

Dead Famous.

Stamping his shoes against the cold pavement, Bryan pulled his ill fitting overcoat tightly around him as the Victorian dressed tour-guide swished his cloak and cried out, "Come through the Lanes, where gruesome deaths and ghostly horrors of Brighton's past will be revealed."

Although boredom had driven Bryan out of his bedsit, the biting February air sent him scurrying back there.

Leaving the throng of ghost hunters behind him, Bryan dived round the corner and straight into the path of a woman in a full length fur coat. The woman let out a yelp as she nearly lost her balance. Bryan spluttered out an apology as he watched the woman lift her leg up to readjust her red stiletto shoe. The woman caught him staring at her black stockings and gave him a wink. As she readjusted her pose, she was joined by an older man, dressed equally smart in a brown suite and a tanned camel coat. Together they looked as if they had stepped off a 1950's film set.

Feeling awkward by the man's presence, Bryan went to leave, but the woman spoke up and said, "Not leaving without giving a name and address?"

Confused and a little worried, Bryan started to apologies again only for the woman to stick her hand out and say "Only joking, name's Janice,"

Bryan shook her hand and said, "I'm Bryan, spelt with a 'y'".

"Bryan with a 'y'", replied Janice, "like Bryan Ferry; I guess you're too young to remember him."

Before Bryan had a chance to answer, Janice carried on, "This is my other half, Nick. He's a man of few words, but don't take offence, people say I more than make up for it with my jabbering."

Bryan went to shake Nick's hand, but Nick kept his hands in his coat pockets.

Janice let out a nervous laugh and said, "Wasn't it any good?"

Bryan looked confused. She then nodded down the dark empty alley, "The group you were with."

"Oh right," said Bryan, "It was great, I just got too cold."

Janice agreed and asked Bryan if he fancied a drink. Before he had a chance to answer, she linked her arm into his and led him through the narrow lanes until they came outside the Cricketers. Bryan tried to protest, saying he'd forgotten to bring his wallet, but Janice just laughed and pulled him into the warmth of the pub.

"Sit yourself down Bryan, I'm just going to powder my nose, while Nick gets us all a drink; what you having, lager?"

"Yes please", said Bryan, as he pulled off his coat, praying that Janice would come back before Nick.

As he sat alone, the pub began to fill up, causing Bryan to say on more than one occasion that the seats were taken and that he was waiting for his friends, which in turn made him feel really good inside.

"You pulling the crowd in Bryan?" Said Janice, as she took off her fur coat, revealing a beautiful red crepe evening dress. Bryan let out a gasp, which made Janice smile, "I love to be over dressed for every occasion."

Nick then reappeared and nodded at the door. Without saying a word, Janice pulled her coat back on and gestured for Bryan to do the same.

Once outside Janice said, "Sorry about that Bryan, it's just that sometimes Nick can get claustrophobic with crowds."

She then looked over her shoulder and pulled out a silver flask, "Here, get a drop of that down yah, that will warm you up."

As Bryan took a swig, Janice tipped the flask, making him take a bigger gulp. Bryan choked. She then passed the flask to Nick, but he just shook his head.

Slipping the flask back in her pocket, Janice said, "So Bryan with a 'y', tell us about you."

With the brandy warming his insides, Bryan started to feel more relaxed, "There's not much to tell, I work at Burger King, but what I'd really like to be is a writer, an actor or someone famous."

Janice squeezed Bryan's arm, "That good Bryan, everyone should have ambition. She then gave him a quick peck on the cheek and added, "I'm sure one day you *will* be famous."

Bryan grinned, he could feel himself growing taller, but then Janice asked if he had any hobbies and he felt himself shrinking back down. Giving his arm another squeeze, Janice said, "Come on Bryan, what do you like to do when you're not working, nothing sinister I hope."

Letting out a nervous laugh, Bryan said, "Well, I like cataloguing things, putting things in order. I've just finished doing it with all the films that have been made in Brighton, I've been to most of the locations and taken a picture of myself there.

Much to his surprise Janice said, "That sounds like a great hobby Bryan, doesn't it Nick?"

Nick nodded, pulled his phone out of his pocket and walked ahead.

While Nick was out of earshot, Bryan asked if he was being boring, but Janice patted his hand and said, "Not at all, me and Nick love all that stuff. In fact, when we first moved to Brighton, the first place we went to was that alleyway where Lesley Ash and Phil Daniels had it off in the film *Quadrophenia*".

As they came out of the side street, and into the moonlight Janice nudged Bryan , “Look at you, I’ve made you blush.”

The sound of the sea covered the silence as they walked along the prom, then Bryan looked back and pointed to the Royal Albion Hotel, “I managed to get in the room where Bob Hoskins shot Michael Cane in the film Mona Lisa.”

“You really are a film geek” said Janice, “what other places you’ve visited?”

Bryan pointed ahead to the iron skeleton sticking out of the sea and said, everywhere except there.

“That’s a shame”, said Janice, “Nick proposed to me on The West Pier, Brighton Rock, is his favourite film.”

Bryan stuttered, “A,a,and they made a couple of the Carry On films there too.”

Janice paused, “Nick doesn’t do comedy” she then added, “So you not originally from here then?”

“No, I moved down from Ipswich, I kind of fell out with my family, so I thought I’d make a new start but it’s been quite hard making new friends.”

“Well, you’ve met two new friends tonight, right?”

Janice then quickened her step so they could catch up with Nick, only for Bryan to stumble forward and make a grab for Nick’s coat. Nick spun round, but Janice stepped in first and said, “You feeling alright Bryan, you want us to walk you home?”

Bryan steadied himself and said, “No, I’m alright, I drank that brandy too quick, that’s all.”

Taking hold of Bryan’s hand, Janice said “If you’d rather do this another time that’s fine by us love, we’re friends right?”

Although he still felt a little queasy, Bryan held both hands up, "I'm fine, honestly," but then staggered towards a bench and sat down.

Janice rubbed Bryan's back and said, "I think you need to take a rest for a bit."

Grateful to be sitting down, Bryan's head lolled onto his chest as Janice continued to natter away, "See that hotel there Bryan?"

Bryan managed to lift his head and saw she was talking about the Holiday Inn

"It use to be a lovely Georgian building, called the Bedford back then."

With his eyes shut he continued to listen, but only caught snatches of what she was saying.

"Nick likes Brighton history too Bryan, did you know next door to that hotel, in Bedford Square, there lived this Doctor, what was his name Nick?"

"Alfred Warder."

"That's the one; first he poisoned his wife, Ellen, then took a room at the Bedford and poisoned himself, then there was..."

Janice suddenly stopped in mid-flow as she realised Bryan's whole body was shaking.

"Ohh, Bryan, you don't look good at all, we only live up the road, why don't we go back there for a cuppa.

Desperate to get out of the cold air, Bryan looked up and nodded.

Janice smiled, pulled him up and led him across the road and up a dimly lit back street. Bryan watched his feet blur beneath him, all the time mumbling that he needed to rest.

Eventually Janice said, "Here we are."

Where exactly they were Bryan had no idea, but all he wanted to do was sit down. Janice kept hold of his hand as she led him up a darkened stairwell,

Mind your step Bryan, hall-lights are on the blink again.”

When they reached the top floor, Bryan stumbled through the door and into the front room and sat himself at a table. In the background he could hear Janice fussing about in the kitchen, filling up the kettle and clattering mugs.

Gradually the room stopped spinning; it was then that Bryan noticed Nick was sitting opposite on a trunk. The two sat in silence.

Janice then popped her head round the corner of the kitchen door, looked over at Nick and said, “Show Bryan your Brighton scrap book, I bet there’s some things in there he’d find really interesting.”

Bryan watched as Nick got up off the trunk, lifted the lid and pulled out a large brown folder. Without saying a word, he sat next to Bryan and placed the folder in front of him. At the same time Janice came in with three mugs of tea and a plate of biscuits.

Bryan picked up the mug with a picture of the Pavilion Palace on it, but Janice took it from his hands, “Not that one, that’s got my sweeteners in, this is yours. I’ve put to sugars in, that should sort you out.”

Although the mug felt unsteady in his hand, Bryan gratefully sipped his tea, as he watched Janice flick through the scrapbook.

“Here we are”, said Janice. Bryan tried to focus on the page. At the top was a photo of a plain looking woman. Confused, Bryan managed to gurgle, “Is she a relative?”

Janice shook her head, “No, but she is quite famous.”

Bryan took another look at the picture, as Janice read aloud the writing beneath, “Celia Holloway. First Brighton trunk murder victim. 1831.”

Janice then turned the page and said, “Did that tour guide mention Violette Kaye? She was to be Brighton’s third famous trunk murder victim back in 1934.”

Bryan tried to speak, but found his throat tightening up, making it hard to breath, but neither Janice nor Nick seemed at all concerned, even when Bryan dropped his mug on the floor, Janice just carried on, “Before Violette, there was another body found in a trunk at Brighton station that same year, but she was never identified.”

The last thing Bryan heard was Janice asking if he was okay, as he felt his body slump to the floor.

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Hearing his name being called, Bryan gradually opened his eyes, to see Janice and Nick looking down at him. Janice, dressed all in black, smiled, “You had us worried for a while there, we thought you were a goner”

Bryan tried to cry out, but a gag wedged in his mouth kept his screams muffled. It was then he became aware of the four walls of the trunk hugging his tightly tied body. Lighting a cigarette, Janice blew the smoke to one side and said, “Don’t fight it Bryan, in six months time when the next tenants move in, your body will be found and you’ll have your wish.”

Again Bryan tried to scream, but Janice put a finger to his gag and shook her head, “You’re so lucky to accomplish your dream Bryan, some people spend a lifetime chasing theirs.”

She then lowered the lid of the trunk and clicked the lock in place, and said, “Just like Celia and Violette, you too, Bryan with a ‘y’, will be dead famous.