

The Hangover

“Given the lateness of the hour, I assume this is another of your regrettable ‘You’re my bestest friend in the whole wide world’ phone calls Tony?”

I thought that was rather a rude comment, although she was probably right. In fact, she was dead right. No doubt. Spot on. But I had a reason. Well, the phone call seemed like a good idea at the time, and she HAD been my best friend once. Jan, my ex-wife. All those thoughts went through my head as I heard her answer her phone, even though I’d only said ‘Hello’.

“Now let me guess.” She continued, “You’re back from an Op and your head is still full of everything that went down. You decided to have a couple of pints to relax, then you moved on to the brandy. When you had downed a few of those, you remembered you had a wife to dump on. The problem is Tony, you HAD a wife, and I am no longer that person. I’m fed up being your sounding board, your confessor, or your ‘bestest friend’ after every Op. If you recall, this is exactly the reason we are no longer married. We are divorced Tony, and I don’t want to have to deal with this anymore.”

I had a good, even a great response to those accusations, but I just couldn’t articulate them, so by the time I’d managed to say ‘Jan, it’s me’, she continued with what was essentially a monologue

“No Tony, I don’t want to know how well the Operation went, or even how disastrous it was. I’m glad for you if it went well, or equally sorry if it all went sideways, but I really don’t want to know what the Skipper thought, what he said, or what he did. I don’t care anymore. You don’t get it do you? I don’t damn well care Tony! Please stop calling.”

I let out an unintended, deep sigh of disappointment at the buzz of the receiver as she replaced the handset, then as I replaced the phone at my end, I knocked over the brandy glass, spilling the dregs into the bowl of peanuts. I’d like to say that I mopped up the spillage and cleaned up the mess, but I fell asleep,

Sailors have many a colourful expression for a hangover and the bottom of a budgie’s cage that was my mouth was testament to at least one of them. Allied to the dull ache in my head - the one becoming stronger by the minute - it forced me from my bed. Whilst I have a bed in my bedroom and another in my guest room, the ‘bed’ I rose from was more usually known to most people as a settee or sofa. As settees go; a contemporary, leather, 3-seater, it was just the ticket. As a bed, it lacked many qualities,

not least of which was comfort. Not that I spend every night asleep on the settee you understand, but over the years, I have found that the best way to remove yourself from a comatose position on a settee is to shuffle off it onto the floor. That way, you minimise the movement of your head and, as you are still horizontal, you can fall asleep again if you so wish, or if you are able. However, both my dry mouth and pounding head were shouting 'dehydration' - and shouting it very loudly to each other - so I struggled to a more upright position with the intention of finding liquid. I managed to get up on all fours, crawl to the easy chair and just as toddlers do, used the seat to slowly pull myself up to a kneeling position. I waited a moment, clinging on to the arm of the chair, just in case I fell off the floor, then warily raised myself to a standing position. Simple, what's the problem, I thought before my pounding head reminded me of the task in hand.

I cautiously tried a step, then another, easing my hand along the edge of the table, heading in the general direction of the kitchen, and the fridge in the corner. Seeing my target, I sped up some, tore open the door and grabbed at the carton of orange juice on the shelf. I popped the top of the carton and started to glug down the orange juice at just the same time as the door decided to close itself. The door hit the raised carton, the juice surged forward and splashed across my face; in my eyes, up my nose and in and out of my mouth, heading rapidly south over my shirt, trousers, socks and eventually, onto the floor.

Apart from the one word, I didn't have the energy for a litany of swearwords, if indeed gargling orange juice whilst trying to speak could even be construed as speaking, let alone swearing. In retrospect, it was probably at this point, dreadfully hungover, covered in, and standing in orange juice, that I decided that the drinking had to stop.

I was relating this sad story to my friend Nobby, that same evening in the pub, and although I did recall my promise 'to stop drinking', once the scotch chaser had hit home, I suffixed the promise with 'alone'