

The Graffiti Killer

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by

David Milnes

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Before dawn lifted its greasy lid on the Channel, I found him on the rear deck, casting an artistic eye into the wake and darkness. Now and then he glanced about but only to hold on to his solitude. There was nothing wary in his manner. If anything, he looked smug and proprietary, as if pleased with the deposits, the excrement, he'd left behind on the continent.

His nondescript outfit - puffer jacket, jeans, paint-dashed trainers - was the same as when I'd seen him boarding, so he'd had no cabin. His child-like frame and smudged features, his lank hair in dark straggles, also singled him out. In appearance, posture, attitude, ambition, everything, he was nothing, beneath contempt.

I watched him from in front of the ferry's Games Room, a poky afterthought adjacent to the cafeteria kitchens. I could hear some movement in the kitchens now. The cabin wake-up call, due at 5.30 a.m., had not yet sounded but they were preparing for the Full English rush.

He turned leeward and a gust fanned up the straggles of his unkempt and scrappy hair and held them a moment about his face, as if in some cartoon sketch depicting horror or electric shock - not a cartoon sketch but a graffiti sketch, of course - while his face in the middle was placid, even introspective, thinking of what he'd done, what he'd achieved, until he saw me standing behind the doors, and straightaway I believe he saw my intentions but refused to give way to fear.

The deck doors were heavily sprung but noiseless.

"Morning!" he called, smiling, insisting on normality with a perfect stranger.

Behind me the doors slammed on their oily springs.

There was no taste of sea air because of the vile black diesel blown back by gusts of tailwind. The *Mont St Michel* thrust on at its maximum of 18 knots.

Oh how those mighty propellers chewed at the dying sea!

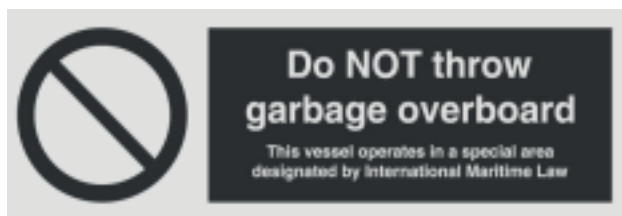
“Morning!” I returned.

For a moment, unbidden, the image of his punk motorbike, an old Honda 250 or similar, its panniers crammed with one-man tent and aerosols, hung before me, modest and forlorn on the upper deck, behind the chrome fanfare of bullish touring bikes.

I thought I saw a flex of muscle, a narrowing of the eyes in recognition, and it struck me that he might have seen me from his bike when I slowed under a bridge on the E5.

His phone and wallet bulged under the zips of the puffer jacket.

On the side of a life-boat barrel was a public warning:



An old man who has never played rugby makes an unconvincing low tackle, but the move surprised him and half his torso was over the rail before he fought back. He was too busy kicking and clinging on to shout or scream, and the weight of his head was over already, pointing down at that twenty metre drop, that five storey drop, his straggly hair pointing down past all those cabin windows, all those fresh, blue and white stripes of welded hull dividing deck from deck, pointing past the welded world deck by deck, his eyes pointing down in terror to the grey churn of propeller current. His wriggling ribs beneath the jacket felt like the ribs of a squealing piglet caught at the fair. My shoulder under his skinny thigh gave enough leverage to push the full weight of his torso and his right leg over the edge. His left leg still clung there, as if he were on a spit, longways on

the rail, which was a wooden chamfered rail, not metal and therefore not so uncomfortable, perhaps. With both hands I wrenched his ankle - he emitted a terrible squeal! - and levered his left leg all the way over.

He couldn't hang on long and he knew it, knew he didn't have the strength. His chin was chattering with terror but no words came out. I reached over and gripped his jacket tight under both arms.

"I've got you. It's okay."

I nodded to him.

"Password."

Still the chattering terror. The utter bewilderment.

Shifting my grip to his shoulders, I felt him start to slip out of the jacket.

"It's okay. Password."

"Loner!"

The collar was coming clear but the hood pouch snagged round the back of his head, which made him think that would help me drag him back up. I got a good grip on the pouch with my left hand, released my right and set my palm on his slippery forehead and he twisted away as if shy of my touch. I pushed so his neck cricked back and dipped under the pouch and he was gone. There was a mad flailing and spreading out and the beginning of a somersault halfway down so the back of his head hit the water first. I imagine that impact broke his neck and he knew nothing more, never felt the draw of the propellers nor saw their cinema-screen scythes reaching out to him through the green froth.

The whole business had taken but a few seconds.

I looked about, his jacket under my arm. No one at all.

If the whole world had sat there in deckchairs, I could not have cared less.

In the end, there is no choice. When all else has failed you or foiled you, you take up arms against them.

Kloon. Shaft. Moos. Loner. Arus, or sometimes, Anus.

Remember our names. We love this game.

Kloon's disdain is not just for truckers but for whole holiday families, van-drivers and all the rest, including the rare super-rich passing by, touring in Bentley and Aston-Martin convertibles, and the educated bourgeoisie on their way to their gites - there is a triumph in drawing them all down to his level. They cannot avoid him, deny him. And when they see him again, on a bridge or wall two hundred miles later, that second hit - You again! Kloon again! *Yes! Me again! Here before you again and after you've gone again! Miles of smiles! I am permanent, you are passing through. My art is beautiful, I am beautiful, no one can tell me it is not so! I am an artist!*

Remember our names. We love this game.

I do remember your names.

Loner of the deep. A sprat to catch the mackerel.

Here's the place: 5km south-west of Ussel on the A89. *Parc naturel régional de Millevaches en Limousin.*

Some likely ruins and farm buildings but their target has to be the minor suspension bridge: two arcs press the sky, with a single main hawser either side threaded down midpoint, which divides to take the weight of the road through two massive stainless steel unions. The sublime grace of its balance must have brought much joy to its architect on completion. A young architect, one imagines.

Its stanchions offer white virgin flanks of concrete, where Kloon will be the first to cock his leg, but for the last time.

A kilometre or so after the bridge I slowed at the sight of a campfire in a lay-by my side of the road. Not so much a campfire, it turned out, but a gas burner in the back of an open van. There were several people in and around the back of the van, all adults, possibly all male, and I noted a homemade bed structure inside. The van was an old white Ford Transit with UK plates. In its past life it had been a delivery vehicle: "*Purveyors of*" was painted over - not sprayed but hand-painted over with a brush, in white paint - and then below that, covering the flank of the van, were

these lines:

*“They locked up a man who wanted to rule the world.
The fools.
They locked up the wrong man.”*

Before checking, I had the idea the lines would come from some troubadour manqué, some Bob Dylan figure, and it turned out they belonged to Leonard Cohen, the pedlar of self-pity to the masses, who died quite recently. The pronouns gave it away. *They did it!* The oppressors who robbed the ne'er-do-wells of what they'd never had in money, property and talent. *They did it! The fools!* The tone is disdainful but resigned, leaving plenty of slack for melancholy singalongs by the campfires of Victimhood. 'They' - society, or some sect within it, or even History itself - is always to blame for how things have turned out. But as Thatcher said on Woman's Hour, there is no such thing as society. There are families and individuals: that is all.

Everyone is accountable.

It is Kloons's van. This is certain from the group messages and the pin-drop. There has been some curiosity about Loner's silence but it seems he is being quickly forgotten. Some on the group seem a touch relieved not to hear from him.

When I had a chance to look closer, on foot, through the night sights, Cohen's lines blocked out completely whatever the van had once purveyed. The humble work once undertaken by some honest soul to put bread on the table, had now been tarted over with Cohen's religio-profundity, his mobile graffiti.

There would be four, given Loner's absence. Four adults. Not easy for a young, fit soul with some military training, let alone an old ham worrying about his prostate, lumbering through the pine trees - *'Ghoul fourteen to the right of tree six, please! ... Like, Now!'*

Dusk was very late - around nine, another half hour - and the moon was full, so they had to wait, maybe till gone midnight, before they got started. Hence the gas burner. Time for a last supper. And a singalong, perhaps.

No motorbikes in front of or behind the van, which was tipped slightly because the lay-by was not actually an official stop, not an *aire de* anything, but a cleared space of about eight metres breadth at the side of the road, probably a scar left from the original construction of the bridge.

After I shot 'Kloon', 'Moos' went to pieces. Berserk.

She was a pathetic, terrified, sniffing and snivelling, wailing thing, trying to wash the blood and paint off the stanchion with crummy tools from the van, a window wiper and an old blue towel. She was about thirty, with dark, shoulder-length hair, mostly tucked up under a Nike baseball cap with a tick on the peak, and that moronic slogan *Just Do It!* across the brow. She was skinny and floppy but not unattractive, even in this hysterical state.

"All of it."

"I can't!" she wailed. "It's aerosol! It won't come off!"

"Harder."

"I can't! It's stupid! It won't come off! That's the whole point!"

Shaft came up the bank with more water.

They'd tossed a coin for the role - one to clean, one to fetch and carry - but with this caveat: if the cleaning failed, the cleaner would be next. And the cleaning was failing miserably, so Moos would be next. No heroics from Shaft. He never offered to swap places. He was dark skinned but not black, nor identifiably Indian. I had picked up they were in a relationship. So much for that.

I could see from the way he was carrying the bucket that he had a plan: throw the water over me then smash me with the bucket. But it was only a blue plastic pail, a slop bucket from the van, no weight.

Moving the Browning across my knees, I offered the cliché for predictable threats of this nature:

“Don’t even think about it.”

He set the bucket down.

“What’s the matter with you, man?”

Good to hear that fake ‘man’ making a comeback from the sixties, seventies. Yeah, man. Cool, man. He also spoke with a heavy estuary accent but with some black in it: I suspected it was an affectation, or an affectation grown so familiar it was now part of him.

Arus was still in the van. I had Shaft tie him up in the back and gag him, and outside smash the van headlights with a rock. Then I’d left Shaft in the cab and hurried back to the other side of the bridge to take out Klooon from the opposite stanchion, using the base as a rest. But I was too late: the K and L were both complete and he’d started on the first O. Some defender of the faith I am. Aiming for the centre of the back of his skull with the new night sights, I squeezed the trigger and he dropped as if there had been a power cut, at exactly the same time. That shot and Moos’s wailing brought Shaft to the bridge, of course. I wouldn’t let either of them touch Klooon.

Now the water from Moos’s futile scrubbing was soaking his jeans. He was lying face down in what had been dry earth but had now turned to slimy surface mud. He lay perfectly at peace, with a steady trickle of blood coming out the back of his matted hair, his clotted dark brown hair, and joining another thicker trickle from his face, or what was left of his face, in the mud; the two twisted round a pale stone a few inches from his skull and started down the bank towards the river, thin and tiny and red but perfectly visible, glinting in the moonlight and the bridge lights.

Shaft squatted on his haunches, the blue pail in front of him. He knitted his hands to stop them shaking with fear and tried to adopt a reasonable, non-threatening posture.

“What’s up with you, man?” he repeated. “We’re just having a bit of fun, for fucksake. No harm done. No one deserves to fuckin’ die! That’s mad stuff, crazy stuff.”

At that Moos set her forehead against the white concrete and wept piteously.

“She needs more water.”

“We don’t deserve to fuckin’ die, man, just cos you

say so. Just cos you don't like what we're doin' an' you got a fuckin' gun. What's goin' down in there?" He pointed at my head. "I mean, *Why?*"

He asked me that. He asked me *Why*.

"You know," I told him. "You know *why*."

"No I don't! That's just what I'm fuckin' sayin'!"

From the Costa del Sol to the Basque country, and on through the beautiful French Pyrenees, and then to every port in France, your names are there, on every ruin, every roman aqueduct, on every naked wall or barrier or noise baffle, on every pump hut alone in corn field or vineyard, on each and every bridge and in every underpass and tunnel and on every motorway sign, your names are there.

And you asked me that. *Why*.

Remember our names. We love this game.

You insist on your presence everywhere, in all these places where you do not belong, and that do not belong to you, that you colonise like imperialists, and you ask me *Why*. There is no escape from your faux fame. It is a tyranny. You inspire hatred. Your art is hate-speech. You hate art, mock art, spoof art. The field or vineyard was beautiful before you shat your ten foot name on the pump hut. The physics of the bridge were a wonder before you shat your name on its stanchions. How could Lorraine, Monet or Van Gogh ever paint that field, vineyard, bridge or river, with your name, your art there *first*, your defilement? The beauty of these landscapes, of the Pyrenees mountains and valleys, never belonged to you but you took it, violated it, raped it, ruined all possibility of inspiration to a genuine artist's eye. You are a murderer of art, a denier of art, a destroyer of all the possibilities of art, of the scope of the artist, of the artist himself or herself - the murderer! - and the consequences of your crime permeate the world in eight point two billion different ways, and counting, infinite in number, immeasurable in scope, and the penalty for your crime is Death.

You have no understanding of work, or respect for work, physical work, or any work that demands more abstract thought, no understanding of the work of the labourer, technician, architect. A bricklayer sets the bricks in

a perfect vertical; a painter labours to whitewash the wall in the same way they have whitewashed walls in the mountain villages of Andalusia for centuries. They do the work to live, to feed their families. But you have no respect for that. In your unfathomable ignorance and vanity you do not know what skill and effort is involved, what effort of labour, and you do not try to imagine, or perhaps cannot imagine, because all that concerns you is the infantile temptation to aerosol your name on that surface in green or red or blue or black. And then the view has gone. Irreplaceable. The image is destroyed outside, and inside, behind the retina. It has been defiled by your baby-ego-art. The consequences of such a crime, such disrespect for the work and dedication of our labourers, technicians, architects, are infinite and immeasurable, and the penalty for that crime is Death.

What is read cannot be unread: we cannot save ourselves from the ratiocinative process that runs against the will to the thought-waste of *Why* and *For Whom* your defilements exist. Your craving - 'Look at me, mummy!' - is bold enough, but beneath that is the claim to be a voice of counter-culture, a voice of nonconformity, even rebellion - 'You cannot ignore me! I have a voice!' - rendered in the flagrant fonts and colours, which also lay claim to talent, and even courage - *Kloon Shaft Moos Loner Arus*, all painted in places apparently impossible to reach, that demand such courage and skill to be put up there! Hah! You remain talentless cowards and nobodies and frauds. Such straining only defecates your failure to fit in. Your curls and shit-shape defilements violate the beauty of the natural world and whatever beauty our architects have achieved in our landscapes; even to the ugliest, most boring, most functional and prosaic and dilapidated industrial warehouse your names add nothing but screaming vanity.

And you ask me *Why*.

The world will be better off, quieter, infinitely more beautiful, peaceful, without you, all of you.

Sometimes I hear the voiceovers of the documentaries:

'Certain patterns of behaviour prior to the slayings suggest psychopathic tendencies - '

No no no ...

It is the modern weakness to suppose one who kills

is disabled by a severed root to the amygdala or some such, but this takes no account of a mind provoked, taunted, to extremes of anger, hatred, shame, all redoubled by the frustration that such passions can find no expression, except through fighting back - *Fight! Fight! Fight!* - no account of a mind overwhelmed, a mind drowned by such excesses. The goading and provocation continue every time one glances out the train window, or the car window, or the rear-view mirror. The pollution and defilement and contamination of Nature and of human achievement, leaving no surface untouched, nothing unsoiled. How can Eliot write about the moment in the rose-garden - 'and then a cloud passed / And the pool was empty' - when the concrete basin is already fouled by *Kloon Shaft Moos Loner Arus*? 'Remember our names. We love this game.' How can Yeats write about the wild swans at Coole, with your names all over the jetty and the landing stage? How can Wordsworth write about the beauty of the 'sylvan Wye' with your names on every signpost all the way along the M4? Thus your excrement leaks into everything, and with it the sense of powerlessness and failure that leaks into every aspect of one's life, because *you have won*, and we are the *losers*, impotent against your success.

We cannot co-exist. One must go. One needs must wither.

And afterwards, the repercussions, the involuntary memories, that I must suffer all over again - that image of Loner's face on the Caen-Portsmouth crossing, his hair spread out behind by the tailwind, that cartoon detail, and again his desperate clinging to the rail, the agony of confusion in his eyes when I said it was okay - 'It's okay. I've got you.' - all of these images will return, have already begun to return, to add to the misery and torment. On his phone there were other groups, but they can wait; the chances I will get to them are slim. Of course I know they are slim. Kloon's Whatsapp group had no faces (only their graffiti handles) except *Shaft*, who I thought at first was a mean looking black guy, but the image is actually of the actor from the *Shaft* films back in the seventies (*Shaft*, *Shaft in Africa*, *Shaft's Big Score!*), Richard Roundtree. I have never seen those films but know well enough the stink of their shit. More trash.

More excrement. More Americana. Take it away. Blow it away. But Richard Roundtree - perhaps he is a hero of the fellow here, with the blue plastic bucket. Oh yes, that makes exactly the kind of sense involuntary memories and billions of images that torment and destroy the soul make time after time, so from *Shaft* and Richard Roundtree I plummet to TV of that era, to Jack Lord, still playing cops and robbers in *Hawaii Five-0* past sixty - how'd he get that part? - and then reel back to Sir John Mills, playing the nineteen year old Pip in *Great Expectations* - how'd he get that part? - when he was already thirty-eight! Was there no actor in his twenties of sufficient talent to warrant that break? Did David Lean have to give it to his best buddy even though he was *twice as old* as Pip? How hard must the actor's life be? Thus the involuntary memories: connections brought on by images and sounds thrust upon, shoved upon, stamped upon the mind over decades, so that one's consciousness is like that island of plastic in the Atlantic, just a concatenation of trash, and one's subconscious is the sunken islands of plastic at the bottom of every ocean.

One's mind has been graffitified, as has the whole fucking planet.

But Kloon has gone, and the straggly Loner has gone too, and they can do no more damage to the retina, to the peace of mind behind it, and soon this woman, this Moos, and Shaft, they will be gone too. Then the rest will not dare come out at night. They'll stay in with their TV and their video games in their urbanite cells, where they belong, not in Nature, not in the landscapes of Monet, Renoir, Van Gogh, Goya ...

Some stevedores wheeled Loner's punk Honda 250 off the ferry at the end of disembarkation, after half a dozen tannoy announcements. Then, one supposes, the *Mont St Michell* had to be searched. I didn't hang around for any of that.

Shaft squatted around five metres away still, with the tatty blue pail, half full, in front of him. From here the rifle would be lethal wherever the bullet went in. His hands were still knitted patiently in front of him.

"Let me reason with you, man," he appealed.

"This is my court. There is no appeal."

“Please. Just let’s talk a little here, cos what’s going down here is just crazy stuff.”

“You talk like your graffiti. You talk graffiti.”

“It’s just a name on a rock! Come on!”

“But what is read cannot be unread.”

Moos slumped to the base of the stanchion, inches from Kloons’s trainers. “I hate violence!” she wailed, she whined. “I hate it! Any kind of violence! I can’t stand it! Always hated it! Look what you’ve done!” She pushed up the peak of her baseball cap, opening more of her pale face to the moonlight, the bridge lights. “You killed my friend! Don’t you even know that? ... You don’t know it yet, do you? What you’ve done? You killed him!”

I looked above her cap, her head, to the defiled stanchion.

“Scrub him off.”

“He didn’t even finish his name!” she cried. “Poor guy! Killed for painting a couple of letters on a fucking bridge! How about that? That’s madness!”

Shaft hung his head. “Look, just ...”

But he could find no new way to start. Hah. That sucks, man.

Remember our names. We love this game.

“Who is Arus?” I asked. “Reads ‘Anus’ most of the time. Why does he call himself Arus, Anus? What’s his real name?”

“You’re the only asshole around here, man!” Shaft broke out. “No mistake about that. Look what you’ve done! Fuckin’ killed someone!”

“Answer my question. Who is he? What’s his name?”

The Browning is a repeater and loaded with six rounds. I lifted the rifle and without aiming fired a round between them down the bank.

Moos gasped. Shaft flinched.

“Let me tell you! Let me tell you!” Moos wailed.

I rested the rifle across my knees again. “So tell me.”

She shook her head and picked at some muddy scraps of grass where the concrete met the earth.

“His name... His real name is Arthur. Arthur Spencer

Harris. I know how fake that may sound but it really is his name. That's partly why he calls himself Arus, because he hates his own name."

"He hates himself," Shaft put in.

I ignored that. "What does Arthur Spencer Harris do?"

She looked bewildered by these questions, these details, with Kloon dead at her feet. "I don't know right now ... like.... like ... he does all kinds of stuff?"

Though she was definitely English, she spoke with that hip American affectation of the rising interrogative, that escape clause, so dated now.

"Specifically."

"I don't know! What's it matter? He's going to die! ... For a while he drove a minicab? What's it matter what he does?" She plucked some more grass and threw it down the bank. "If you're going to kill him anyway. You must be mad as a fucking hatter."

"Did he drive a cab? Or does he drive a cab? Or not?"

"Yeah." She pulled at the muddy grass again, head down. She was calmer for a moment. "For a while. Yeah. He drove a minicab. His dad's old car. All around Yarmouth."

"Great Yarmouth?"

"Yeah. East Anglia. And now he's gonna die, gonna die for a bit of graffiti. Stairway to heaven for a bit of graffiti, knockin' on heaven's door for a bit of fucking graffiti, oh yeah. Fucking amazing! Fucking madness!" She looked at me and a flash of anger crossed her narrow eyes.

"Where the fuck are you coming from, you ugly old prick?"

Nothing came from acting. Only debts came from acting. If one looks even vaguely albino one is cast as albino, which for the industry, in my time, seventies-eighties,

meant Ghouls - *The Omega Man* - or a Hit Man - *The Eiger Connection* - or some cranky Bond Villain like Max Zorin in *A View to a Kill*. Of course, I was never anywhere near the latter parts, I was always way too far down the heap for anything but Ghoul 14 in *The Omega Man*, but the point is they represent the acme of an albino's acting career, or an albino lookalike's acting career. And things haven't moved on much because in the 2002 version of *The Time Machine* the mastermind Urban Morlock (Jeremy Irons, to his shame) is typecast as pure albino. Explanations for this kind of prejudice are of no interest. 'The world is what it is,' Salim famously tells us at the start of *A Bend in the River*, 'men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it'.

Some of my money came through promoting minor UK rock bands, and a few not so minor ones, and handling the UK management of one major American star from the seventies/eighties - Barry Manilow - who still tours prestige venues such as The London Palladium today, at 81 years of age. My association with Manilow UK died more than ten years ago but I'll say this: there was more money in a string of summer Manilow dates than in a year's tour of most UK rock bands. The rest of my money I didn't earn. It came from luck. I'm of that generation that owned a freehold in London - just a pokey flat in Fulham, near the bridge - and saw the price of it soar to half a million in a few years. Worth double that now, no doubt, but I sold at half a million, bought big and cheap in Andalucia, and I'll never have to work again.

The bands I promoted - managed is a better word - and toured with, for months on end at the start, were the also-rans of the punk movement in the mid-eighties, the most well-known of which were *DuDChek*, whose lead guitarist actually was a Slovakian emigré, and the notorious *Crucifux*, whose cruel onstage antics sold the tickets, not their awful music. At that time, because the punk movement itself was a rejection of learned musicianship, any bunch of kids could come together and slash out a song which I could pass off as authentic punk, no questions asked - as The Sex Pistols themselves said, 'we can't even think of a word that rhymes'. For those early tours I actually travelled with the

bands in my campervan while they shared two old Bedfords I bought from a dying bakery: those were the days, as they say, but they assuredly were not! Of course I was fleecing the bands from the start and as soon as I could afford it, I rented an office back in London, in Dalston - *PunkProms* - and left them on tour. I couldn't stand the noise of their shit music, and pretending otherwise, nodding along, heaving out the speakers and amps etc, added too much strain to life.

The tipping point came when the singer with *DuDChek*, who sang so sharp he'd cut himself, started asking questions and making dry remarks. He'd rumbled me and I knew my touring days were over, thank the lord, and it was time to hide away in an office. But apart from that personal matter, the Dalston move was organizational - or strategic, you might say, to glamourise the unglamourizable - because the secret to making any money out of those minor bands was to keep them on the road all the time. That way they were at a distance from the financial side of touring. They literally didn't have a moment to stop and figure things out, not least because they were having such a good time. Part of what made me convincing to the bands was my brutal honesty about their prospects: I knew the punk scene couldn't last and I told them so; I told them they had better get out there and enjoy the fuck and make as much noise and money as possible while I could still find them bookings. So there was this edge, this haste, this panic almost, about the touring, and the idea carried through to equipment and transport. Even after they'd had a hit and some TV coverage - *Crucifix* made it onto The Old Grey Whistle Test on BBC2, with whispering Bob Harris - and the whole band wanted to upgrade equipment, I told them No No No, not unless they wanted to do it out of their own pockets. Besides, I said, that would be selling out what punk stood for.

But these conversations I kept very short, to an absolute minimum, on the telephone. As I say, the secret was to keep them out there performing night after night, no matter where, so that they were too busy and too exhausted to catch up with the accounting, which was all my business. "Good news, lads! We're fixed for Queen's Hall Leeds all weekend, so wipe your arses double-quick after Birmingham

and get ‘em over there!” The two old Bedford bakery vans I bought them I let them paint up and kit out as they pleased.

“That’s your business. Do what you like. Here’s a monkey.”

No Leonard Cohen rubbish for them.

That singer from *DuDChek* was a small and nasty eurasian guy called Nat, with a mouth crammed full of yellow teeth. He fell sick up north and came down after me, actually took me by surprise in the Dalston office.

“Where’s my fucking money?” he demanded, leaning over the desk, pouring his sickness and exhaustion all over my empty desk. “I’m not leaving till you give me my fucking money!”

It was obvious he was too sick and shrunken with exhaustion to get violent.

I held out my hands: “Listen, Nat. It doesn’t work like that. If we had any money, I’d give it to you. Right now. You have my word. But we don’t have any money. I’m on the phone here day and night trying to get box office receipts from half a dozen places. Some from months ago. It’s coming in, for sure, but it’s blood out of a kidney stone. Meanwhile I’ve got to pay for the diesel, the meals, the equipment, the roadies. You want a list of all the advances you’ve had? You want to see the bank charges on the fucking overdraft? No one wants that money more than I do. Needs it more than me. I’m the loser here, big time. Believe me.”

Actually, I’d just spent all his money at the weekend on a PADI scuba-diving course in Gosport, Hants! First class rail ticket! Plumbing the depths of murky gravel pits just because I fancied the woman in charge! All a total waste because I never took it up and she didn’t want to know. Ah, Nat, how different our worlds were then, had you but known. You’d have pitied me.

He had no answers to what I’d said. He didn’t know enough. So he got snide.

“All Jews good at showbiz, eh?”

“That may be so, but I’m not Jewish. I’m just a flunked actor with a shabby arts degree who no one wants to employ, trying to make a go of things the best I can, and you’re just a guy with nothing at all to recommend him, not

even a shabby arts degree, hardly any musical ability, trying to make a go of things while the moment lasts. Simple as that. Let's not pretend otherwise."

That brutal honesty. It worked so well.

He stood back. He looked so tired and sick and unhappy his mouth couldn't close over all those yellow teeth, but the really sad thing was I think he knew deep down he wasn't going to get a shiny sixpence out of me, not ever, but this was such a desperate thought, to be so cheated and forsaken, given all his endeavour on stage, all his hysterics, his screaming and ranting, his histrionics and cruelties, and all the misery on the road, the breakdowns, freezing all night in the back of the bakery vans with the amps and speakers - it was really such a desperate thought that he would never get a shiny sixpence out of me, given the broken state he was already in, that he shied away from it, preferring to believe my procrastinations and bare-faced lies.

Oh, all too human weakness!

That confrontation, and the damage to reputation he was doing with his suspicious talk - not only with *DuDChek* but with other bands they met on tour, who were all on regular money - that suspicious talk of his started some blowback. As it happened, that was when the Manilow gigs began and I quit Dalston and bought my place in Fulham with the punk proceeds. Dumped the bands. Disappeared.

Could I really kill Moos? In cold blood? That was the question she wanted me to keep asking myself.

She was a youngish woman, after all. Might even have been a mother, or pregnant. It was so much easier to shoot Shaft, whose name had already lit a bonfire of tormenting associations, a bonfire of trash, but he had won the toss. So, could I kill Moos? It would be different to Kloon: just being on the other side of the bridge made a difference, and his back was to me, and he knew nothing of what was about to happen. Loner had been a more similar