



59. Who was going for a song in the January Sale on the Strand in 1994?

60. Who studied anthropology sitting down?

61. A bloody drink was named after his spirited return to Blighty in 1805. Who?

62. Which poet's bridge was supposedly drawn faster than the mustard could be fetched?



V Death By Water (4,5,6,9)



It was six hours later. A hard white light shone down on the flat-topped table on which the dog-eared pages of the report were spread. I'd told my story three or four times, but still the men across the table wanted to go through it again. I looked up at the ceiling and could see stars. I couldn't tell if they were real, painted on, or just putting on a private performance to remind me of the physical interrogation that had been done earlier on.

I fumbled a cigarette around in my fingers, lit it, but didn't like the taste of it. The guy from central intelligence started up again about the report, which he kept prodding meaningfully. They had eighteen documented charges against me, and on top of that my ex-partner had been singing like a canary at a fat ladies convention. Most of it was ludicrous stuff, all of it fabricated.

"The oftener you tell this story, the sillier it sounds." He held up a card and I glanced at it. It was one of mine. It looked rather dirty at that, and there was a murky ring mark on it. "Is this your business card?"

"Sure," I said, "I give these out whenever I get a chance. Work isn't exactly busy right now."

"If you're holding anything back with the idea of investigating this case yourself, I'd forget it. The more information that you provide, the more marks you get in my book. I don't like all the points in your story, and I'm going to give you the night to think about it. Tomorrow, I'll probably ask you for a sworn statement. If I don't like your story any better, we'll do the same routine all over. And you'll keep coming back every day until your story has a happy ending. All we want from you, my friend, is facts. Do you understand?"

"Sure. Can I go home now? I don't feel any too well!" The Archbishop nodded. I got up and headed for the door in dead silence. I had a feeling I'd be spending so much more time in this celebrity chamber.

I got up and started with three cups of black coffee, and bathed the back of my head with ice-water. I'd managed to get a room at the Palace Motel. I skimmed the morning papers and there were a few column inches briefly included about a guy who'd had a necklace stolen. One account described a string of Asian origin, made of those green stones and worth eighty big ones. The guy was clearly very protective of his jewels: interviewed in the paper he was yelling about how hard done to he was. He sounded like the kind of guy from whom mortality drains badly. I had more time for the other story, which reported the necklace to be of pearls, and to be owned by the gentleman's daughter. He hired a private detective friend of his who had quoted for the work, and who had identified the culprit by means of a word search which had also recovered the stolen goods.



I dressed, ate two soft boiled eggs and drank a fourth cup of coffee. I looked at myself in the mirror and didn't particularly like what I saw. It was time to leave for my daily appointment, and I was just swallowing the last mouthful of luke-warm coffee dregs when the phone rang.

It was Bob. Somewhere far off in the subconscious I vaguely wondered how he'd known I was here.

"Have you decided yet? My offer at our last meeting still stands..."

"So you keep on telling me, but I need time to think it over."

"Time is the one thing you don't have much of, although you might be doing a lot of it pretty darn soon. I'm out of the country at the moment, but I'll be passing your way on Wednesday." It was lucky how he just happened to be passing my way all the time. I had the feeling he was holding a gun to my head. He said to be at the place on the green.

I was up another creek but this time there was no paddle, and I was taking on water fast. Bob was probably my only chance, but I didn't trust him by now, and one way or the other I couldn't take my hoard with me.

In the Post Office, I asked the good looking hazel-haired dame behind the counter to send a telegram for me. I took out my wallet, drew a card, and turned it over. I put the wallet away and got a pencil out instead. I wrote five words on the back of the card, looked up, and pushed it across the counter. The brunette took it and read what I'd written.

AD PIPING

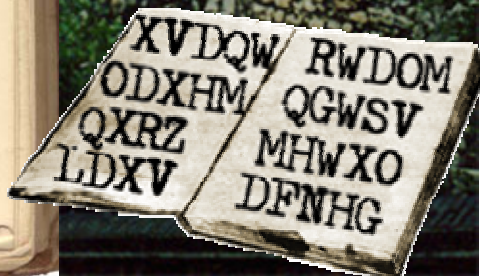


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LEAD PIPING



20 pts: _____





63. Who was the author of the Royal Society's first ever publication?
64. Which son of a Times journalist wrote three books about one of Henry's beheaded wives?
65. On what date was Marie Stuart informed that she would lose her head the following morning?
66. Which snowball-throwing youngster ended up dead in a Canadian harbour with the stone in his mouth?
67. Who is the patron saint of sailors?



16

Wasted

She held my defiant stare. "That means nothing to me. What am I supposed to do with these?" I took the fifth on that one. They would mean something to someone who knew their books, someone who they were meant for. I knew just the person. I gave Miss Stanley's address and handed over my money. Outside I passed a Spanish Galleon that reminded me of the Scythian. I jumped in a blue tram and headed over the creek. I was bunking off my daily counselling session, and going to meet Bob instead. I got off at the stop by Trinitie House and started walking. As I cut through the churchyard I felt a shiver run down my spine, as if someone was walking over my grave. As I walked along the Strand, I pondered the telegram I'd just sent. I remembered a saying I'd once heard: 'Words that enlighten the soul are more precious than jewels'. Well, whichever soul was enlightened by my five words would be some way to digging a little deeper.

I found the place alright. It was some kind of Conference Centre. Perhaps it should've been a Marriott Hotel. There was a narrow grass verge in front. I went in. The first thing I could see was rows of books through a doorway. A woman sat behind a desk at the other end making sandwiches. Her hair was pulled back into a bob which sat defiantly on the crown of her head. I turned and walked towards her, down past the stairs, the length of the reception hallway.

I looked up at the clock behind her. I remembered when Bob had said our meeting was due to start. "Hello," I began. "I'm scheduled for a meeting here at ten"

"Uh huh." She sounded like a legitimate target and worth a bob or ten. She shuffled slowly back around the desk, her varicose veins jiggling as she went. She started flicking through a rack of cards. I glanced around the walls idly. There was a stuffed moose that looked like it'd been shot at least five times before it dropped down dead. There was also a framed picture on the wall of some old guy. She saw me looking at it.

Our mouths opened simultaneously. "Your husband?" I enquired. "Gawd, no!" she exclaimed. "Dick's been dead these past three years. What was your name again?"

I told her. She found what she was looking for eventually and held it up triumphantly. It was one of my business cards. It had a familiar well-thumbed grubby look about it. The faded brown ring mark on the front, the colour of cheap whiskey, was still there. Seek and ye shall find, as they say - it was certainly quite an effective marketing campaign I was running on this particular week.

"The other gentlemen have already arrived. Room five. Go down the hallway, turn right, and through the kitchen. You'll see a door on one side. That's the garden, if you want a smoke. The bathroom's opposite. A buffet lunch is served at one. How does that look?" She gestured at the half-made sandwiches in front of her with a grin. Clearly, this was a one-woman operation.

I followed the old frail's directions. I could hear the mumble of voices. Somebody inside was swearing like a trooper. I'd a bad feeling about this. I nearly turned round, but there was really no alternative. I knocked before entering.

The room was sparsely furnished. On one side was a bed occupying a third of the space. Much of the remaining area was filled with a shabby looking wooden table surrounded by four chairs. Three were occupied by bearded men and a game of backgammon was in progress. Bob stood up to greet me. He seemed unusually tense.

"Hello. Glad you could make it. I believe you know these two gentlemen?" Tom's butler forced an awkward facial contortion in my direction. I guessed this was as close as he ever got to smiling. Next to him sat Nick, the not so independent financial adviser.

I was suddenly conscious of Bob's role in all this. "I trust it's all legal and above board," I said with a nervous laugh.

I spied a bottle of whiskey on the table. I had a desperate longing to have Uncle Jack's arm around my shoulder with Mr. Daniels whispering comfortingly that everything was going to be alright.

Bob's face wore an expression of mock hurt. "I should not have called you if it were not." Ah, a Cambridge boy. Nice use of the subjunctive mood. "We're here to bloody help you," interjected the butler. Clearly a man schooled more in plain grammar!

Bob attempted to calm things down. "Look you're in it up to your hat, chum. A certain gallant knight wishes to bestow a kind favour on you. He has asked us to make the necessary arrangements, to entertain you, and to pass on his good countenance and liberal affection. He might even be here later to say farewell in person." I





68. Who was the first to be fingered for murder at a colourful place?
69. In December 2002, who was declared not to have done it after the Queen of England had previously intervened?
70. Which 6'8" ship-builder trailed four dozen dwarves at a funeral in 1715?
71. Who was Francis Archer erroneously accused of killing in 1820?



Wasted

17

couldn't help being a tad suspicious. "What's in it for you three?"

"We already know you have a little something put aside somewhere for a rainy day. We're obviously expecting something a little more tangible than mere praise, but let's just say the weather forecast predicts a torrential downpour later today."

Bob tried a less threatening tack and pointed out of the window at some old tub moored in the Great Dock. "The Royal Crown. A fine sea-going vessel! You're in a jam, and you need to decide which side your bread's buttered. I've just come back from the low countries, where a safe house, papers, and a new identity are waiting for you. Once the heat dies down, well, whose to know? The world is full of places a crook can hide."

I fancied an undiscovered Greek isle perhaps or a small backwards Mediterranean island really quite large [9].

He paused briefly and looked at me intently. "Now tragically, it just so happens that a poor sailor booked some permanent shore-leave last night. Bit of a brawl in the Navy Arms after a tot too many. Coincidentally, this stiff just happens to be the same height as you. Come to think of it, he has your build, your long brown hair, and your brown eyes too, although he's not quite as ugly. Hell, he even had your bad manners! In fact, if you weren't sat there in front of my very own eyes, I'd be trying on my black tie for size and trying to remember your good points." I returned the extremely well concealed compliment: "Thanks, you're not so bad yourself."

"The point is this, wisey. Suppose they find this guy and he's wearing your licence. He's in the ground faster than a mole with vertigo, leaving you to read your obituary in the evening editions as you engulf yourself in serenity and a relaxing whiskey on deck."

It was time to take a stroll in the garden. I rolled a cigarette to and fro between my fingers and weighed up my options. Bob's scheme, I had to admit, was ingenious. The only problem was that I'd left my purses behind and this meant I couldn't afford a ticket to ride.

After some time pondering, I went back in. "I'd like to take you up on your offer, but I'd like to talk to the gallant knight first." I was playing for time, but time wasn't sure whether to put me in the team or not. The others were clearly irritated by my stalling, but seemed prepared to wait.

Dinner came and went, and it was a quiet sort of afternoon passed in an uneasy silence. We walked in the garden, smoked some more. Still no sign of Tom. Perhaps we'd have to wait another 360 years. At six, we came in from the cold into one of the rooms where supper was served. I broke the silence. "Tom's not coming is he? I should have known this was a setup!"

"Doesn't look like it," snapped the butler, who looked like he was changing the white flag on his tent to a red one. "Times running out for you, Shamus - high tide is at 23 hundred hours. We need to start making waves or the deal's off. Let's see the colour of your money - I reckon it should add up to a tidy sum of pence." Now here was a member whose mouth should most definitely be stopped.

He sounded cold, but he was making my blood boil. He certainly didn't have the respectful demeanour you'd expect of a servant. "Sir," he continued. "You badly need this naval move. Let me change my name, and that might help you in your search for the location of that not-so-holy grail." He seemed to have lost the plot. I made a mental note to write a piece about butler mania and the conceit of clowns.

There were cross words exchanged in the room, and it was my turn to lose the plot. I lunged at him, but he was too quick. He jolted slightly to one side, seemingly unimpaired by the other two either side of him, and he produced a deft prod that found just the right place to send me sprawling on the bed. Someone pinned my arms to my sides. A glinting weapon in a waist-band winked at me. The price tag still dangled from it. 12p seemed a cheap price for taking a life. I swung out a hand and grabbed it. I managed a couple of wild slashes before I was disarmed. My wrists were twisted behind me fast and I felt a knee like an iceberg crash into my back. I went down. I felt like I'd been bent in two, and I'd lost touch with my foot, wherever it was.

Then I had a cushion over my head. All went black. Breath panted in my throat and couldn't get out. I felt a weight on top of me, and what felt like a clamp around my neck. Breath fighting and losing. I was nearly gone when the light flared on again. A flash, then all I could see was red. Blood red. On account of the blood in my eye-balls. I could feel something warm trickling onto my lip. A pool of darkness opened at my feet and was far, far deeper than the blackest night. I dived into it. It had no bottom. I couldn't climb out it was so steep and treacherous. I'd gone.

- The End -

