

## PART EXCHANGE

“You don’t them see much,” said the man. “Not in this condition.”

I nodded. I was trying not to give away my excitement. In truth, I had never seen a car like it.

“Is that the original paintwork?” I asked, trying to throw some doubt into the mix.

He smiled. He was no fool.

“Oh yes,” he said. “Hard to believe, I know, but this car is in perfect condition. The previous owners looked after it really well.”

“Who were they?” I asked, casually, although of course I knew the answer.

“Circus,” he replied. “That’s why it’s so remarkable. Normally with these things” – he shrugged – “Wear and tear.”

I walked around it. It was bright yellow. One of the wheels was elliptical. I opened the driver’s side door.

“May I?” I asked.

“Be my guest,” he said.

I reached in and honked the horn. It was deafening in the concrete space of the garage.

“No shrinkage on the bulb,” he told me.

I didn’t know what else to say. It was the most perfect clown car I had ever seen. Everything about it was immaculate, from the paintwork to the interior. The other man threw open the bonnet, but I didn’t need to look. I knew the engine would be as good as new.

“How much?” I asked.

He named a price. It was surprisingly low. He must have been expecting my reaction because he said:

“The economy. Even something like this, people just don’t have the money. It’s a shame. But someone like you – it would be going to a good home.”

“All right,” I said. My heart was pounding. “Bank transfer OK?”

He nodded, and for the first time there was something eager in his face. I realised that he was keen to get rid of the car. I wondered if I should have beaten the price down, but it was cheap enough already.

I took my phone out and sent him the money. His phone beeped: he handed me the keys.

“All yours,” he said.

When he had gone, I looked at the clown car for a long time. There was something on the passenger seat: a little ruff, big enough for a dog to wear.

I leaned in and turned the engine on: it started first time.

I could hear music, far off. Voices, and the smell of greasepaint.

And now I got in the car, not on the driver’s side, but the passenger side. Immediately I did so, the door closed.

It was dark, black as night. There were others here, scores of others. A dog barked. Someone laughed hysterically.

“You won’t believe what’s in here,” they said.