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GRAVEYARDS AND DOGS DECEASED



The sun rose on Little Bosnia. It rose like it had always done, rising and rising and rising still further, casting another thousand lessons in history and tradition over Simon's craggy mindscape. Could he really use the future to fight the past? His mind was in as many places as the sunshine. Could he really tackle this historical problem with his futuristic methodology? That's surely where he was going with this. Could he genuinely neutralise his age-old acid burns with a bucket of Tomorrow's alkaline wipes? He had to try, but right now he couldn't get his mind off the present. In spite of the sunny influence, there was a black cloud (entirely metaphorical) over the Vetterage. The white-noise-background-hum of his computer and Sliding Penguin executive toy filled the still and early morning air and echoed the frustrated buzz in Simon's bonnet. He was back at his desk but his mind was elsewhere. Snuggles on the other hand was never coming back anywhere. For in one moment of half asleepy rage, drunk on ambition and alcohol, Simon had helped the world of domestic violence statistics tot still more to its tally.

From his plush vet studio, Simon gazed out over the empty dogtrack, easily visible from the high vantage point that was the Vetterage. The detritus of a hard night's dogging lay deep and crisp and even. The Murder of Snuggles was now just another surreal midnight murder memory. Simon hadn't slept since that dream he had and the murder he had done. And now he had to deal with the nightmare, Reality, that was the lovechild of those two mismatched imposters. Treat them the same, Simon, but treat them nonetheless.

When he arrived at his desk he had set to work immediately but as it turned out, searching for glory was not as easy as searching for 'glory' on Lycos.

Such is life.

Lit by the flickering artificial light of his 'Favourite Photos' screensaver, as it blinked between happy memories: pictures of Snuggles and him having fun; even a few black and white snaps from the good old days with N.A.S.A., so many emotions tiptoed across his pail, gaunt face, ploughing their effects into his furrowed brow. But what are these emotions? With Simon, every wrinkle tells a story...

But that's another story.

Simon had been surfing the web, but useless waves of un-Jack 'the Ripper' related information hauled him under and jellyfish of disappointment stung his foot

and stump at every double-click. But he, who was computer-literate as hell* and had always been a firm believer in technofying equestrian proverbs, got right back on the board. Like a man who works hard, eats lunch at his desk and doesn't get back for his supper until at least Eight:Thirty *every night*, Simon was dedicated to the job. He *had* to find some virtual trace of this legendary racer. He had a hunch that his future glory depended on it.

Lycos was the obvious place to start, but Simon wasn't about to start thinking inside the box all of a sudden. Archie dot icm dot edu dot pl first for him now, yessir. Yawho do you think he was anyway – an everyman?

But anyway, again and again, failure began to get on top of him pretty quickly, like a hefty lump of murder-guilt squashing down on his skull and conscience, or a big heavy hat (obviously these are both hypothetical examples, Simon being a principled man of fashion, not a hat-wearing wimp who went all gooey and regretful moments after doing a murder or a manslaughter. Having said that, that was the old Simon. This vet was clearly grateful for the distraction from his spur-o-the-moment pet pal murder and showed several symptoms of being afraid to think what he had done: for example: look on't? He definitely dared not).

A lateral-thinker Simon may well have been, but he wasn't a time-wasting patience-monger. Who cares a jot for graces or virtues when you could have glory, or at least information on how to go about tapping into the glory of a long-dead racetrack legend? If only he could find the right turnpike on this cursed information superhighway. Predictably, our hero began to boil over with road-rage. Time for a breather and nice little calm down. But before heading off to his chill-out tent†, Simon allowed the quivering titbits of fury inside his soul to work a little of their angry magic as he defragulated and upbooted the crap out of his (standard-issue) Gateway P.C.. Revenge was sweet as sugarjuice as he dished out a free tutorial to that blinking heap of techno-junk atop his ivory desk.

Calmly gazing out the window wasn't cutting it so, once monitor power settings etc. were well and truly adjusted the fuck up, and Simon was safely ensconced within the calming canvass walls of his tent haven, our mega-stressed hero began to strum his genuine catgut guitar and harmlessly hum a little ditty, proof positive that he was truly inspired, for the words flowed like sunflower oil:

.....**Song.....(Lovely tune)...**

*I've been searchin' on Lycos for days‡
Searchin' in many many ways
Sometimes there's ups
Sometimes there's downs
One thing's for sure – I don't want no strays*

* *Exempli gratia*: Simon had an internet wife. And of course had managed to get photos into his computer using his state of the art scanning equipment.

† Simon had erected a medium sized tepee in the old slaves' quarters which protected his sentimental artefacts and thoughts from the harsh world just as it protected his professional persona from the dangerous sentimentality it caged. He was a vet and candles, compassion, compassion fruit candles and soft pillows were not to be mixed with business.

‡ More like hour's Simon but I guess you are artistically licensed to exaggerate.

*I'm a day-dreamer with dreams of the track
These modern dogs are all shit, I need a hit of my smack
Sometimes there's highs
Sometimes there's lows
One thing's for sure - I'm tripping on Jack.*

*I've been searching on Lycos for clips
Plugged into my blood-calming drips
Sometimes there's ins
Sometimes there's outs
One thing's for sure - I'm having some freaky ass trips*

*I'm a drug user, abusing myself
It's probably the root of my questionable mental health
Sometimes I'm lucid
Sometimes times times
One thing's for sure - that dog will inject me with
megagrams of glory wealth ...*

Simon was top-chuffed that he'd fitted some words to his favourite rhyme pattern - a,a,b,c,a. In a swoon of self-congratulatory, rhyme-writing, glory-doped celebration, he did a massive guitar solo for about ten or eleven minutes, emotional and full of notes. The music transported him to a dream world..:

Simon was beclad in all his finest finery; bullet cuff-links and Virgin Mary cravat. He was rocking a pretty smart fox trot, hand in paw with a divinely bejewelled, gorgeously begowned Jacquetta the Ripper. As they swayed gently to, gently fro, the intoxicating music pulsed from foot to pad, stump to claw. It soon became clear to a heavily besmitten Simon that they had all the moves. Jack complimented Simon on his grace and elegance and this nasty vet blushed. Skip-twirl here, spin-pirouette there, closer and closer, two dancers beware.

As is so sadly often the way in the morally decrepit under-world of dreamy ballroom dancing, one dance step lead to another and soon enough they were definitely just about to kiss. But at that very moment, i.e. nanoseconds before the cross-natural smooch we've all been dreading, Simon ran out of notes on his guitar and was dragged unceremoniously back to Reality, as though the ballroom bouncers had spotted this quickstepper, disorderly and drunk (if only so on his partner's one hundred and ten proof glory). Simon fought it but the pull was too powerful and he returned, tail between his legs, with a CRUMP to Reality, as Jack's face melted into a dead, fleshless dog-skull and Simons own head echoed with the demented cackling of his murdered slave-hound Snuggles.

Is this guilt? Simon was not sure...probably not.

A shocking twist to this dream menu: lovely song on a bed of rocket and glory druglettes for starters, ecstasy for mains, agony ice-cream with chocolate skull bone chips for pudding. Simon had basically invited himself to dinner and had pretty much just date-raped himself. Needless to say his mind was swimming and he needed some air. Deep (to the point of drowning) in thought, he threw back the flaps of the tepee,

exchanged his soft slippers for business boots and hot footed it to his favourite (for many reasons) thinking bench.

Thanks to its terrific vista, one hundred percent panoramic perspective of the pet graveyard, Simon felt like the king of his very own realm of corpses; crown prince of the killing fields; archduke of the death ditch:

“All that, as far as the eye can see, all that is yours, Simon, you dirty little badkin,” he whispered seductively to himself (just like the hyenas in the Lino King). Usually, in this spot, he sniffed up the magnificence through his nose, swelling his breast with pride and engorging his whole body with the satisfaction of a job well done. But not today.



BUT NOT TODAY

Simon was a man generally unaffected by dreams, unaffected by death, unaffected by nightmarish dreams of ominous forebodings and death...but today he was a man affected by dreams, affected by death etc. His breast did not swell, nor his body engorge. Instead he felt a little acid trickle in his soul, burning away.

Verging on a little too hasty, a little bit 'quick-fix' for a serious minded man such as he, Simon swiftly dug up a corpse and ate it. No, it wasn't hunger (that there feeling). Although this was a tasty morsel, it did nothing for his waning spirit. If it wasn't hunger why did he feel so bad? Simon set off in a monster huff (destination not yet chosen). This had *never* happened before. He needed to pace about a bit but then, to make matters worse, his pager went off: **SPECIAL ALERT TONE!** which Simon had recently set to his favourite note from The Good, The Bad and The Ugly - one long, piercing whistle that trampled and stampeded on the synapses in his brain, crumpling around where it didn't belong. Neurons fired at one another: electroshock warfare in his skull! Painfully and eventually it reminded him of the veterinary RGM*.

Now more than ever, Simon wanted to be alone (it usually took him hours of good thinking time to recover from these bouts of confused rage and this was a new strain that he'd never encountered before, his immunological memory banks were all coming up blanks - even the best vets can't inoculate themselves against everything).

* Veterinary is a serious profession and requires regular general meetings.

What he did know was that he had set the pager to ring *only* in an emergency. This must be an emergency...

Simon jumped pretty sharpish into the grave buggy and slammed on the gas. Soon he was pulling smoothly into his parking space in the converted cow buyer garage at the Vetterage where he crashed a little bit. Looking down, he saw his prosthetic foot shudder and detach itself. A sharp heart pang! A memory of Snuggles! The adoring gift of a slipper and the cruelty of a spanner! Even before he had killed Snuggles the, Simon's lack of a foot had served as a constant reminder the painful occasion on which they became blood brothers. But Simon didn't have time to deal with these memories right now. He snapped out of it and tried to clean himself up: shaved his head to the quick, filed his teeth, coloured his eyeballs...

Simon considered himself, with a high degree of confidence, the only vet, and so treated the High Veterinary Council with the disrespect he appointed most things. But he was jumpy today. Jumpy and unsettled.

He zigzagged down to Veterinary H.Q., nr. Bristol, and staggered out, leaving his Jaguar's door open and a bit crashed. He managed to flash his favourite smile at the bouncer who quickly dealt him his admittance. Once through the giant oaken doors, he arrived in the palatial atrium, decorated with paper (the finest paper, obviously) chains, each link the shape of a different specie of animal. Ignoring these (he'd seen it all before in the flesh and blood and just like a doctor or gynaecologist, he didn't care for it being strewn across his stressful enough holiday/holnight/holnightmare).

He crept on into the boardroom allowing his eyes to nip niftily round as he went. Not necessarily averse to beauty, Simon allowed his two greasy little sight-balls to wallow a while in the vast opulence that signalled the wealth of the veterinary world around him. He scanned the multitude of ivory tablets (tablets at least a thousand times thicker, creamier and ivorier than his own ivory office execudesk) that served as place names ('Dr Lear,' 'Dr Thello,' 'Dr Morse,' 'Dr McOcter,' ...) until he found his own seat ('Simon'). Suddenly, a whisper sprang over his shoulder from the gloom by the unlit fire:

"Where's your cloak, Simon?" asked Dr Malcolmson.

Suddenly, as the myriad cloaked figures of the veterinary profession emerged from the shadows to take their seats, Simon became aware that he was not sporting the livery of his professional forefathers and immediate peers. If there was one thing that Simon had respect for it would have been the traditions of the veterinary community, with all their striking whiffs of wrongdoing and blood-money. As it was, however, he didn't, and so, although still shaken up by the day's events, he was not embarrassed in the slightest by his significant sartorial faux-pas. His problems were much more profound than fashion. Luckily, these modern types got over it pretty quickly and the meeting began with the offer of coffees all round. As they settled into their seats, the Veterinary General Secretary walked over to Simon.

"Sorry we had to call you on your emergency line, Simon, but we were concerned when you didn't show for the vet R.G.M. drinks down at Little Bosnia yesterday afternoon - especially as it was your turn to host the event." The Vet Gen Sec's American twinge and speech mannerisms pyroclasted in Simon another painful wave of the past and his father, the long dead Mr Lacey Zimmermann. "...And the

traditional invitation carrier pigeon? You sent it to the wrong address, in a jiffy bag... Where were you yesterday, Simon?"

"Nowhere..." (Nowhere, Simon? Is that also where your famous witty reposts and snappy comebacks that we know and love you for have gone?)

"We spoke with the locals, Simon, they are concerned about you. Apparently you were seen drunk and unwieldy last night. I mean, was it your pager that woke you up today, Simon? Sleep well last night, did you?"

"Yes, but only for about twenty minutes. Since then I've been trying some more esoteric veterinary."

"Of course... Now Simon, Dr Hoskins may have found your eccentricities endearing or may not have cared for what was going on in Little Bosnia, the town that time forgot, but Dr Hoskins is dead now and as the new General Secretary I will be running a much tighter ship."

On any normal day Simon would have replied with a swift 'fuck off' to the face of his interlocutor. But today (as has previously been explained, what with all the weird events and such) was different. He gave his inch and they took their mile.

"Dr. Hoskins never cared for History," continued the V.G.S., "And now he's part of it and I do. The Vetterage is not a place to be forgotten. It is a wonderful monument to our great profession and should house the great leaders of Veterinary, as the flagship of our modern business. Times are a-changing, Simon, and so must you. Vets are no longer kings in this land; they're just businessmen with needles. Now, I'm not saying I'm going to remove you from your position or anything.*You might be a maverick vet or whatever but you're now a *veteran* [all eavesdroppers chortle] and I'll be watching you closely."

Again, normally, with the impoli taken to this level, Simon probably would have thrown his vows to the wind and murdered this man there and then but he barely took in a word of it. The Gen. Sec. left and a lot of boring stuff was said and the distracted Simon didn't listen to any of that either until the grating smell of overfed veterinary laughter scraped at his ear-holes:

"Ha ha ha, guess you're not the only vet anymore then, Simon. Hi, I'm Dr Macduff but you, like everybody else, can call me Finn."

!!!

Simon felt liquid moisten his lips and chin. The soup they'd served earlier? No, blood. Blood brought to the surface by anger and ejected to the outside world by building rage. Simon's anger and fear and disdain transubstantiated and realised. Madly, Simon grabbed the huge mahogany demithrone that he sat upon and smashed it over this annoying new vet's head, which exploded. Another painful reminder/hallucination of Simon's recent violent past? Yes and yes:

Yes - this whole thing was just yet another hallucination. Simon was off in Cloud Cuckoo Spit Daydreamy Land again. No-one could realistically lift a big ol' heavy chair

* Of course this man could not legally remove Simon from his inherited position, but if he could get enough votes in the right direction who knows what might happen to Simon. For now, at least, one vote, even if it was the Vet. Gen. Sec.'s, did not make a democracy. And Simon straddled democracy like Hitler. But then again, times were, after all, changing.

like that one, as Simon discovered when he woke from this daydream yanking on the thing. And *yes*, he did have a painful memory of Snuggles exploding like a vet's cheerfully bloated head. He felt as he did when he woke to Snuggles, not the Ripper. Betrayed. He also felt the pain he should have felt then, upon the death of man's best friend... guilt!?!?!

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The room was awash with emotion and Simon, much to his eternal internal chagrin, was the saltiest swimmer in this sea of sentiment. There were tears in his eyes and Finn was embracing him. What had he become? Just like murdering Tony, which Simon had anticipated so hotly and with such expectant hope but turned out to be rubbish, his descent into madness (which he could hear rapping on the door) looked like it might follow in a similar vein, totally unlike he had ever quixotically envisaged it might be, if that time ever came.

Suddenly, as if his guardian angel had just given him a spoonful of salt to help the menacing go away he was throwing up, purging himself of all his sins (well, what Simon saw as sins. His embrace of this repellent man was certainly one of the worst).

Stomach-mangled dog corpse adorning his gleaming Oxbridge cloak, Finn spoke: "Not a problem, mate," said he, "I'll have my nurse clean it right up, good as new (which it is)!"

Simon had always been a lone wolf, a solitary shark in a sea of sheep and shingle, and he certainly didn't sanction the use of a nurse in the practice. A lot of things about this repellent man were repelling Simon. But he was purged. Food poisoning and a lack of sleep, he self-diagnosed. Probably was a bad idea to scoff that dead dog.

Of course, Simon forgot to look at the heart of the problem which was definitely to do with his blind, emotion-fuelled panic which had driven him to rush straight into a corpse scoffing.

If only Simon had been one twentieth as good with human medicine as he was with animals, he'd have diagnosed and probably cured all his problems long ago. But that was his curse. There wasn't a veterinary conundrum or impossibly advanced animal brain surgery you could throw at Simon that would prove to be anything less than a joyful and easily overcome challenge to him. A Killer Sudoku maybe, but in the hands of a human calculator. But these problems were a nagging doubt at the back of his mind that he couldn't dig out with a spoon. Simon was his own worst patient, in his own hands, incurable, and the limp he walked with was a constant reminder of this curse every day. Any animal might become immortal in his hands, but put his own feet in those self-same hands and his medicine wasn't so magic - one foot on his leg, one foot in the grave, one prosthetic foot on that leg, one proof positive that he was one foot short of having both feet. What he did have, however, was the memory of a nasty accident and a sense of his own ineptitude. If he had had such a terrible patient as himself, his diagnosis would have been 'Moribund' and his cure a swift and lethal needling. But if his intention was suicide he should have committed to it long ago. By this point he had invested so much in himself - glory bonds if you will - and he wanted the dividends he was owed.

Suddenly, whatever interval had begun was over. The band ceased the vet jazz. All was business once again.

Simon was business again. Food poisoning and a lack of sleep, sure.

And he had things to sort out:

"What is this ridiculous creature?" he bilely barked at the General Secretary, his finger lodged in Finn's smiling eye.

The Gen Sec came over all authoritarian, *comme d'hab*, this time addressing Simon publically:

"Dr Macduff, Simon, is just another vet. Our first second vet in the Little Bosnian area. He will assist in your veterinary. We've heard talk, Simon, of many things and voted yesterday on where this wonderful new vet would be put to work. You didn't raise any issues yesterday, Simon, and we heard it was all getting a little much for you. Of course we'd never believe these naysayers, Simon. No matter what your kill count, you're a darn good vet and (sensei) Dr Beaudalaire though you were The One. But we've heard The One you need a bit of a hand. It's just a measure. Finn is merely a precaution against public unease. Besides, a big dogging hamlet like yours could do with another vet! I mean, it's the Vetterage, for Heaven's sake. This gem of history cannot be run as an autocracy, can it?" This smug democrat triumphed.

So beside himself was Simon, so emotionally and physically exhausted, that he made his apologies (yes, you read right) and scuttled off to the Grande Salle de Bain to splash his face with water and have another quick unplanned narcoleptic episode to think about this. If only he'd packed that chill-out tent. But sleep was still as much a dream as everything else. In the moment when he blinked off, he thought hard about murder, the easy way out, but no, this was hardly the environment in which you could kill a man and not lose your job and not go to jail and not get your comeuppance like the quiet cobbled streets of Little Bosnia, his playground of death. Having said that, after years of threatening and violent fantasies, the murder of Tony had only served to flip murder out of the frying pan and onto the backburner while Simon dealt with a new fascination. Simon had murdered the murderer within himself. He cast his mind back to the easy days when his only worry was that he might become addicted to murder and this addiction would eventually lead his comeuppance to him with a cold kiss on the cheek. Oh how he'd have laughed a little (which would be a lot for Simon) if he wasn't in such dire straights. Murder was a means to an end. Glory was his addiction, killing just a habit

One second later he awoke. Or maybe it was slightly longer... most of the minor vets had left now as Simon returned to the Banqueting Hall. Sadly, of the few vets that were still present, Finn was one (chilling proof that he wasn't a horrible hallucination).

Simon sat down and squinted. The flame from the torchlight was burning his eyes. He shrugged it all off as best he could and stole himself to listen to more of the bureau-claptrap. But (first things first) what were those ghastly green eyes doing, rudely fixing him in a death-stare across the table? Slightly refreshed, Simon decided to claim that inch he'd given back before everyone thought he was a pushover (like he'd been acting like):

"Don't stare your gory eye sockets at me, mister! Are you another new vet, you blurry twat? You look like an hallucination." Then turning to the confused members of

the board who were still present he asked, "Who's that gay who looks like an hallucination in that chair?"

"What, Simon!?" asked the now exasperated chief, "That chair is one hundred percent empty. If this is a joke, it's a sick one. Mocking a dead man's absence is severely frowned upon. Dr Hoskins M.B.E. has not sat in that chair for eleven months since he died of 'boredom' nine months ago."

"Hoskins never had green eyes and a wild stare." Replied Simon, still staring at the head of the table.

"Simon, I'm apoplectic. This episode simply proves the rumours of your hideous misdemeanours and questionable behaviour, Simon, dammit!"

"You guys are all idiots!" Simon retorted, equally indignant. "That's no man - dead or otherwise! More like a dog that looks like the one I murd...put out of its mis...kindly sent to sleep, 'cept more skeletal and green-glowing."

Embarrassed low-level chatter filled the room. More than anything, had Simon really missed a golden opportunity to deride a dead man? Was his mind really as tortured as it seemed?

Well, truth be known, Simon could see, sitting in the chair, clear as eggs is eggs, relaxing in a silken dressing gown (black, gold trim, the kind that might appal the Devil), the sleek and powerful body of a great racer - fur black as night, ghostly green shimmer to boot. But topped with a much meeker face, a softness that he'd seen before.

...

When a vet like Simon had kindly puts an animal to sleep, they don't like to see it out of the grave unless they'd dug it up for supper, say. But, if pet graves must send those that they bury back, then, sure enough, this was a face he knew. He wiped the paint from his eyes and blinked, but there, clearer than ever, was the face of his erstwhile canine companion and best-friend, Snuggles ('cept with ghostly glints of green).

"Snuggles!" yelled Simon, crying and shaking and back on board the emotional rollercoaster that the vomiting was meant to have kept him off. "Snuggles," he cried, "what are you trying to tell me!? *I'm so very sorry!*"

But, before he could fall deeper into this terrifying mystery, a greasy palm appeared with a cloth of chloroform and everything went black as night...

"That's good work, Dr Macduff, good work. Now keep an eye on this 'brilliant' psychopath. You know your 'assignment'. 'Take care' of him."

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Had Simon stayed awake a little longer, he may have completed the growing mental tapestry of thought that was suggesting with every little stitch that perhaps the emergence of Jack, as Simon saw him, herald to a brave new world of glory, might possibly be nought but a divinely bejewelled poisoned chalice. So far there had been no glory, no splendour, no wonder dog... only hurt. Indeed, Snuggles was dead, Simon's greatest companion, dead. A.k.a. his pursuit of the legendary greyhound had left him

without a dog of his own, a fact that would never have failed to show up on Simon's ironydar.\*

He'd lived his dream, carried out that murder and escaped the trial and his comeuppance. Yet he didn't have time to celebrate, for, upon finding a new desire, he had immediately struck up a new and unbreakable covenant. But was it with Satan himself? Simon would have hoped so, but he would also have doubted his luck or that religion had such a fun side. Plus, Simon was never much of a deal maker. Right now though, he thought nothing. Finally, a moment of peace. His painful haunting, both by those frightening emotions and now, could it be, by the dog he killed(?), were far away in the land of the conscious...

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Sleep well, Simon, you have a big day ahead of you tomorrow.

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\* Simon's ability to spot irony a mile off was the one thing he knew for sure was a double-edged blessing.