

Jimmy Works in a Chip Shop

By Dougal Higgins

Chapter One:

Jimmy works in a chip shop and, as you might expect, has three distinctive features; he is fat, he is broke and he stinks of chip fat. No one knows or likes Jimmy very much which is fine with him because he doesn't know or like anyone very much either. It's not that he's un-likable; it's just that he's a loner, rarely happy and does nothing to encourage any kind of friendship with anyone or anything at all. In football terms, Jimmy is in Division 2; and as long as he stays mid-table, that's fine with him.

Our man lives alone in a shabby flat whose contents and décor is limited to crude, basic necessities because Jimmy is ridiculously tight arsed. He won't spend a penny on anything that he absolutely doesn't have to and even then, he will hold an internal debate with himself before committing to the spend. More often than not he will later hold a personal enquiry to determine if he made the right choice and he will frequently give himself a good telling off for his poor investments like when he bought that 'posh' Boursin cheese last week that he thought tasted like duck poo.

For the third time today, Jimmy has read the Solicitor's letter to himself, only this time he has dissected every word of it as if each one may give him the clue he needs to determine what this is all about. The letter is from the firm Short and Shorter of Bond Street, London and it reads simply;

"Dear Mr. Farrelly,

I am writing to you at the request of my client who, for the meantime, wishes to remain anonymous. I am instructed to seek your presence at these offices at 3 pm on 11th February, 2008 or at a subsequent time to be arranged should this time be inconvenient for you. Your travel expenses will be met by this firm.

If you would kindly telephone my PA to confirm your attendance, I shall be most grateful.

Yours sincerely,

Sebastian Short."

Every word was repeatedly dissected but still no clues emerged. 'Wonder what a PA is' he mumbled to himself in a slightly sheepish way (if you can be sheepish with yourself) followed by '... and where did they get my details from?' He wasn't surprised that he hadn't heard of the company before, because other than McDonald's and Threshers and possibly Asda, he didn't know any company names anyway or 'is the BBC a company?' he would probably have thought to himself.

To sum Jimmy up, you could describe him simply as a chubby, grubby nobody. Apart from being podgy, a bit stinky and very skint, Jimmy is undeniably resistant to exertion and activity. To normal people, that equates to lazy. Actually, he is beyond lazy. He is 'mucho lazy'. You will not have met an idler person than Jimmy. His indolence is so absurd that he is to lazy what the Atlantic is to wet which, let's face it, isn't a good thing for fatties like Jimmy really. To illustrate the point, for the last 15 years, other than bowel movements and 'hand parties', Jimmy's exercise has consisted mostly of walking the 47 paces from his flat, down

the outside stairs, through the alleyway into the chip shop and then back again. This workout is extended three times a week by an exhausting 85 paces two doors away to the Off Licence to buy some beer or wine and then return back upstairs to the flat. In addition, in what must be an incredibly tiring marathon for him, there is the monthly bus ride to the local Asda (the 'others' are too expensive) where he suffers an unwelcome trolley 'dash' to collect his monthly necessities. He does, of course, move about a bit whilst working, but any calorie burn established here is more than rubbed out by the constant grazing he undertakes whilst cooking. He more or less employs a 'one for you, one for me' strategy which means he is constantly popping sausages or saveloys in his gob. That probably explains why he hasn't done any other jobs because such perks aren't normally available in offices or building sites are they?

The only other form of energy employment that Jimmy undertakes is in eating. Not surprisingly, his main diet consists of anything free which mostly means whatever he can scoff whilst on duty in the chippy plus whatever he can take home with him. Aside from watching television and listening to Elvis, his favourite hobby is to deliberately over produce food shortly before closing knowing full well that there won't be enough punters around to buy everything in time thus allowing him to take home a St. Bernard sized doggy bag. If he wasn't so lazy and tight he'd probably put some effort and cash into getting a computer and use the internet to order his supplies online. However, he is just too bone idle to be arsed so his monotonous existence continues day to day, week to week as if living in some kind of Groundhog land.

As a result of his Olympic scoffing and microscopic exercise, over the last 5 years Jimmy has had the misfortune of allowing his waist to share his age. Having just released another notch from his belt, he now knows that his belly will probably see 40 before he does. Still, he doesn't care how chunky he gets really. He's got nobody to care about and nobody cares for him. Plus he changed his 'normal' wardrobe a few years back with elasticated replacements which he thinks will mean there can be no financial side affects to his ongoing and humungous swelling.

Anyway, back to that letter which is now on the side where the rolls are being buttered because the chip shop owner has grown impatient and has started shouting at Jimmy to get on with his job. Jimmy reads it for the eleventh time whilst it lies on the side and simultaneously looks up at the garish nudie calendar hanging next to the till. He scrolls to February the 11th and sees that it's a Monday when the shop is closed. Monday is his day off which is good because it means he can make the appointment with Mr. Short. 'Or is it good?' he mumbles to himself '... because if it were any other day, I'd have an excuse and not have to go.' A few more yaps from Mr. Wee, the obviously Chinese owner, and Jimmy is again distracted from the letter making various pots of boiling fat gorge unhealthy food ready for its largely pissed and always rude customer base.

Later that night, armed with a large swag of greasy stodge, Jimmy returned to his ghastly shelter and scoffed enough junk food to seriously pollute an entire family. Jimmy knows that if he were to ever be lucky enough to have a dinner date, it probably wouldn't last beyond the starters. His eating habits are enough to embarrass a caveman. Among other dreadful things, Jimmy's table manners include a weird chanting of 'unmm, unmm, yunmm, yunmm' in time with the heavy movement of his wide open jaws. This is accompanied by a strange slapping noise which vaguely resembles the sound a jellyfish would make if forcibly removed from a fridge door. But the real showstopper is the frequent distribution of food shrapnel randomly splattered about the place. Jimmy is so set in his ways and so engrossed in his gluttonous festivals that he doesn't even

notice his disgusting behaviour anymore or, if he does, like many things, he no longer cares.

This week's tippie is Cider (it was on offer at 4 litres for £1.29) which went down rather nicely and very quickly with the 3 fishcakes, 2 sausages in batter and about eight thousand chips all removed from Mr. Wee's. After a few dozen belches that they must be able to hear next door and possibly next door to next door, Jimmy fell into bed to muse over the letter once again. For a moment he reflected on his loneliness. Perhaps if he had some friends he might be able to call on them to ask for their view on the letter, but without any friends to call or indeed any telephone on which to call them (waste of money), he had to settle on agreeing with himself to call the Solicitor's office in the morning to find out. He grinned at the thought of using Mr. Wee's phone without him knowing and without Jimmy paying. But, in the meantime, it's time for sleep which means Jimmy dreaming of eating food he can't actually afford to buy.

Chapter Two:

In the shop the following day, Jimmy couldn't help himself. He distorted his chubby face to form a mixed expression of hate and disgust at the whistling being chimed by Mr. Wee. Jimmy hates Mr. Wee because Mr. Wee is either happy, which makes Jimmy resentful and jealous, or he is bossy, which reminds Jimmy of where his position on the power ladder lies. The 'tune' puffed out by Mr. Wee was completely made up and carried no structure or tone whatsoever which inflamed Jimmy's irritation. Jimmy really wanted to bellow "Fuck off with your shit whistling!" right into Mr. Wee's ear, but he knew this would affect his cushy job and nothing is worth that.

Eventually, the owner disappeared to complete the scheduled stocktaking exercise leaving Jimmy alone with the telephone; the free of charge telephone. He dialed the number printed on the now creased and heavily soiled letter and heard a plummy voice announce with pomp and ceremony "Short and Shorter thank you for calling. How may I direct your enquiry?" This totally stymied Jimmy who truly didn't know how to answer and only managed to spurt "Er, I, er, my name". "Please hold" interrupted Mrs. Plum prompting Jimmy to ask 'hold what?' before he realised what was meant by the instruction. He immediately felt relieved that no one would have heard his stupid question but it didn't stop him blushing though temporarily making him look a bit like Billy Bunter.

The line crackled a bit and Mrs. Plum was back. 'Hello caller and thank you for holding. How may I help you?' She was a little too evangelical with the 'thank you' part to be taken seriously so it's no surprise that Jimmy had already added her to his 'people I hate' list. He eventually, but badly, got his message across that he had been asked to confirm he will make the meeting and in the process he got the impression from the plummy one that she despises having to speak to divs like Jimmy. This, for a while at least, made Jimmy think of deliberately keeping the conversation going just to piss her off. He quickly decided against that however on the basis that not only would that increase the odds of him being caught using Mr. Wee's phone but also that he would obviously be meeting Mrs. Plum in a couple of weeks and didn't want his insolence to interfere with his chances of receiving whatever he had been invited to receive which, by the way, he has privately convinced himself is a massive inheritance.

For the rest of the day and the two weeks that followed the call, Jimmy could think of nothing but the pending meeting with Mr. Short. His excitement was only exceeded by his anxiety at the prospect of what this meeting was to be about. He truly had no factual basis on which to form an idea so decided to carry out his own investigation to pre-empt the revelation due to take place in London.

Using all resources available to him in his flat, he had scanned the Yellow Pages with much gusto. He was disappointed to learn that the firm of Short and Shorter had not advertised their services in the Grayston Parish edition of the brightly coloured tome which meant that his so called investigation lasted an unimpressive 3 minutes. Jimmy never considered the reason why any London law firm might need or choose to advertise themselves in a, let's call it not privileged, place 50 miles from London so he summarily decided that because they weren't anywhere to be found amongst the scoundrel debt chasers or conveyance firms spraying lies about their brilliance, Short and Shorter were obviously a rich firm specialising only in rich clients. This enabled Jimmy to settle on his obvious (but unlikely) conclusion that the estate of some dead relative he had long forgotten or, more likely never known, was due to be relieved of many, many pounds straight into the flabby arms of himself.

This uninvited disruption to his admittedly plain yet predictable life actually affected Jimmy's appetite to the extent that he wasn't worried about throwing food away at work anymore. Even the edible stuff went in the bin. Jimmy's gut probably thought his throat had been cut or some such to the point that he actually stopped putting on weight for a while.

His anxiety didn't cause him stress as such, but it did consume his every thought. Even Elvis couldn't distract him. He spent far too long trying to think of the poor sod who had snuffed it to create the bounty he was about to enjoy. But, try as he did, no names came to him. There really wasn't anyone left to die. He started at the beginning and one by one ticked off every family member he had ever known to conclude that honestly, he knew no one even vaguely related to him that could have been forced, probably against their preference, to donate their life earnings to a distant yet unknown slob of a relative called Jimmy. Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, Jimmy had said it so many times to himself that he now believed it was true that the letter and therefore the meeting would be some form of unexpected inheritance that he knew he would really, really enjoy. He even convinced himself that such an event was only fair given the years of struggle and hard work he had endured. He thought it was about time he left the school of hard knocks.

Chapter Three:

As time passed and the meeting drew closer, Jimmy became careless and was even more horrible than usual to work with. He was so persuaded that he was days from great richness that he had foolishly begun acting badly. He had never really cared about his job at the chip shop or the people he worked with, but now he was openly showing it. He had taken to saying 'no' and things like 'scalamanger' to Mr. Wee quite a lot and had been repeatedly rude to Wendy, the girl assistant, asking her things like why she kept leaning over 'like a spaz all the time'. He knew she had a sticky vertebra which required constant stretching but he couldn't help himself having a go at her. He really was a proper arsehole.

Finally, the 11th February arrived and Jimmy woke early and tired. He had spent another night trying to identify the mystery relative without success. 'Only a few hours now until I find out' he muttered aloud, almost singing to himself before sort of brushing his teeth with Asda's finest Fluoride Fresh. Despite his certainty about becoming rich, he hadn't created a shopping list of things to buy straight away like normal people would when discussing the fantasy of a huge and sudden capital gain. It was probably his nature that stopped all notions of a huge spend up, but it may also have been his subconscious reeling him back to the reality of the situation and the unlikely inheritance he was now taking for granted.

After dressing in his best garb, which absent a couple of stains was no different from his worse, Jimmy started to panic that maybe he was in trouble and that, unknown to him, the meeting would be the start of some kind of criminal prosecution. It was just as difficult for him to conjure the scenario of his crime as it was to identify the mystery donor so by the time he was fully dressed and ready to leave, the thought of his guilt had waned sufficiently for it to be ignored. He was off to London.

Grayston Parish is a suburb of a concrete jungle 50 miles or so from London and like most suburbs has terrible transportation links into the City. This didn't go unmissed by Jimmy who, fuelled by the fact he had to pay for his train ticket, was Royally pissed off by the time the ancient train finally rolled up to the platform. He had already suffered and paid for a bus ride to the train station and now he had finished standing for 20 minutes he was relieved to at last be on his way.

Within a minute or so, the train was moving but only just. Jimmy began to wonder if it was being pulled along by a set of teeth belonging to a contestant in the 'World's Strongest Man' competition such was its torpid pace. However, after an hour or so Jimmy could see tall, shiny buildings. He recognised some of these from the tv so knew he was almost there. As he prepared himself to disembark (which wasn't as easy as you might think), he thought he recognised someone in the carriage with him. He stared directly at the man for far too long and no doubt gave off the impression that he was a complete pervert; a fat pervert at that; the worse kind. The man, who was in his thirties and was probably a journalist or architect threw a glance that said 'God I'm sick of London and all it's fat poofs' and then focussed back on his paper.

Jimmy left London Bridge Station and walked straight to a cab. He enjoyed the ride to Bond Street for at least two reasons; firstly, he remembered the part about his expenses being met so he knew he was only funding the fare temporarily and secondly, the taxi had a huge bench seat that he was able to spread out across in what felt like absolute luxury. It was like he was having his own private tour of the City and he liked the feeling of being spoilt a lot.

Even though the train was late and the cab probably went the long way round, Jimmy stood outside the fine offices of Messrs. Short and Shorter a full 15 minutes ahead of schedule. This pleased him but also allowed him a further 15 minutes to worry about his meeting and what its outcome was likely to be. After a few minutes spent watching what he thought were clones in suits shuffling in and out and all around the building, Jimmy walked inside and presented himself to the receptionist whom he presumed was Mrs Plum. He was led to what were clearly the cheap seats reserved for guests whose appearance could offend the eye of the real clients who no doubt enjoyed their own, more comfortable lounge area. Conflicting appointment times often presented this awkward predicament but Mrs. Plum was an expert at filtering the good from the great so she made the whole process seamless.

After a minute or so, which gave Jimmy just enough time to gasp at the prices paid for the magazines on the table, there was a buzzing sound followed by the posh squawk of Mrs. Plumb demanding to be followed. This time she led Jimmy to a chestnut coloured door and gestured for him to walk in to the room beyond. One very deep breath later and Jimmy found himself in unfamiliar comfort in a room with a very small and greasy haired man apparently called Sebastian Short. "Now's the time" thought Jimmy, "bring it on".

Chapter Four:

Mr. Short didn't divert his attention from the folder and its contents despite Jimmy's appearance before him. The folder contained just a few sheets of paper and was deliberately angled away from Jimmy to stop him from seeing any of its contents and to prevent any premature spilling of the beans. Whilst Mr. Short studied his paperwork, Jimmy studied Mr. Short and his office.

Jimmy wondered if Mr. Short's name was his real name or if it was an adopted handle thanks to a lifetime of being known as Mr. Short. This was a logical suggestion because he is a Mr. and he is, well, short. He presumed it was kosher and just an unfair coincidence but then wondered if the other half to this firm, Mr. Shorter was even shorter than Mr. Short but then he told himself to stop being silly. The Solicitor was gaping so intently at the mystery paperwork that Jimmy became convinced it was probably the first time this bundle of records or whatever they were had ever been read by anyone other than the author. Certainly not by Mr. Short anyway.

As his patience grew strained, Jimmy made some subtle huffing noises in a pointless attempt at grabbing some attention. He'd been invisible for long enough and thought it was time to make his presence felt. When this didn't work, he shuffled on his feet a bit and then started spinning his torso around without actually moving anywhere like a basketball player might. He could see lots of things in the office that he hadn't seen before like real oil paintings and a bronze statue of a horse rearing up. There were many leather seats and a large table presumably made from some rare, fine wood and everything was spotlessly clean and shiny. There were wooden blinds across large sash windows which were also draped in heavy, fancy curtains pulled to the sides by knotted rope things. The place reeked of money and the view through the windows was magnificent; hustle and bustle of everyday comings and goings of a dense working population littered with taxis and buses and the occasional motorcycle. Despite the busy activity beyond the glass, not a sound could be heard in the office giving the impression that the view outside really could be fake.

Without notice, the small elderly solicitor suddenly snapped the folder shut and announced the beginning of the meeting. "S-S-S-S-S-Sebastian S-S-S-Short" he spluttered with a faint misty spray. "It's a P-P-P, it's a P-P-P pleasure meeting you". Whilst struggling to remove his words from his mouth, Mr. Short was leaning backwards and squinting his eyes until they were almost closed which made him look and sound a bit like a drunk Chinese person might look if trying to recite a rude anagram. For a moment, Mr. Short flinched forwards extending an arm to shake Jimmy's hand as part of his normal meet and greet routine, but his eyes were fully open now and he got his first full look at Jimmy. His talented legal mind immediately processed the image and his reflexes instantly withdrew the offering and instead he twisted his face to an expression mixed of shock and unease. He rarely got to meet people like Jimmy and didn't exactly relish the prospect. He was genuinely puzzled why anyone would choose to dress like the person currently in his office with him and the hairstyle intrigued him somewhat. It was neither spiky nor flat nor scruffy. It was just, well hairy. And what was that odd smell that had just joined them both in the room?

At the same time, Jimmy had to use a lot of stamina and control to stop himself from laughing at the silly old man flinging spit all over him. Like most people would, Jimmy ignored the obvious speech impediment and replied simply "Hello".

Mr. Short beckoned at Jimmy to take a seat which he did at the desk opposite to where the old man was already perched. Jimmy reckoned this was the first time he had sat at or even near a desk since he had left school some 24 years ago.

He was hoping however that this encounter would prove more rewarding than any lesson he ever had at school.

"Firstly, thank you for coming here today" said Mr. Short "I have a few questions for you if I may?" Jimmy nodded his head in agreement and was puzzled by the lack of stutter. "I will ask you S-S-S-some questions and I would appreciate it if you could restrict your answers to just a 'yes' or a 'no' if possible or just S-S-Sh, er little, er, answers. Is that ok?"

"Fine" said Jimmy ignoring the verbal obstacle now back on Mr. Short's tongue for a second time.

The folder was again open and a pained but studious expression spread across Mr. Short's face, like he was considering the deep meaning behind some classic poetry written on the pages before him.

"You are 39?" came the first question.

"Yes" replied Jimmy

"Are you a married man?"

"No"

"Are you in a relationship?"

What the fuck? thought Jimmy but he let it go and slowly said "Nnnoo" with a disgruntled and confused tone normally reserved for use by teenagers.

"Are you homosexual?"

"What the fuck are you on about? Just 'cos I aint married, don't make me a fucking shirt lifter, does it?" snapped Jimmy, upset by the mere hint of doubt raised by the question.

"Clearly heterosexual then" observed Mr. Short whilst scribbling something down on a pad. "To your knowledge," he continued "do you have any living relatives?"

"What is this? Can't you just tell me why I am here and what this shit is all about and stop wasting time on pointless questions?" Jimmy was annoyed now and had raised his voice a level. He was anxious to be told how much he would be taking home with him and irrelevant questioning was nothing more than an invisible barrier between him and his money.

"All in good time..." came the placid reply "but if you would just answer the questions P-P-P-please".

"No. I don't have any L-L-L-living R-R-R-relatives." mocked Jimmy. If he thought this had annoyed Mr. Short, he was wrong.

"Have you ever committed a crime?"

"Er, no, don't think so." The change of subject had thrown him and made him more compliant than before.

"Are you interested in politics?"

"No" said Jimmy "but what's that got to do with my inheritance? What has any of this got to do with my inheritance?"

Ignoring his question completely, Mr. Short asked "If you were never to return to your home again, would anyone notice your absence?"

Jimmy really couldn't imagine a time when he was ever more confused than he was right now. His thoughts were so jumbled that he didn't know what to say and had temporarily forgotten what the question was.

"Sorry, what? Disappear? What?" he mumbled.

"Who, if anyone, might notice if you became unseen from today?"

There was a pause whilst Jimmy genuinely considered the prospect of him being killed by this old fool and dumped somewhere never to be found. Just when he was settling on the chances of this being remote at best, another puzzling question arrived "Have you told anyone about this meeting today?" followed immediately by "Does anyone other than me and you know where you are right now?"

Again, Jimmy was slow to reply. He didn't like to confront the fact that, actually, no one in the whole wide world knew where he was and that, worse still, no one would care or even notice if he was extinguished from this planet right there, right then. He didn't have time to ponder on why that was the case or what he might be able to do about it because there was a small, polite cough nudging for an answer. "No" muttered Jimmy, "no one knows where I am and no one would miss me".

"Thank you" said Mr. Short as he studied the paperwork as if searching for more weird questions to ask. "That's all." he said matter of fact. He then leant over to the white plastic box on his desk and pressed the grey button briefly.

"Yes sir?" asked the box.

"Could you help Mr. er, Mr. ah" Short was looking for Jimmy's details in the folder "er..."

"Farrelly!" barked Jimmy to ease the clumsy situation Mr. Short had created.

'How could he not even know my name?' thought Jimmy.

"Thank you. Yes Mr. Farrelly is ready to leave now Jennifer"

A second or two later, Jennifer (Mrs. Plum) was in the room to escort Jimmy away.

"Hang on" said Jimmy "is that it? You still haven't told me why I am here"

"I believe we owe you S-S-S-some S-S-S-subsistence" said the solicitor and on recognising that Jimmy didn't understand what he meant he added "Expenses. Getting here? How much did it cost you?" For all of the things he wanted to leave here with, Jimmy's priority was to not leave in debt so he put his other questions aside for a moment and replied.

"About fifty quid" which was a bit of an exaggeration, but hey beggars can't be *losers*.

"Jennifer, P-P-P-please hand Mr. er, ah, Farley here one hundred pounds from petty cash and escort him to the P-P-P-Pavement". And with that, Mr. Short scurried out of the office away from sight leaving Jimmy no choice but to take himself, the hundred quid, a wide open mouth and utter bewilderment out onto Bond Street and back home.

Chapter Five:

Jimmy was so baffled and shocked by what he had just experienced that he thought he might develop a stutter similar to that fashioned by Mr. Short. He looked and felt like the man who would have won the lottery if he had bought his ticket that week. He was suffering a loss of expectation on a truly magnificent scale and once he had accepted that what had happened had actually happened and this wasn't just another dream, he became angry and upset. He started to leak sweat and debated storming back into the building to demand a further hearing. But when he glanced up at the window shielding the plush office from which he had just been escorted from, he thought again. He stared for a moment then waddled away in the direction of the nearest pub.

At the window stood a very small man who, restricted in every dimension, looked even smaller than he really was against the huge sash glazing. Mr. Short stared down at the street pushing most of his many chins deep into his chest. The index finger of his right hand was repeatedly tapping the space between his top lip and his nostrils giving the impression that he was considering a matter so important it could literally mean the difference between someone's life and death.

Once this dull expression had been held long enough, Mr. Short turned to the man Jimmy thought he had recognised on the train and said extravagantly "S-S-S-so, to sum up, what we have is a candidate who has no family, no friends, no history, no debts, no form and no shadow. Nothing. Not even a credit card".

"And no energy, no education, no intelligence, no grace, no presence, no style, no ambience, no positives and probably no ability either" snapped Raymond White

the associate handling the case who had been covertly following Jimmy for some time now. He hadn't exactly met Jimmy, but he had put together the dossier which Mr. Short had studied during the meeting a few minutes before and despite lacking Mr. Short's experience, he had heard enough to know that Jimmy wasn't right. Their client demanded better than a flat line nobody like Jimmy and Ray was determined to keep looking until he found the perfect target. Mr. Short, however, had other ideas; he liked Jimmy. He liked him a lot and had already made up his mind. "Jennifer, get hold of Mr. Bellini and arrange a conference call right away P-P-P-please".

Meanwhile, his mood meant his manners had escaped him and Jimmy found himself at the bar demanding beer. "A pint of... argghh!" he barked only to be ignored. The pub was packed and it wasn't his turn yet. "Can I have..." he begged trying the polite approach, but again he was invisible. He had to wait until someone came from the kitchen or whatever room was back there who didn't know who was next in line so asked "Who's next?"

"Two pints of lager" shouted Jimmy using reflexes sharper than a feasting fly threatened by the swooping hand of an itchy sunbather. He wasn't prepared to go through this waiting torment again and knew he needed more than one pint to sort himself out and calm down from the disappointment of his encounter around the corner.

"Seven pound twenty? Two beers – seven pound twenty?" spluttered a moody Jimmy. Although he lived in the 21st century, he often acted as though he had just landed on the last flight from the 60's, especially when it came to paying for things. Despite accepting he was in Central London, he pressed on as if his stubborn mood might create a discount of some sort. Staring at the chilly substance resting in front of him, he pecked "You sure?" The Eastern European barmaid ignored the feedback and simply held her hand out until it was eventually crossed with sufficient currency fresh from Jennifer's till. When the change arrived, Jimmy was still shaking his head in disbelief. This soon stopped however when he glugged away at his beers almost consuming the first in one bite.

Looking around, he could see how out of place he was. Wrong age, wrong shape, wrong dress sense, wrong class really. No one seemed to care though and no one seemed to even notice his presence except, of course, the man in the corner who was there to observe and record everything Jimmy did and said. It was Ray White's assistant who had been dispatched to follow Jimmy home and report back in case there might have been something missed during the last few weeks to make Mr. Short change his recommendation.

The Jukebox was suddenly released from its blocks and put into action. Straight away, it came alive at what couldn't have been far off full volume. The music, which received loud cheers from the crowd near the door, was welcomed by Jimmy. He really like this tune and he had already had enough of the 'nutters' around him who kept shouting nonsense at each other like it was some kind of protest. The music prompted arm waving and beer spilling as glasses were chinked hard into each other in celebration of god knows what. Jimmy just gawped at them all and actually felt old. As the beer saturated his frazzled nerves, Jimmy began to relax a bit and started to hum along to Jim Kerr's lyrics of 'Don't you forget about me' bellowing from the pub's speakers.

Boom, boom boom. Jimmy fell quickly into his second pint and unashamedly started 'air-drumming'. He was almost having a nice time too but soon caught himself when the record finished. 'Time to go' he thought. Whilst supping up he considered whether he should waste a cab fare or get a cheap Tube back to London Bridge. Unknown to him, however, whichever route he took, he would be

accompanied by Ray's assistant who had been on the payroll of a rich businessman carrying a very determined agenda which, in all probability, now had Jimmy's name written all over it.

Chapter Six:

Jimmy made his way home slowly but cheaply. He couldn't balance the cab fare against his conscience so he slumped it on the tube, train and bus. The reasons for his choice of transport would not have been known or even recorded by Ricky Lum who would simply have minuted to Mr. Short that 'The subject returned home at 18.35 hrs'.

Back in London, before Jimmy had even had a chance to do his Manny Elias impression in the pub, Mr. Short had been connected to Marco Bellini who might not have been the richest but certainly was his weirdest client. Sebastian Short's minor speaking disorder irritated Marco Bellini to the point that he preferred to communicate only by email. However, he had given clear instructions to be disturbed by telephone as soon as a candidate was to be recommended. Marco, therefore, knew what the call was about before he even came on the secure line organised by his office in Turin.

"Ave you found me someone?" asked Marco sounding like a member of the Amateur Dramatics Society auditioning for the part of 'Johnny Foreigner'.

"We think S-S-S-so" said Sebastian. He was qualifying his choice by leaving the ultimate decision to Marco, but also, in case his choice was wrong, sharing the blame with his team, a point which was seized on by Marco immediately.

"Ave you found me someone - Yes or No? I am to be *desturbed* when you 'ave got someone; not when you *senk* you 'ave".

"Yes S-S-S-sir, we have found the right P-P-P-P-person for you". Short was blushing a bit now.

"Good. Send me 'is details. I will *den* tell you what 'appens next".

The call had ended as quickly and as abruptly as it had started. That was Marco's way. That was how he had lived his entire adult life and he had no plans to change that now, especially for some overpaid two-a-penny lawyer. Surprisingly, despite his change of fortunes, Marco became even more determined to emphasise the importance of his being. To complete his legacy, however, he had one more chapter to write and for that, he needed someone's help. That someone was Jimmy now and his life story was being transmitted across the internet in a neatly summed up dossier soon to be reviewed and admired by Marco, the luckiest man in the business.

Back at his flat, Jimmy twisted the wispy hair on his tummy which was frequently being left open to view by his poorly fitting wardrobe. This fidgeting was normally a sign of hunger which meant that Jimmy fiddled with this region a lot. He was in the mood for fish and chips but, it being Monday, he was out of luck. He stomped around his kitchen area (it was too small to be considered a room in its own right) repeatedly opening and closing cupboards looking for something to fill the pang in his gut, but nothing appealed. There was only one egg and some solid cheese in his fridge and although it sounded tempting, the Pot Noodle was just too much hassle; the candle wasn't worth the light so to speak. He even checked the bin for any edible left-overs, but, even if there had been something useful in there, Jimmy was just too agitated to do anything about it.

So he fell into a much more comfortable routine and opened a tin of White Lightning followed by a tube of Pringles. Whilst his teeth sank themselves into mouthfuls of starch, his buttocks sank deeply into the armchair which, following

much practice, now took on the symmetrical shape of Jimmy's well formed behind. Once his stomach had stopped attracting all of his attention, Jimmy started to reflect on the day that had been; a day which had seemed so long in coming and viewed so optimistically. Yet it consisted of just a bizarre meeting with a small person, overpriced beer and lots of unwelcome to-ing and fro-ing and it now looked likely to end in disappointment. "Still, at least I managed to coin a Pony out of 'em" said Jimmy to himself as he opened another tube and another tin. It was time to drown the munching and belching with a bout of Elvis and so entered the rhythmic plunking of the piano rift of 'A Big Hunk o' Love' into the airwaves. Brilliant.

Despite the apparent lack of information sources available to Jimmy, he was surprisingly full of trivial facts. If only he had someone to impress with these titbits, or even just someone to discuss them with. His ability to absorb pointless information was a habit he collected from school probably in an attempt to garner respect or friendship. The opportunity to boast rarely presented itself, but whenever he got the chance to show off his knowledge, Jimmy rattled off his stuff quicker and louder than a 'Diamond Back' or *Crotalus Toxus* as he would proudly explain its scientific name.

Frequently, whenever he did chirp out his factoids, he almost always left his audience lost for words. For example, if someone in the shop was being too clever for Jimmy's liking and he felt the need to prove his own competence, he'd blurt out statements like "Elvis was a black belt at Karate you know" or "The full name of the UK is "The United Kingdom of Britain, Ireland, and Berwick-Upon-Tweed"". He really was priceless.

After a few more tinnies, Jimmy eventually fell asleep in his much loved armchair (another regular event) with 'Now and Then, There's a Fool Such as I' ironically playing in the background. It was a shame that he fagged out so early, because if he had stayed up for just one more track or one more drink, he would probably have noticed the slim envelope being slipped under his door.

Chapter 7:

Marco had spent about 20 minutes in the dossier before deciding to instruct his lawyer to despatch the invitation. Jimmy's profile exactly matched Marco's requirements and for the first time since the terminal diagnosis, Marco was almost upbeat and excited. He had sat in stunned silence across the table from his doctor just 6 weeks ago and now he found himself coming back to life a tad albeit with an obviously temporary timetable attached to it.

Not one to waste time, especially time he no longer had, Marco had immediately decided that someone should be blamed and punished for the suffering he was apparently going to face and that he should make the most of it. He reacted no differently to his misfortune than he would if it was a business deal that he had unexpectedly lost. Ordinary people faced with the dilemma of how to spend the last year of their life would probably take holidays they always dreamed of, or visit long lost relatives to say their tearful farewells. Not Marco. Over the coming months, Marco wanted to play games with people's lives and Jimmy's was one of them.

Trypanosomiasis is commonly known as 'Sleeping Illness'. In Marco's view, this is a misnomer, a major case for misrepresentation. Trypanosomiasis wrongly describes itself to ordinary folk as nothing more than a sleeping problem, an irritation. It is, however, an aggressive and violent infection which attacks the nervous system and ultimately the brain. Left untreated for too long, sleeping

illness will kill a fraction (0.08%) of the world's population every year, including those who, like Marco, are too busy or too arrogant to be treated early doors.

In aviation terms, Marco's health is now beyond Vee 2; the plane must take off. He will die.

Following his African trip last year, much work had to be done to complete the contracts he had travelled so far and worked so hard to secure. There was no time to worry about a minor health problem which, it turns out, was caused by a hungry tsetse fly. He brushed aside the symptoms that would have been easily diagnosed by even the most junior of Doctors and just got on with what has consumed his every hour for the last 19 years; making money. When the discomfort grew too large to ignore, he forced himself to see a doctor (actually he paid a doctor to come and see him) and after a few tests, the damning diagnosis was delivered and his fate was sealed.

Like most things he didn't like in his life, Marco had been in denial about his illness, not that it wasn't real, but that it wasn't as bad as he was lead to believe. "How bad can 'you have less than a year to live' be?" His doctor had asked him two weeks ago "how worse can it be?" was the frank statement that continually echoed in Marco's head "how worse could it be?" It didn't matter whose fault it was anymore, it was what it was and Marco had to deal with it, in his own, very own way.

About 20 years ago, whilst working as a clerical officer for a French airline, Marco heard about a new technology being developed. This wireless technology enabled telephones to operate anywhere without having to be plugged in meaning people would be able to take their telephone lines with them anywhere. It was the dawn of the digital age and Marco saw an opportunity to cash in on what he knew would be a revolution in personal telecommunications. He spent a lot of his free time researching the technology searching for a clue to his way in to this obvious money maker and, before long, he found it.

Much effort and money was being spent developing the portable devices but little seemed to be going into the infrastructure these phones would require for their use to be widely adopted. His job opened a few doors and quickly he saw himself facing the prospect of quitting the airline to set up the first of many radio beacons which were to become the digital equivalent to the local telephone exchange. The beacons were expensive to build and much red tape had to be cut to have them erected in busy towns and cities. However, the revenues generated by these robotic hosts were enormous. Within a year, Marco's newly formed company was responsible for providing more than 80% of the French mobile phone network which itself only represented about 15% of the airspace available.

Over the years, Marco expanded internationally and became a very rich man in the process. His life was full of money but little else. He had travelled so much yet seen so little that he hadn't stood a chance of obtaining a wife let alone a family. Sure, there had been brief encounters with probably hundreds of beautiful women but nothing you could consider a relationship as such. Marco's paranoia prevented women getting too close to him. He always thought they were only attracted to his money and not to him so he would abruptly end any relationship before it ever became one. Yet now, full of terminal sickness, he wondered retrospectively if that had been right. Perhaps he shouldn't have worked so hard or so long and actually stopped to enjoy his success rather than keep growing it. He couldn't help thinking that if he hadn't gone to Botswana to pitch against Vodafone he would now be looking at a predictable and comfortable

future. However, he had, and now not even Christmas was guaranteed for him this year.

He was, understandably, very down and depressed when he thought about how quickly and painfully his final chapter might arrive. Yet, his low moments were now being balanced at the prospect of how he would enjoy the final few chapters he was about to write.

Chapter 8:

The chip shop opens at 11 so Jimmy woke with a shock thinking he would be late for work today. It wasn't the first time he had spent the entire night asleep on his lounge chair, but to his knowledge, having seen the letter on the doormat, it was the first time he had slept past the postman arriving. He quickly rushed to the bathroom and routinely scraped the sticky brown stuff from his lips using a fingernail and a filthy flannel. This natural lip gloss appeared most mornings after a night in the chair and was created by the combination of beer dribble and crisp crumbs left to cure overnight under a heavy breeze of drink fuelled snoring.

Once the face pollution had been cleared, Jimmy lazily set about removing the remnants of last night's snackfest from his teeth with his naked toothbrush which was so old and worn that it probably did more harm than good these days. He didn't even notice that whilst he did his daily mouth service, he stood atop a small pile of damp towels which had built up over the last few days.

It was breakfast time, which for Jimmy meant a proper cup of tea made properly. Jimmy wasn't overly fussy about many things, but he certainly was fussy about his morning tea. The pot had to be warmed first and so did the cup and only when the water had been boiled twice was it allowed to be sacrificed to the three waiting bags of Indian leaves. Only one full stir then three minutes of patience followed by a slow pour into the hot cup. Just a rumour of milk, semi-skimmed of course and then it has to sit for a minute before being slurped up into Jimmy's flabby cheeks. Drama extraordinaire.

When the over-prepared tea had been left to cool, Jimmy opened the morning's post. He quickly realised however that the letter hadn't been delivered by one of Her Majesty's finest and that it wasn't as late as he at first thought.

"Bollocks!" he shouted out loud to drown his embarrassment as if he thought someone was listening. "I hate being rushed for no reason". He then sat down at the throne where he had spent at least 15 of the last 24 hours and started reading the letter from Mr. Short. His body was telling him (through a series of grunts, groans and smells) that it was time to empty his bowel, but the letter had grabbed all the attention now and Jimmy was beset as he began to read.

"Dear Mr. Farrelly,

On behalf of this firm and my client, I would like to thank you for attending our meeting today [which was of course now yesterday]. I am sorry if matters were left unclear for you or if you thought the meeting ended too abruptly. However, your contribution and attendance has enabled us to progress matters.

My client has asked me to contact you again to request a further meeting. This meeting will be with my client who, I am pleased to say, has a very interesting offer to make to you. If you accept the offer, you will be handsomely rewarded.

Full details will be provided to you should you wish to learn more and accept this offer during a meeting to be held tomorrow [now today]. You will need to excuse yourself from your current duties at the dining establishment [the chippy] and make your way to the central car park in Parrock Street (the one across from the Grammar school in Grayston) where there will be a Mercedes car changing what will appear to be a punctured tyre. The car will be there between 11am and 12pm tomorrow [today]. My client will consider this offer rejected by you should you fail to join the vehicle and in that respect, we will never contact you again.

Yours truly..."

"kin 'ell" said Jimmy releasing more air and slightly shitting himself at what he had just read. Too much information. Too quickly. It was all too weird to take in. "What the..." he kept saying "what the fuck..."

He read the letter again and then studied the clock. He couldn't quite work out if the time offered was just for one hour in the morning or if 11am to 12pm meant 11 in the morning to midnight. He decided on the side of caution and agreed with himself that it was just the one hour. That's the one hour that would start in 45 minutes time which meant he had to rush a bit if he was to take up this mysterious offer.

Jimmy felt his insides tremble a bit. He had never felt like this before and was quite tizzy as a result. He didn't know what was going on and didn't know how to react. After much sighing, pacing and head scratching, he concluded that it was all too tempting to ignore so Jimmy decided to gather some energy and go along with it and try to find this car. He decided that last night's sleep was so bad that he could do with a day off anyway, but not having a phone made it difficult to throw a sickie at Mr. Wee. In what was more of a brain ripple than a brainwave, Jimmy quickly jotted a note to Mr. Wee and forced himself to run downstairs and stuff his almost illegible note through the shop's letter box. On its own, the note would probably not have made much sense to Mr. Wee so bad was its writing, but when Jimmy failed to show, he would eventually realise that an ailment of some kind would be preventing his star man from performing deep fried miracles today.

Conscious that other members of the chip shop crew would be making their way to haematoma heaven, Jimmy had to be careful not to be seen by anyone as he made his way to the car park described by the small Solicitor. Despite his efforts, Jimmy was clearly seen heading in a Grayston car park-erly direction. However, his movements weren't noticed by anyone he knew because he was being observed and followed by Ray, the associate who had helped Mr. Short discover Jimmy. Ray still didn't approve of Jimmy's appointment, such that it was, and he was determined to provide unauthorised evidence that his view was the right view. His interest in Jimmy and his association with Mr. Bellini would grow, but for now, Ray's ambitions in their relationship sat purely at a 'told you so' level.

Jimmy hopped onto a number 480 bus towards town and sat in the same disabled/elderly seat that he had used the day before on the first leg of his journey towards Mr. Short's office. He witnessed the same un-approving looks from several shocked passengers too and ignored them all exactly as he had on his previous ride. When the bus arrived near the train station, Jimmy started to walk the short distance to the car park. It was past eleven forty five now and the town was relatively quiet which made Jimmy stand out like a blue pig. Feeling the heat of the deadline, Jimmy rushed as much as he could which meant he arrived at the car park about 5 seconds sooner than he would have if he hadn't rushed; Jimmy wasn't built for speed.

The man 'fixing' the wheel was the only other person in the car park except for a young mother who was having trouble unfolding her buggy for what Jimmy presumed was her own screaming child. The serene surroundings spooked Jimmy and made him feel like a naughty schoolboy wagging a boring lesson in lieu of something more grown up. With no justification for his senses, he felt completely transparent as if everyone could see straight through him and what he was about to do; everyone except him of course because he had no idea what he was about to get himself into. This guilty feeling added to his sense of urgency which made his chest pump even harder to the point where he could hear the blood rushing through his ears. Twice he rocked himself forward but neither effort was enough to build the momentum required to move him from his spot of safety. His eyes darted left to right and right to left searching for the energy to push him to the car and whatever lay inside it. But still he was statuesque. Still was how he stood racking his brain one last time to solve the mystery that sat just a hundred yards away in that car.

Wearing a face resembling that grimace crazy people pull immediately before pulling a stupid prank they know will lead to an injury of some sort, Jimmy suddenly skipped forward. 'Go, go, go' he repeated quietly to himself like he was in charge of his own SAS regiment on night manoeuvres. And with every instruction his steady pace grew and grew until he was almost scooting across the tarmac. He moved ahead staring blankly and looking like he was about to miss a slowly departing train. As the imaginary train gathered momentum so did he. His body was determined now and worked effortlessly to get him to the car's door handle in just a few seconds leaving his brain no time to even consider changing its mind. In one graceful movement, he slowed, reached out and opened the door to Marco's Mercedes as if it was his own. He was transparent no more and as he closed the door behind him, he fell neatly and confidently into the back seat alongside a smart man who smelled faintly of what Jimmy thought was ladies' perfume.

Chapter 9:

Marco couldn't help but be surprised by Jimmy's appearance in both a sudden and a physical sense. Not only had he made the vehicle roll with his heavy landing, but it looked like he was actually sweating from his eyelids which given the freezing weather outside was a feat in itself. Both men sat and studied each other for a moment or two before Marco broke the silence and said 'Mester Jemmy I presume?'

'Yes...' said Jimmy puzzled by the accent 'and you are?' he added using his best schoolboy politeness.

'I am Marco Bellini and this is mon chien Tripod.' Said Marco gesturing toward a scruffy bundle of ginger brown fur curled up on the floor. 'E is called tripod because he as only three legs.'

This was a great ice breaker and pleased Jimmy very much. He snorted a strange guffaw at the joke name and thought it showed a sense of humour similar to his own. He already liked Marco Bellini and felt more relaxed than he thought he would.

'It is me who has asked you 'ere Mester Jemmy. Sank you for coming.'

It was time to discover the reasons behind the secrecy which made Jimmy fidget and itch his crotch a bit. His tummy reminded him again of its need to be emptied but fortunately for Marco without any sound or smell effects this time.

'I imashin you 'ave been wondering why you are 'ere today and want to know.' Jimmy just nodded his head. He didn't want to say anything that might slow the delivery of the answer so sat in silence. Marco continued 'Well, first let me tell you zat I am about to offer you the greatest opportunity of your life. I want you to work for me'.

'Have you got a chip shop then?' Interrupted Jimmy showing his obvious stupidity.

'Non, non, non' sang Marco who found Jimmy's innocence funny in a charming sort of way 'I 'aven't got enny shop, but mebbe one day?' Said Marco through a wide smile. 'I 'ave money. Lots of money, mester Jemmy, but I do not 'ave lots of time. If you work for me and do as I ask, I will give you lots of my money'.

'How much?' said Jimmy like the answer might make a difference. It was a bit early for Jimmy to reveal his greed but Marco didn't seem to care.

'Lots' said Marco 'lots and lots'.

Oddly, the two men sat in silence for a few awkward moments whilst they absorbed the starkness of the words that had just been exchanged.

Despite being in one of the world's most luxurious cars, as the silence grew, they both felt very uncomfortable; Jimmy had so much to ask yet found nothing to say and Marco wanted to explain what he wanted Jimmy to do but didn't know how to start and was worried he may scare him off. Fortunately, their silence was broken by the driver who had now 'repaired' the puncture and was ready to drive them to wherever they were heading.

'Shall we go sir?' he asked.

'Oui' said Marco 'please'.

The car moved away so gently that if he hadn't seen it with his own eyes, Jimmy wouldn't have known they were underway.

Jimmy's habitual existence had more or less made him agoraphobic over the last few years, at least in a statistical sense, so he now felt a slight panic at the thought of going somewhere unknown. Somewhere he probably hadn't been to before and with an eccentric rich man to do God knows what.

'Where are you taking me?' he blurted out without thinking followed by a small rant.

'Who are you? What's going on? How do you know me and what... er, how... er, who...?' he didn't know what words to use but he made his point. He was worried now and it was time to wait out about this job.

'Please mister Jemmy, you are saff with me. You have the day off work and no other plans so please sit back and relax. We are going to my house en London and I will explain what I would like you to do for me while we drive there. If you don't want to work for me then se driver will take you home and zat will be zat'.

Jimmy couldn't suffer the torture. He didn't want to wait. He didn't want a long difficult explanation; he wanted to take a tablet or have an injection to fill him instantly with the information he lacked. But he had no choice. He had to sit it out and soak up the speech Marco was about to start. So Jimmy just sat in silence staring out of the window listening to the French man do his best to dictate his outrageous plan.

As the huge Mercedes left the car park, it was followed by Ray in his small Ford Fiesta with the wheel hub caps that didn't match. He had been to the chip shop earlier to learn that Jimmy was ill and having followed him to the car park, he had sat patiently for the last few minutes waiting for something to happen and now it had, he didn't really know what to do other than follow the limo to wherever it was going.

'Before I start, I want you to agree to my promises...' Marco asked as if using a faulty translation device, but Jimmy knew what he meant. 'I want you to promise you will keep this informations secret. I want you to contact me when I ask you to and how I want you to and I want you to enjoy yourself'.

'Fair enough...' shrugged Jimmy 'don't see any harm in that'.

'Bonn. So I shall begin then...'

Chapter 10:

Jimmy's nerves had held up well so far, but he suddenly started shaking. At first it was just an internal tremor, but just as Marco was about to reveal the mystery plot, it became a full blown rattle. Jimmy's entire body shook like he was connected to an over eager road digger, or 'Paddy's motorbike' as he called them. There was no disguising his anguish and with a cloth tongue he asked Marco if he had a drink in his car he could help himself to. Without responding, almost predicting this would happen, Marco slid open a wooden panel to reveal a small drinks cabinet containing two bottles of chilled cider.

Jimmy licked his lips at the liquid gold and knew that was exactly what he needed to calm his nerves. Marco passed a bottle over to Jimmy and removed the lid in the process. 'Your favourite I senk?' Jimmy just nodded as he gulped and gulped and when the bottle was empty he tried really hard to disguise his burp as part of his heavy breathing. But it didn't work. It was a burp all right and if there was ever any doubt, that doubt was removed when the sicky smell arrived.

The sudden rush of carbonated juice set Jimmy's tummy rumbling again reminding him he had yet to complete his morning necessary. He needed a toilet and by luck he noticed that the car was approaching his flat so he said to Marco 'Err, sorry Marco but I need to use the loo. My *house* is around the corner so do you mind if we go there quickly?' When Jimmy had to go, he had to go and unless Marco wanted his car soiled further by his guest, he had bloody well let Jimmy out. Marco sat in silence however and neither acknowledged nor ignored Jimmy's question.

The prospect of Jimmy being able to use a toilet made it more difficult for him to hold back what he now had in his departure lounge. He really had to crap. Really, really. Just as he was about to repeat his demand, the car pulled up outside Jimmy's flat which Marco silently observed was most definitely not a *house*. Until Marco spoke, Jimmy didn't realise that his flat had been the destination all along.

'Jemmy, we are at your *house*...' he was very gracious 'because I want you to understand zat this is the last time you will see it and everything zat is en it. This is now your old life. You have a new life now; you do not need ever to return here. I will provide you with everything you will ever need.'

He let the words sit for a moment before passing over the second bottle of cider which went straight to Jimmy's still shaking lips just like the first. If Jimmy wasn't sure he was going to shit himself before, he was certain he would now. This was getting scary.

'Merci' was all the driver needed as the instruction to move on came from the man in charge.

Jimmy just stared at Marco through wide, sweaty eyes which showed he was desperate to find out more about what lie ahead and to keep his bowel from letting him down. Both things were as important as each other right now.

'Do you understand revenge Jemmy?' Marco asked.

Jimmy was chewing the cider bottle again so just nodded.

'I want you to help me get back what was taken from me over many years Jemmy. I want revenge from all the people who have let me down and stopped me doing everything I have always wanted to do.'

This prompted many questions in Jimmy's head but now was not the time to ask. Marco was on a roll and finally removing the lid to the box of secrecy which had

contained this mystery until this point. He kept his gob and his bottom firmly shut to let Marco continue.

'I am a very seck man Jemmy and I am dying. I've a year to live and you have a year to get rich if you do what I ask. I 'ave been running my own beziness for many years and have been very successful. 'owever, I could 'ave 'ad more.'

Again Jimmy wanted to ask the questions growing in his puzzled mind but knew it would come quicker and clearer if Marco was left to it.

'I've two sengs to do. The ferst I will tell you about now. The second I well tell you about when you about after we 'ave done the ferst.'

'And how do I fit in?' Jimmy couldn't be quiet anymore.

'you are going to do it for me Jemmy...' Both men were nodding as though they were on the same wavelength which they obviously weren't. 'you are going to use my knowledge and my contacts to get back at the people who 'ave made my job harder than it should 'ave bin. You are going to cause accidents to hurt people who need to be 'urt. And they are going to suffer like I am now suffering.' Marco released a false cough as if to emphasise his suffering.

'Why me? Hurt people? What people? I'm..' Jimmy's confusion reigned.

'Please Jemmy. I 'ave chosen you because, and excuse me, because you 'ave no life. You need a life and I want you to 'ave one. I can give you a good life if you 'elp me.'

Jimmy couldn't deny that his existence was just that; an existence. Not a life as such. His life until today had been aligned to that of a common garden weed surrounded by flowers and trees with eventful and colourful episodes. The weed just existed alongside the bright and beautiful flora dominating its surroundings. The weed did wish to become the sunflower and the offer being described by Father Nature (Marco) to cross pollinate was now compelling. Jimmy was as interested now as he was intrigued and he wanted to hear more. He wanted to be rich and to have nice things; he wanted to become the sunflower.

Sensing Jimmy's interest, Marco seized to make his sale's pitch.

'Imashin 'aving a car like this' he blurted. But Jimmy wasn't interested in cars so it didn't register on his face.

'Imashin 'aving a fridge that is always full of beer.' Home run. Jimmy liked that idea.

'Imashin being able to eat and drink whatever you wanted whenever you want. Imashin having a yuge house with a yuge stereo to listen to your muzik and a yuge telly.'

'Yeah... yeah... and... a pinball machine' enthused Jimmy.

'Oui...' said Marco '...everything and anything you want'.

'So, tell me again, what do you want me to do?'