

# Jacko's Hut

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Jacko liked to get to the Hut early, get the log-burning stove going, get the kettle on, make sure the place was warm. He made a big pot of strong instant, rolled-up with the special stuff Yann had brought from Amsterdam, and settled down to check out his horses and dogs for the Bookies' later. Bliss. Back at home Mamie, his wife, had banned him smoking inside which meant standing out on the veranda if he wanted a wee puff. OK in the summer, but hellish in winter.

Jacko checked his mobile: 08:08. He smiled; nearly an hour before the other two get here, he thought. He set up the draughts' board and hooked the dartboard on the wall beside the big picture window which looked out over the woods, away to Ben Lomond in the distance. Jacko had been a joiner, still was, still did 'wee obligations' for his neighbours in the high flats. Jacko's Hut in the allotments was a legend, pure luxury compared to the all the others.

Eddie left Murdo's newsagents and fast food emporium. It was starting to smirr. He snuggled into his big parka and put his head down for the walk to the Hut. In his side pocket for elevenses he had two rolls and Lorne sausages with brown sauce and a packet of salt and vinegar crisps. And two tins of Irn Bru, the real stuff, not the sugar-free rubbish. "Eff it, ye only die wance", he thought. His wife Ella was always at him about healthy eating, trying to get his fight against diabetes under 'diet control'. Eddie had spent years off-shore denying his urges, making a mint on the rigs as a painter; he hated people thinking he was past it. He checked his watch; nearly half-past eight. Eddie stepped up his pace - he hated being late.

Yann LeBlueff, a retired wholesale flower delivery driver, was already on his way to Jacko's Hut. He was in his aging Volvo, bleary-eyed, crawling, still on the outskirts, trapped in slow traffic caused by roadworks, something to do with a cycle path, he had heard. Winston, his aged Miniature Schnauzer, was asleep on the passenger seat. Since his wife Doortje had left to visit her two sisters in Haarlem, Yann had been working hard with his still in the garage, making his own gin, just like his father had taught him to do forty years earlier. Doortje always went to Haarlem for the three months before Christmas. That's when Yann did it, so she wouldn't find out. Doortje had no idea what Yann did out in the garage, with his secret laptop, which he used to watch basketball from all over the world, his still bubbling happily in the background, and a pint tumbler of gin and bitter orange to hand. Yann had two litres of his latest vintage in a PVC drinks bottle, stashed under a dog blanket in the boot, to share with Jacko and Eddie. He checked the clock on the dashboard: 08.23. 'Winston, let's scoot aboot round Balfron Road and loop back through Summerston, OK wee man?'

The men had met thirty years earlier on the terraces at Firhill, home of Partick Thistle FC. They called themselves, rather prosaically, "The Jaggy Bunnets". Now that

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they were retired, Wednesdays were sacrosanct. The Jaggy Bunnets had not missed one in over ten years. Only Jacko had a Hut, so that's where they met, where they could do and say what they liked.

ooOoo

The TransCargo Freightliner was on its way to Glasgow from Rabat airport in Morocco, due to land at 09:03 with a chilled cargo of tomatoes and soft fruits. The stowaway had been born twenty-three years earlier in Syria, in a poor village near Damascus. Since escaping to Europe, he had worked as a hospital porter in Brussels. Abdul was a tiny man, otherwise it would not have been possible to do what he had done. He had contorted his body into the space above the undercarriage. To protect himself from the sub-zero temperature at high altitude, he had wrapped himself in two shiny thermal survival blankets, overlapping and taping them into place. Thermal mittens protected his hands. A balaclava covered his face and over it a Perspex mask of the type used to resuscitate patients. His plan was to feed medical oxygen to this mask through a trickle-feed regulator from a small canister, needed to combat the low oxygen levels he would encounter during the flight.

ooOoo

'Tea or coffee, Yann? How ur ye Winston, ma wee man. Here ye ur, son, sit yersel doon on yer wee bed and hae a wee nap tae yersel.'

'Coffee, strong and black,' mumbled Yann.

'Comin right up. Ur ye a-right, Yann? Ye look a bit wurse fur wear. Ye've no been at yer still again, huv ye? Huv ye goat any wi' ye?'

'Help yourself, Jacko, my man. Watch out though, it's the best of the best.'

'Aw thayr ye ur at last, Eddie. Ah thought ye hud goat lost. Ready fur a coffee wi a wee topper ootta Yann's bottul?'

Thirteen minutes out, the pilot of the TransCargo Freightliner was placed in holding pattern while a fuel spillage on the apron was dealt with. With the runway closed, the opportunity had been taken by the fire-fighting Watch Commander to turn the clean-up exercise into a full-scale emergency evacuation drill. Soon the airport was in chaos, grid-locking the M8 at the already busy St James Interchange.

Time passed.

Darts were hurled and tallies were kept.

The TransCargo Freightliner circled.

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At 10.23 the 'emergency exercise' was declared a success.

The smirr stopped. The clouds parted.

Winston whined and yapped to be let out to pee.

The plane turned to make its final approach, lowering its undercarriage, its engines screaming as it banked into a tighter than regulation turn, the pilot hoping to make-up lost time.

The shining package that was Abdul was hurled free of the undercarriage and commenced its trajectory towards Jacko's Hut.

'Whit the fuck is that?' said Jacko, pointing out of the window.

'It's a bit aff that plane. God's sake, it's comin' straight fur us,' said Eddie.

'No, it's frozen ice,' corrected Yann. 'It must've built itself up in the freezing fog. . .'

'Naw, it's wan o' them fuckin' drones thay bastarts huv been flyin aroon ma high flats, spyin' in oor windaes', said Jacko.

'Aw naw, fuck it!' said The Jaggy Bunnets in unison.

Microseconds later the silver bullet that was Abdul struck and Jacko's Hut exploded.

Winston ran to the Volvo and crouched underneath it, shivering.

Eddie's watch stopped at 10.27.

Jacko's Hut caught fire and had burned to a shell before the Fire and Rescue Service arrived to pick over the smouldering remains.

ooOoo

Yann LeBlueff had been closest to the truth.

The forensic remains of the four corpses revealed that the body wrapped in the thermal blankets had died of hypothermia, probably within an hour of leaving Moroccan airspace.

At first, because of the tobacco mixture that Jacko had been smoking, and the illicit gin, it was thought that the tiny unknown man had been part of a new drugs smuggling ring. In pursuit of an identity, the Serious and Organised Crime group pumped his DNA profile into the system.

Abdul Alnasseri was quickly identified as a bomb-maker from the Brussels' faction of Islamic State, who had been on the run since the Charlie Hebdo attack. In accordance

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with UK Foreign Office protocols, and with the full agreement of the Scottish Government, the presence of this fourth body in the debris was not reported.

The Coroner's Inquest decided that The Jaggy Bunnets had died by misadventure, in an explosion caused by a faulty illicit still.