We then had a discussion about whether Matt would meet with GiGi and the crew from *TVGauche* before or after the roadshow, given that she was being allowed special treatment over and above the other TV news stations. Matt had prepared an alternative to an actual interview that he and Nikka had agreed would work well but Matt argued that it would be better before the weekend. Nikka preferred it to be *after*, saying that the roadshow was more general and the real guts of this alternative interview would work very well after, as a post script. I didn’t believe that Matt would agree with Nikka but he did. She had become a very persuasive woman. Her intelligence and her professional know-how was now bolstered by her newly found womanly command.

Post Script to Chapter 11: Now, I know this chapter is running on and on and it’s all bitty bits and bobbly bobs and I won’t apologise for that as I had to get a few things down to set the scene for all that’s to come. When I told this whole story to some of my mates and said what a great story this was (and I was already thinking of a film, I have

to admit) they all said “But yeah, what about the setback? You can’t have a love story without a setback. And this is where it should come... Something bad has to happen to stop GiGi and Matt getting it together at the end, which gets resolved just in time for the grand finale and the happy ending, surely”.

Well the truth is that I can’t just create one of those painfully annoying setbacks. Because it didn’t happen! It was bad enough watching Matt in his quiet moments, for over six months, so obviously aching for this girl. I’m surprised that his hairy balls or even his heavy heart didn’t explode in the interval. So I’m not going to make up some extra agony for the guy. I like Matt and he deserves better after all he’s done for everyone else. He’s a good guy and it’s not for me to invent some extra problems for him.

Anyway, you don’t know what’s going to happen. We have to get through the promotion roadshow and that’s quite enough pressure... Then they can meet in person and you’ll have to wait and find out. But let me tell you now, basically, it’s going to be broadly OK. No suspense there, then... It’s not perfect, it’s real life OK. But it’s not annoyingly unnecessary either like those frigging films where you can only have a happy ending after an unhappy episode. On the GiGi front Matt has had six unhappy months...

Chapter 12: Big Bollocks Big Top Roadshow

So it's later in December. It's cold but it's sunny. The scene is set. Everything is ready for the big promotion. The planning has been military. So on Saturday morning bang on 12 noon we open the gates, which we had only closed just for show: Just so we could open them. And we let in the good people and the could-be-good-could-be-bad media. It's a surprise to most of us just how many media-land folk there are. It's more than we saw at the zoo protest. Matt wasn't surprised. Nor was Nikka who said that every single invite to the news had been taken up. Shit a brick, I thought, we'd better get this right.

Apart from this being kind of the semi-official launch of GIAG Finance which would be big news (and anything Matt did was apparently worth a media-scrum), it was also a dry run practise for rolling the roadshow out across the country next year. And maybe even further abroad the year after...

The château was beautiful, (Have I said that before?) Beautiful ~ but orderly. You knew where to go and what things were. And if you didn't know or couldn't work it out, we had over 40 helpers round and about to see everyone was being looked after. In the middle was the GIAG "village". It was like a mini village square having a mini village fair in the cold sunshine. Everything was of course free for the media and for the public alike. Food, drink, treats and samples of our traders' wares. (Justin had got the bank to stump up for all samples and supplies... "Sponsored by Wanker Bank.") There were tables and chairs, umbrellas, and also a few fires to warm the cold.

Everyone had lunch in the "village". We mingled. There were two zebra-drawn carts to carry the infirm (or the fat and lazy as some of

the news people could be described) to the big top tent and to some of the further afield parts of the estate.

Beyond the “village” and the château, the focus was the lake and the big top nestling on its banks. Actually this was our beautiful swimming pond, though it’s size said “lake” not “pond”. The new avenues of trees and the new paths lead you all over the estate, but the eye went to the big top. Inside was where all the action was ~ once you’d lunched and toured the GIAG village. The 2pm start of the show was approaching...

I’d seen the Paris wunch of bankers at lunch, still wearing their blue suits and still looking like they understood very little. They were not engaging with anyone. I also saw GiGi a few times and each time she was near Matt ~ but never actually with him: I saw Nikka keeping her at a distance. Matt saw Nikka keeping GiGi at a distance but funnily enough he didn’t look like he minded. He was spending his time talking to many of our businesses and to our new prospects and introducing them all to each other. He was pretty separate and staying clear of both the media and the big business community. He was wearing his hat that Bonnie had given him and his rainbow shirt. He was enjoying himself. I guess he knew that it was good (that sounds like something from the Bible) and I guess he knew that the whole thing was looking good to GiGi. So even if he hadn’t talked to her, he was impressing her at a distance...

As Goldie and I walked down to the big top for the start of the show, I clicked that it wasn’t just Nikka who’d been managing Matt’s performance and his composure. Goldie had been coaching him too in matters of the heart and in the ways of romance and attraction. Matt wasn’t playing hard to get as such but he was positioning himself to be

observed in a good light. And so far, he hadn't spoken to her. He was just biding his time, not shunning GiGi. Just earning brownie points...

"You know Goldie it's not just your jewellery and your fingernails that are gold... it's your heart. You, my dear good woman, have a heart of gold. So much of this could never have happened without your calm and healing ways with all these people. Their happiness, as well as mine, has been in your hands hasn't it?" She took this compliment with grace, as you'd expect. She couldn't hardly gloat, being praised for her saintliness, could she. "You know something else," I added, "if we weren't about to go on stage in a minute, I'd take you up to our first-week-in-May²⁵ bedroom suite and show you a thing or two about how much I love you. I'd play willie-sticks with you."

"But we've got a show to do and you have a big bass guitar to play with in the meantime. And I have to sing our new song. I mean, if anyone has, I've got to give that a go, haven't I? Maybe later for the wille-sticks, yes?"

"And you know something else, TC," Goldie came back, "if I didn't have a big fat bass to play in a big fat show, I'd take you up on your big fat offer. Maybe I'd manage to get my knickers in a tree for you. Mind, we'll have to plant a special tree just for them... I can't use Nikka's knickers tree."

"Yeah we should have a tree to ourselves anyway", I said, joining in the fantasy. I'll talk to Giles on Monday." "Not Monday," said Goldie, we have to look after Matt's date on Monday." "What date?" I ask. Somehow I wasn't quite up to remembering anything else at that

²⁵ *As you know all the rooms are themed by a week of the year. Our suite was the first in May with the first roses and blossoms.*

moment. “I’ll tell you later,” said Goldie, “when you’re whooping my panties around...”

At the big top, Matt’s getting ready to start. He’s on the stage, standing there all alone, with a spot light directly on him. He’s standing still, smiling and surveying the audience. He’s ready. The audience is ready. Off we go...

“Ladies and gentlemen, welcome. Welcome to The Give it a Go Foundation and welcome to our home here at Château Boules. This place was s wreck six months ago. I was a wreck six months ago, to tell the truth. But then I stumbled quite by chance on an opportunity. And I took it. I didn’t need to but I did. I gave it... (pause for emphasis) I gave it... a go.”

“So now you see our beautiful home and you see me. It’s all change. Look at this place and what we’ve done in six months, or just over six months to be precise, but that’s splitting hairs. It’s an amazing transformation: On both counts. I hope that you’ve also already had the opportunity to meet some of our start-up businesses and to talk to the good people who have started them up with our help. And their stories they’ll tell you, will put this all into context. The key word there was “help”. As the Beatles wrote, *I get by with a little help from my friends*. [Cut to bankers looking expectantly for backing vocals] And my friends here today and I and the bank have helped many businesses not just to get by but to get on and to give it a go. But the real benefits are so much greater than that. Let me give you some statistics ~ with a little help from my friends...” [Cut to bankers again looking expectantly for backing vocals and being thoroughly confused]

Matt moves to the left of the stage... “In six months we have met with 800 candidates who asked for our help.” At this point one of the

Marshall Patrol bikers rides onto the stage (on his motorbike, no less, and with the hazard lights flashing) and unfurls his big rainbow coloured banner which reads **800**. Boy this is going to be some show, I think, not your average PowerPoint slide show! Not the norm in your normal boardroom... Not that I know... but judging by all I've seen and read I'm pretty sure that most presentations don't have motorbikes in them. "Thank you Buzz from Marshall Patrol, motorised VIP security services. Twenty part-time employees," adds Matt.

"We've taken on about three quarters of the prospects as plausible businesses". And now, as the bike leaves the stage, Tree Man comes on with three topiary bushes, each clipped into shape so that the three read **600**. Matt explains, "that's 600 new or improved businesses created in just six months". "Thank you Paul²⁶; Paul from Treeline; turnover up over 150% since we helped with funds for the business.

"And 40 of those have a strong social aspect and 35 are purely charitable. Those 600 business have turned over, on an annualised basis, an average of €85,000 each." And on to the stage come 5 chefs with five colourful cakes, each with a number all reading **85 000**. Matt thanks "Cook, Cater, Clear, now running cooking classes, catering classes, outside catering and consumables. Twenty employees and so far 180 trainees and graduates sent out to the workplace..."

"Which totals over 50 Million Euros." Bonnie brings on seven children to the stage, each with a colourful hat on their head. They hold hands and as the audience start to clap Matt's words, they take a bow which shows the tops of their hats also carrying a character each. In line all the hats read **51 000 000**. The audience clap louder.

²⁶ *That's the first time I realised Tree Man must have had a real name...!*



In-frigging-credible, I think, that's real money! I guess the truth about this is filtering through to the gathered audience and media ~ let alone to me in its total big balls impressiveness. I'd been seeing each small business by itself and hadn't thought about the totality. And that my friends, is why Matt's in charge of the business side...

The audience are audibly pleased and they're obviously surprised by the numbers that Matt is bringing out of his proverbial hat. (And almost literally out of Bonnie's hats). The 51 million number has encouraged both clapping and thoughtfulness. "Thank you to Bonnie of Titfertat Hats. Sales up by over five-fold since the spring..."

"A few more facts and figures before I leave you," says Matt, warming to the enthusiastic response. "With an average of four employees per business, we've helped 2400 people into work. And that's helping 2400 families to enjoy improved lives. A video screen leaps into life behind Matt flashing graphics of **2400 Jobs**. "Thank you to Visual Arts, our newest Give it a Go business partners, for the graphics."

"And two final bonus points... first the fund is getting one hundred per cent debt repayment." Dong comes on the stage with one of his new Alpacas, the rainbow saddle bag over its back reading **100%**. "And with seven and a half million Euros profits from all businesses (annualised), we'll collect over 375,000 Euros back into the fund for charities and social schemes." Cue a tractor entering the stage with a

cart behind reading €375,000. “Thank you Dong from our own Gouljyun Animal Rescue zoo and and farm, with Zebra, Alpacas, Rare Deer and now Terrapins, who have had 1600 visitors this year and thank you Eric from Tractor Trading, who just joined the scheme last week. But he’s doing good so far. Thank you Eric.”

The alpaca and the cart stay on stage as nine children with helium filled rainbow coloured balloons enter the stage. Matt stands centre stage and pauses... If we can do that in six months and if we can continue with a little bit more effort, we estimate that we can have partner businesses with a Billion Euros turnover in less than five years ~ just here in France alone.” The children reveal their balloons lettering reading 100,000,000. Matt studies it for a second and playacts that that’s not right. He joins the end of the line after the last child and the last zero on the right. Then he inflates a balloon of his own, magician like²⁷, displaying the last zero, and the missing zero to correctly read 1,000,000,000. “That’s right. And for that, it’s worth giving it a go I’d say. Thank you. Enjoy the rest of your visit.”

The band breaks into “With a little help from my friends”. All the rest of those who’ve already been on stage return and the screen behind displays the GIAG logo. Everyone on stage join in the chorus and sings the tune with us. The audience stands and claps. Photos flashes all round. Now that was a massive success, I think, looking across the stage over the assembled gang and into the appreciative audience. Fuck PowerPoint, I think. That was powerful and that was to the point my friends!

“Thank you, thank you” I say as the song finishes. “And before we let you meet more of our partners here in the big top (for hire if you need

²⁷ *Like a Prestidigitateur as they say in France...*

a big top by the way, at very reasonable prices), we'd like to play you our new tune, heard for the first time today by anyone in the whole big wide world. That means that for you the whole trip has been worth it. Even without the food and the drink and the goodies and our show tonight! Mind, I think that what you just heard from Mr Matt Pewter was quite worth hearing too. So here we go... It's a little thing called *Just Give it a Go...* Get used to it!

It's a catchy little thing that the band has written. And we're mighty proud to play our first ever publically *written and* performed song by the Colourful Cats. The chorus is picked up by all the assembled friends on stage which gives it a choral quality. The audience pick it by the end too. I think we're on to a winner. I might even be persuaded to write some more songs...

Just Give it a Go: The Lyrics © The Beverley Hills Colourful Cats Gang 2018.

*Rhyming tunes is all very well, But I got a tale I really gotta tell.
Making music for everyone to dance, It ain't so important as, to give
a guy a chance*

*Just give it a go, (bravo!), Just give it a go (ain't it so)
Just give it a go (don't you know), Nothing's as good as, to give it a go!*

*Talking big and walking tall, It's not important, not important at all
Sitting in the sun, and getting all tanned, It ain't as important as to lend
a helping hand*

*Just give it a go, (bravo!), Just give it a go (ain't it so)
Just give it a go (don't you know), Nothing's as good as, to give it a go!*

*Sitting at home like a misery guts, Sitting in the chair just scratching
your nuts*

*It ain't as important as doing the deed, It ain't as important, as a friend
in need*

*Just give it a go, Just give it a go,
Just give it a go, Nothing's as good as, to give it a go!*

*Just give it a go, (Hello, hello), Just give it a go (at the rodeo)
Just give it a go, (go Eskimo), Just give it a go (be a Romeo)
Just give it a go, (in Idaho), Just give it a go (in Jericho)
Just give it a go, (like Status Quo), Just give it a go (Edgar Allen Poe)
Just give it a go, (Hey Joe), Just give it a go (in Borneo)
Just give it a go, (Drive to Monaco), Just give it a go (Scorpio)
Just give it a go, (Michael Angelo), Just give it a go (under mistletoe)
Just give it a go, (in Bordeaux), Just give it a go (from top to toe)
Just give it a go, (in stereo), Just give it a go (on the radio)*

Just give it a go, (We gotta go...), Just give it a go (Cheerio.)

*Just give it a go (don't you know),
Nothing's as good as...
Nothing's as good as...
Nothing's as good as...
Nothing's as good as, to give it a go!*

And that's that for now. We leave the stage. We're going to play again later, just for fun for those who stay for the evening. Meanwhile the audience starts to chat and to mingle and to find out more. Some return to the GIAG village.

I take Goldie, by the hand, and in passing we give Matt a congratulatory hug. “Well done Matt, a spectacular presentation. Very different,” says Goldie. “Thanks Goldie, Thanks TC. Thanks for everything. Now I have to give tomorrow some thought... And Monday,” he says looking conspiratorially at Goldie.

“Yes,” I say to Goldie as we grab some beers at the bar with the rest of the Gang, “tell me about Monday, before I forget to ask again.” Later says Goldie, “after tonight’s show, OK.”

And after tonight’s show, I forget to ask again. I was thinking of the earlier discussion that I had with Goldie. I was on a promise, remember. Willie-sticks!

Chapter 13: There is No Chapter 13...

... we need all the luck we can get for chapters 14 and 15...



Chapter 14: 2nd Interview. Better

OK and you're probably thinking how come we have all been so relaxed about the interview? Well I guess that it was partly getting the promo show done and dusted that had kept us going and it was partly a load of bollocks that we were so relaxed about it! I mean we weren't. Some of us were sweating it a bit... but we managed and if the truth be told (hey guys, it's all I do) a shared worry is a pared worry. (Can I say that; I mean it's cut down to size a bit but I just made that phrase up... when I said that a shared worry is... I didn't know what should follow so I made up a new phrase.²⁸)

Poor Matt had to meet this woman in front of the cameras again, a woman who'd tried to bust his balls twice and hadn't given him a chance before. And then it's shown on national TV, for the love of all that is good including beer and fine wines...And then poor Matt comes clean to us, that he loves her despite all that. Then he has to spend seven months waiting for a re-match.

But listen out there, we're the *give it a go* guys, so we had a plan. But the plan was that it wasn't going to be an interview at all, as you'll hear in a minute.

On top of all this Matt has his own plans to try to woo Ms GiGi the next day. (Nikka checked her schedule and she was still in town on Monday. Nothing was being left to chance.) So on Saturday night, after the final gig, and after a bit of pantie play, willie-sticks, Goldie laid it all out for me. The cooking, the guitar lessons, the dress rehearsal for

²⁸ *I think what I meant on reflection was "a problem shared is a problem halved". But that doesn't even rhyme!*

Nikka and Pete, and so on and so on... So that's where the pressure was for Matt, given that we thought the interview bit today would be a mere formality, based on the water-tight display Matt had prepared ready for GiGi. Sunday business: Monday pleasure.

Nikka had organised one of the salons to be the studio. (The biggerballs salon, as I called it. Our club room was more cosy.) The camera crew were set up ~ as per Nikka's instructions. Matt would sit at a long table, with 12 so-far empty chairs next to him and GiGi would not be in shot. Nikka had asked that she ask no questions until the end and Nikka had also drafted an introduction for GiGi that she hadn't yet given to her and which she could edit in later. Matt and Nikka were in control this time.

After the shots in the salon, there would be a tour of the estate. Giles had had a team up late Saturday night and early Sunday morning clearing up and making everything château shaped for the tour and for the *TVGauche* audience. Obviously the TV crew had footage from the events yesterday and from the big top from last night.

When Matt comes in he's wearing a simple grey outfit. No hint of the rainbow colours of yesterday. He looks like a regular new England bachelor at a drinks party ~ or at least a lot more like a dot-com billionaire than he'd been looking like recently. Twelve of our partner business people come in too and they sit at the table to Matt's right. Nikka gives GiGi the introduction to read.

The cameras are on... GiGi reads the introduction that Nikka has just given her. "Mr Pewter, we have met before and I have been critical of you. But judging by what we have already seen here, it may be fair to say that I have misjudged you. Would you like to explain to us today what you've been up to since we last met?" GiGi does the neck chop

sign to cut the cameras off and turns to Matt, glancing sideways at Nikka occasionally as she speaks. “Well that is true, I suppose but it is not my language. May I re-record some words along the same lines for the final edit? The same meanings but in my own words?” Matt looks at her for a minute. He smiles and yet still says nothing. He sits back, fold his arms (relaxed not aggressively), unfolds them and leans forward to speak. “Yes, that’s fine. I trust you,” he says. “Let’s get going...”

The cameras are turned back on. Matt starts, “Hello. I’m not going to say much: I’m going to let others speak for us today. Their voices are more important. It’s what this is all about and I want you to hear from them. You have heard from me yesterday and we have presented some facts and figures, including the remarkable business and commercial achievements of both the Foundation and the partner business. But there’s a human side, and that’s what we’re going to hear today.” He folds his hands to say, that’s all from me and turns to his right to the first speaker, inviting her to speak...

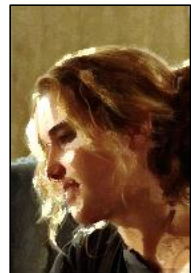
Each of the twelve have been chosen carefully for their variety: They are a cross section by age, class, colour and the type of businesses that they run. Each one of them speaks, one by one, to the camera. Some are nervous but each delivers a short precis of their personal and business story.

They each give a short testimonial about GIAG. Some mention Matt specifically. I can see that this is mildly annoying for Matt because they have all been specifically asked not to do so, that is, not to mention Matt. He wanted it to just be a business case for the GIAG Foundation and not a personal thank you. But as each of them had a short story to tell about the absolute hopelessness before they met Matt (or the GIAG team as they were supposed to say) and how no-one would

help them with a way into starting or growing their business, they found it hard not to (or didn't want not to) mention Matt, the man.

So even though the effect is supposed to be about the enlightened Foundation, it does end up being a bit of a glowing, glorious and glittering and extended praise for Matt. He goes to speak again as the last guy (Henri the pixie boot-maker) finishes but at that point, wait for it... another hundred people come into the room. They surround Matt at the table and a spokesperson for the whole group (who organised this, I wonder?) signs to GiGi and to the camera that she wants the last word. It's Pat the Patisserie (as we call her) who speaks. "We all want everyone to know that although this Foundation is run by a lot of marvellous people who have welcomed us into the business family, and we say thank you to them. But in the course of things, we have all been met personally by Matt, we have all spoken to Matt at our first meeting and then subsequently. We have all discussed our businesses with Matt and our progress with Matt. We know that the Foundation is bigger than just one man but we all want to thank Matt for the Foundation and we want to say that without him, none of this would have happened. We owe him for his vision and for his humility." They all call out *Bravo!* and *Bien Dit!* (French versions of "hear-hear"), they clap and as many as can, kiss Matt. It's like my grandpa's 80th birthday party or something. It just falls apart at that point into laughing and chatting and smiling and kissing.

Matt after a while, disentangles himself from the 112-strong crowd and walks over to Nikka and GiGi, who is genuinely smiling at Matt. He says "Well that was embarrassing and let me please re-assure you that there were strict instructions that that was not the sort of thing that was going to happen today. Nikka, did you...?" Nikka looked at her shoes... "Pete thought it



would be a good idea after the last time and we all thought it could do no harm. GiGi, was that OK for the camera?” Then she walks off a little looking relatively pleased with herself... She hoped that as Matt’s instructions had not been followed, that at least it was a success and a success for Matt personally ~ under the circumstances.

It was the first time in our brief history of the world since ski city that Matt had been directly disobeyed (by what we used to call “his people”) but I think, watching from the side-lines that he didn’t mind, on reflection. The peasants weren’t running the court, but they’d probably helped their king a little in his personal hunting pursuits...

“Monsieur Pewter, that was quite impressive. Did you pay them to say that?” said GiGi as they started to walk out to begin the tour of the château grounds. Matt stopped and I saw a face more hurt than shocked but GiGi quickly reassured him, by adding “It’s OK, I was joking. You may not give credit me either Monsieur, but I do have a sense of humours.” “Humour” said Matt automatically to correct her English. And they both started to laugh.

O-frigging-K, I thought, we’re on track...

We all follow the tour around the estate. Matt and GiGi talk all the way, with the camera crew filming all the while. We can only pick up bits of their conversation but it looks like Matt is doing a good job. GiGi nods a lot and the camera is getting all the key stuff on video.

At the end of the tour, Matt asks GiGi if they have finished and if so could he talk to her off camera and off the record. “Of course Monsieur...” She replies. Matt asks to see her again tomorrow. “What?” GiGi replies, “Is there more or is there something you’d like to film again?” Or another interview perhaps?” “No something of a more personal nature” says Matt, “In the evening.”

GiGi pauses and looks a bit confused and slightly abashed... “Ah you mean like a date, as you Americans would say?” “Yes, if you like,” replies Matt. “I like” says GiGi, “I like a date.”

Well hallelujah and hairy fairy godmothers, I think. He’s pulled it off. GiGi explains that she has to make sure the footage is with the station and that the edit goes OK, which she can do on the phone and online from her hotel during the day and then she’ll be all free. Matt says that he’ll send a car for her at 7pm tomorrow...

OK one big hurdle cleared without losing his nuts. Onwards and upwards!

Chapter 15: A Private Dinner Dance

It would be fair, or it might be fair to say (depending on which side of the argument you follow) that we needed all the luck we could muster at this point... But as they say, you make your own luck. Well, you can't actually make your own luck ~ as I'd been discussing with Matt. He said that you work hard and you prepare and you practise, you can make your own luck. It's like the old story about the golfer Gary Player, Matt explained to me, who refuted that he was enjoying good luck on the greens by stating that that it was funny because the more he practised, the luckier he got.

I argued with Matt that although I agreed with him about practice and planning you could also make your own luck by 1. Being in the right place at the right time, that is putting yourself out there to be open to finding luck and 2. Taking a chance and grabbing life by the scrotum, in other words give it a go... give luck a chance. It's amazing, I'd argued that I'd seen so many people in my life who refused to be lucky because they refused to be open to luck. And hey-ho, a big hairy ball sack of a surprise-surprise, they weren't very lucky...

Well in that case Matt agreed and in that case he said i: (boy we've got to stop numbering everything and just talk like regular human beans), he said "i: I have placed myself in the lucky position to be able to be lucky tonight and ii: I have minimised the need to be lucky because I have planned everything within a gnat's whisker of being perfect."

"And I have taken counsel from your dear lady Goldie who has been most helpful, as you can imagine. And you and the band have a role to play as you know but keep forgetting. After I do my song tonight,

you guys have to join in and help me finish and then you have to play some background music while GiGi and I enjoy each other's company." "OK, I know we're helping out with the end of the song but I didn't know about the background music. What do you want, gypsy violins or smooch lift music, we can do either at a price?" "Fuck off." said Matt, with a smile. It was probably one of the friendliest "Fuck Offs" I ever had.

"I guess I'll work something out with the band then." I said being all casual about it. "Goldie has the list," said Matt. "As I said, it's all planned."

One thing that Matt hadn't planned was the snow. But that was only a bonus. The château looked even more beautiful when the stretch Rolls turns slowly into the gates, carrying Matt's heavenly desires. It pulls up to a halt and Matt, who has been standing by the gates waiting for GiGi to arrive (not for long, he'd had a call from Louis) climbs in beside her. He had said that he'd wanted to see the château with the spinning trees and their fairy lights, with her, like it was the first time ~ which it was in the snow.

By the time they had got out of the car and got to the front door, they were looking like a couple sharing something wonderful. The snow and the turning trees with their fairy lights, had done a good job. Maybe luck did come into it. Mind, Giles and Tree Man (who I now really should call by his proper name now that I know it) had been ultra-fantastically clever in making the lights work. I just wondered why the wires didn't get twisted but it was so much more clever than that... Anyway the effect was glorious.

Matt opened the front door for GiGi and they walked through the hall and as they came into the club room to join us all for a drink, GiGi

looked like she was a bit disappointed to see us after the promise of so much loveliness so far. The gang were not part of her ideal date. But she was up to it and she politely greeted us all. TC holding her elbow introduced GiGi who said hello to each of us in turn. She'd seen most of us before a couple of times but she now met the whole gang. And by "gang", I mean to include Matt's people. We've all come a long way.

We all get up to serve our own drinks. Blackie gives Matt and GiGi theirs and GiGi makes a "lord of the manor" jibe at Matt. "Uh-uh" said Matt, "Now, Now".

As GiGi relaxes (and Matt has assured her that they're just having a drink with us), I can see what Matt sees in her. She's good looking and smart for sure, but it good to see her off-duty side. She's being quite human. Matt gives her the hat that he has been holding on to for her for months and even though it doesn't suit her outfit she does it gracefully.



She was giving us a run-down of what they'd all thought of all the super-rich guys back in the Alps. This was by some way an explanation of her antipathy to Matt when she'd first interviewed him. She said that she'd seen a guy hire a piste-basher for him and three of his mates one evening to both tow them up the piste so that they could ski down again on perfect newly powdered snow, rather than the end-of-the-day skied-out slushy snow that everyone else had to ski.

Matt then tells the tale of one of others who'd bought two sports car, one right hand drive and one left hand drive: Just to get both elbows equally tanned, when the hood was up. This guy even had a typed list put up in his twelve car garage about which days of the week he drove

which car (LHD, Mon, Wed, Fri, Alternative Sundays.) More tales of the mega rich extravagances followed until Matt says it's time for dinner and they leave for the ball room for dinner.

The ballroom is all in the dark when they enter and Matt flicks the switch to reveal more fairy lights. We all have a thing for fairy lights and we have them everywhere and not just for the Xmas season. We'd all seen the ballroom earlier and like when we had decked it out for Nikka and Pete, it was quite a sight. But this time a winter version, as made by fairies. The ballroom is a massive space but there was just a table for two in the middle. Candle lit. And the fairy lights all around.

It's dinner time and the first of many courses is brought in. GiGi starts to take him to task about being waited on hand and foot (again) and getting all his servants to do his bidding. Matt takes her hand and says "GiGi, enough of this. Enjoy yourself for what it is. But please note that I have cooked this dinner for you, myself. I have been having cooking lessons and I have practised. And I hope that you like it."

"I am sorry" she said. "but I am a little in awe, even if I am used to the rich and famous. I can be a little bit scratchy, as I think you say. Did you really cook dinner? In that case I am really looking for it".

"Yes, and I am looking forward to it too," says Matt, without actually correcting her English.

(You may wonder how I know what was being said... Goldie and I were in the wings for this little scene. After this we left them to have their dinner... until it was music time ~ the song remember...? I had no fears that Matt would perform it OK (practice and diligence, plus his innate capability at doing everything that he wanted to do). The only worry was that GiGi would like it. Goldie's thinking was that she'd

like it whatever because it was for played her and... *and* he had learned to play the guitar for her. What more could a woman ask, she said.

So we just have to imagine the rest of the dinner. But when I went in at the end as agreed with Matt later, to give him the guitar, they seemed pretty happy with each other. “Ah TC,” said Matt when I handed over the guitar, “Thank you.”

“And what is this? Another gift for me? I do not play,” said GiGi. “No said Matt, “I would think that your hat was enough for one evening.” “Yes of course I am still making a joke with you,” replied GiGi. I thought that if these two were going to get together that there would be a lot of gentle humour between them but they’d have to learn fast when each was joking.

Matt talks to GiGi with guitar in hand. “Listen GiGi, I have had a hard time from you in the past but for some unfathomable reason, it may be your beauty or it may be your spirit or your politics which you’d be surprised to know I agree with more than you’d think, I like you. The first time we met, I thought I saw a heart in there behind the hard TV-lady front and I wanted to win that heart from that very moment. Joking aside about seigneurial rights, I know that I can’t have it for nothing and I know that I can’t buy it. I know I have to earn it.”

“I have not built this world because of you, I did that for myself and for my friends. But I have become a more rounded person...” GiGi looks quizzically at Matt... “No not more *round*, in fact I’m healthier than ever: No more complete as a person... I have become open to people and to ideas. I have however learned to cook ~ for you. And most importantly at this moment, I have learned to play the guitar ~ so that I can sing for you.”

I know that that heart of yours is in there. No-one could see it before ~ except Goldie knew. I hope that they can see more of it now after yesterday. But I want you to open it to me..." Slush-ville Arizona, I think. But...

[This is the time to listen to the song that Matt plays. It's "All I want to be (is by your side)", written by Peter Frampton and you can hear the acoustic version of the song here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GLIZrSwFWk>

And these are the words...

All I Wanna Be (Is By Your Side) by Peter Frampton

*Do what you do don't bring me down
 I went to the doctor he's just another clown
 Don't stand alone you might turn to stone
 I wish there was a pill for that, you're on your own*

*Can't you see what it's doing to me
 All I want to be is by your side
 I don't care if they cut my hair
 All I want to be is by your side*

*Shake me down you want to put me on the ground
 There's money in my pocket I won't make a sound
 Run me over or pick a four leaf clover
 Now they cut the lights down, this record's going slower*

*Can't you see what it's doing to me
 All I want to be is by your side
 I don't care if they cut my hair*

All I want to be is by your side

*All I Wanna Be (Is By Your Side) Songwriter: Peter Frampton
Acoustic lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group/*

Matt performs it brilliantly as expected with only the slightest falter near the beginning. As the song nears the end the band reveals itself, one by one strolling into view and helps Matt finish the song with accompaniment and of course the girls' brilliant backing vocals.

"Ah Matt, this is superb," says GiGi when he finishes and rests the guitar by the table. She stands and walks the few steps around the table and very gently kisses Matt. Not French style on the cheeks but on the lips. "Matt, I love Peter Frampton and I am liking you more too." "I know," say Matt. "Which bit?" says GiGi, "about Peter Frampton or about you?" She fully expects him to say about him, Matt. But Matt smiles and says nothing. Then I clock on... he did know what music she likes. He found out! He really did leave nothing to chance.

The band plays some more acoustic Frampton, as Matt had asked of us. We sat and played in the corner of the ballroom while the two diners sat and chatted at their table. They paid us no attention after that although GiGi had the grace to thank us later for our playing.

[You can hear more of the music we played on the link which continues after All I Wanna Be...]

We leave them. We leave quietly. We leave but we really don't want to. We want to see what happens...

And on Tuesday morning there's another pair of knickers in the tree!

Chapter 16: Wedding Balls

Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know... It's predictable. But fuckety-fuck and bollocky-bollocks, what did you expect...? It's a story. What, did you want it to end in tears!? Sorry, no car crashes, I'm just telling it as it is. And you wouldn't have wanted to me to stop before now would you. So it's a convention, I guess with stories that you end up at some reasonable punctuation that doesn't happen in life but has to in stories, or else it would never end...

And to make it better still, it's spring, just less than a year after we started this tale in a bar, in the Alps . The Château Bolleaux setting is, as always, a delight. I won't apologise about that or going on about it either. It's a beautiful place and that's why we bought it. And what we've done to it since has only made it better. And we're in the rose garden which was newly planted last autumn and has its first roses. That's something to behold itself. All the roses are white.

In short it's the perfect setting for a wedding.

The Notaire or Notary (?) or whoever the hell marries people in France, the Registrar (?), turns up. (It would be a Registrar in the UK). I meet and greet him and invite him to meet everyone... We're all outside in the sunshine. "Where is the happy couple then" he asks. "We'll see in a minute, let's find them..." I say.

I decide to walk him about rather than wait here. We have an hour to go before the ceremony and a drink or two certainly seems to be in order. No beer today's though, it's fizz all the way. The Registrar takes a glass as Blackie and Buzz approach both dressed in white. "Ah, is this the happy couple. How are you?" the Registrar asks them. "Oh

no,” giggles Blackie “I ain’t getting married. It’s not my time yet...” she smiles at Buzz who shuffles a bit. “Ah then this must be the happy...” he starts again as Whitie and Cookie approach, also dressed in white. “Nah, not us, Mister” she says “Cookie, do you fancy it, then?” Cookie, moves to stand next to Buzz and hands out more drinks without saying anything. “One day, Love, eh though...?” says Whitie.

I walk the Registrar away from the bar as he takes his third glass of champagne. We walk into the rose garden and at the front, fiddling with last arrangement is Nikka, looking quite delightful. As the Registrar looks hopefully at Nikka and she realises the question on his lips, she says wistfully “Ah non Monsieur, ce n'est pas moi qui se marie aujourd'hui.” Since she’s been with Pete she’s been learning French. Our friend here shrugs his Gallic shoulders and turns to me. At this very point and as the Registrar downs his glass, Alan and Justin walk up to us , arm in arm, to say hello. Justin is wearing white but Alan black.

The Registrant looks awkward. He starts “Oh no, Messieurs, I would have brought a different license with me if I had known... I cannot do a civic ceremony you know without the special paperwork... It cannot be today.” Alan, looks thoroughly confused but Justin cottons on. He turns to Alan, “He must think that we’re the bride and groom, what with you in black. I’m sorry sir, it’s not us, we’ve only just met,” he finishes for the benefit of the rapidly getting tipsy and confused Registrar.

I’m starting to think this is quite funny so I take the poor bewildered man back to the bar and give him another glass. I like the idea that he might not make the ceremony at this rate. I tell him to relax and that the bride and groom will be here soon.

I start a conversation with him and with Pete. It's seeing all these couples that makes me wonder how they get their joint labelling. I explain my query to them. Is it X and Y or Y and X. Do you name the man first or the lady first? Do you start with the person you knew first? Or sometimes is it just the sound of it, poetical as it were? Romeo and Juliet. I run through those we've just met... Blackie and Buzz: Knew her first/girl first. White and Cookie: Ditto. Pete and Nikka: Man first/ knew her first but she's second. Does Nikka and Pete sound more right then? Alan and Justin or Justin and Alan: Ditto. What do people call me, or us, TC and Goldie or Goldie and TC? I think the former sounds better but I'm me... What about Matt and GiGi? Definitely Matt first...

As I say this Matt arrives at the front of the rose garden and clinks a glass to get everybody's attention. I shuffle the Registrar back into the rose garden to join Matt. "Ah it is good now," he says as we look to Matt to get things going. I can't see GiGi anywhere.

The other guests gather into the seating in the rose garden. Matt is at the front, looking like a real groom. He's also in white but his built in neatness just makes him look more groom-like than most. Or maybe he just always looks like the most important person in any setting?

"We are gathered here today..." he starts with a twinkle in his eye. He's really learned to take the piss... "We are gathered here today," he repeats, "to celebrate that somebody or two somebodies are just giving it a go. As we've learned - or at least I have recently learned, just giving things a go, usually isn't a risk, even though it may be daunting."

"TC! Top Cat, *indisputable leader of the gang*, come up here. There'll be speeches afterwards I'm sure..." he pauses a moment and looks to

Nikka for confirmation and to Goldie ~ who has appeared in a gold frock that I've never seen before. She looks like the sun. They both shake their heads. "Oh... OK," say Matt, "OK, we're that unconventional are we?! In that case it's even more important that I speak now. Goldie will you please come up here too."

Now Matt has Goldie and I on either side. He takes our hands, steps back, putting our hands together and stands between us with his hands on ours. "From the minute I met you two I knew you had an unbreakable bond of something for each other. I might call it love but that seems to be too straight for you guys. TC might put it as "scrotum-achingly-feel-it-in-your-groin-belonging-togetherness." He tries to mimic my accent and fails miserably. "And Goldie, (*he pauses*) might say something beautiful and thoughtful like "TC and I are share the truth". But in my book, and as I'm paying for this wedding, I say, you guys have just taken too long to do the right thing. You two belong together. TC, make an honest woman of this beauty. And Goldie, make an honest man of this hero of mine. But not so honest that he doesn't slip the odd drink onto my tab, when I'm not looking."

Yes, yes, yes, it's Me and Goldie. Goldie and Me or even Goldie and I if you prefer. And why not? She's an absolute angel and a delight to boot. Me and Goldie? Why not after all these years?

The Registrar is delighted that he now knows who's getting hitched. He looks for his papers but he's lost his bag. A small piece of theatrical silliness follows as we all look for his official briefcase. This it turns out is in the bar and in finding it he has brought himself another glass of champagne back to the wedding platform. I suggest that we all get top ups. This is a civil ceremony after all. We're not in church and we don't have to keep an eye out for higher powers disapproving...

Being up here with Goldie suddenly made me nervous. For the first time I lost my cool on stage! Not that this was a stage but it was like it. I'm used to being watched on stage and I have a swagger ~ but this was different. Goldie and I were the centre of attention but not for our music. I guess we were making music of a different kind today.

If it wasn't for the drunk Registrar who only just got through the ceremony, I think I'd have been too nervous.

And you all know what weddings are like. This was like that. Many lovely hours to follow, with lots of handshakes, kisses and laughter. Lunch, drinking and chatting but not too much conversation for us funnily enough. (Everyone thinks we're just too busy to talk to them.) So we spend a lot of time just wandering around in the sunshine, holding hands and drinking champagne. Smiling at people. Glad to be alive. Glad to be married. Glad to be about to give that a go...

There's no way I can get drunk: Many, many glasses of cold fizz pour down my throat but it doesn't seem to touch the sides ~ or my insides. Even though I'm inspired by the Registrar's fine efforts, I never get beyond mildly tipsy. By the way, we find out that the Registrar is actually the local mayor. His wife comes later along with some of the villagers and the townsfolk to join in the party. The mayor-slash-registrar dances with everyone. He has a ball at Château Balls.

We've all had a ball. "What a year we've had." I whisper to Goldie. "Yes," she says "It was twelve months long." "OK, lady, just because you married an arsehole with a silly sense of humour, doesn't mean you have to become one too!" "OK arse-face" she says.

Later, in passing, near the end of the day, Matt says "You know you should write down that little story we just lived" "I might just give that a go," I say.

Some kids run past, and Matt looks at them and then he looks at me and says, “And you know, GiGi and I might just give that a go next.”

The End



[In the film version we'd now get the end titles. And let's not beat about the bush this story would make a fucking good film. So the end titles would be running and we see the château obviously a few years later (I don't know how you'd know, maybe some white hairs or something predictable like that... I know I still look the same). And we see loads of tiny little kids running around the lake. I'm in a deck chair dictating the story to a secretary, with a beer in my hand. Goldie's swimming with a couple of kids. (There's a really, really, really tall tree in the grounds and there's a pair of gold panties in the top branches.) Alan and Justin walk past. Nikka and Pete holds hands... etc... etc... etc...]

[Or maybe a better and less corny shot to have under the end titles would be the cavalcade leaving the Château to go to the first outside roadshow of the year. It would have about twenty vehicles including all those you've seen and many more new ones, like catering vans, a mobile media centre, etc. Both endings are true, it just depends on what you'd prefer to see after all the romance in the last chapter.]

[Another thought I just had would be to update you on everyone, you know some time later, either at the same time as the kids shots as above or further on. But that's not my game. My work is done here and you can stop reading now.]

