



TACET TIMES – 2

So here we are in week ? – well, I don't know if you're like me but I've lost track already, with each day merging indistinguishably into the next.

In reality, the United Kingdom was put into lockdown on 23rd March, exactly two weeks ago as I write, although we had seen it coming for some time. Since then we have seen a less than dignified scramble for loo rolls, a despairing one for delivery slots and a desire to go out more often than is permitted.

And have also resorted to clearing out cupboards, cooking more than is wise for our figures, and going for a walk, which is definitely wise for mine!

The best advice seems to be that the important thing is to have a plan, and have variety in your day and week. Cleaning one room a day can leave time for more appealing activities. Choosing a book that is going to take a while to read and setting aside an hour each day seems to be such a luxury to many of us, but fear not – Hilary Mantel's *The Mirror and the Light*, the third in her trilogy about Thomas Cromwell, has come along just in time. The fact that it is easiest to read all 888 pages when the book is resting on a table or cushion may dictate your location. Not one to read in bed, I think!

For members of TPS the clue to another pastime is in the name. Susan Skone-James wrote in response to my request for material that 'most TPS members will know what the word *philharmonic* means but I would like to share a little nugget of information (courtesy of Classic fm's *Pocket Book of Trivia*) – it is made up of two Greek words *philio* and *harmonikos*. Welded together they translate as 'harmony loving'.

Susan comments that 'in these difficult times, it is impossible for many people to pursue their favourite pastimes, be it playing sport, going to the gym etc. We *philharmonics* on the other hand are very fortunate to be able to continue to enjoy music and music-making in some shape or form – though I'm still finding reasons not to practise my scales!'

So we are truly fortunate in our enjoyment of all sorts of music. I have been sent a number of links, so there will be a page of them at the end of this copy of the *Tacet Times*. Yet another reason for reading all the way to the end.

Here's hoping you are all staying well.

Joanna Mace

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Self-isolation

The news is that people over 70 may have to stay at home for four months over the late spring and early summer to avoid catching the coronavirus/COVID-19 – so we shall have to self-isolate. Before that happens there have been cancellations across the board – and I'm referring to chess.

On Sunday morning, 15th March, all chess matches across Kent were suspended, so I won't have to play for Tunbridge Wells 3rds against Maidstone 6ths as we seek to escape bottom place in the league. We may languish there for some time if we descend to that point.

The same Sunday morning there were three in the congregations at St Dunstan's, West Peckham, so I had a foretaste of religious isolation. I tried to cheer up the trio by telling them that we had more in church than the Pope had had in St Peter's, Rome, as all the basilicas and churches were closed there.

Sunday 15th March was the *Ides of March*, when Julius Caesar was cut down, and as the day progressed more events were also cut down – the Tunbridge Wells Chess Congress in June, the Poetry Group (for which I had read four books), the Tonbridge Philharmonic concert (for which we had been practising since early January), a St Patrick's Day dinner, and a preparatory meeting at Waterloo for the Lambeth Conference.

As Gillingham FC have been on an unbroken run I decided that I could watch them play Fleetwood instead, but that was cancelled too. As I write this, I have been told that I could be fined £1,000 for irresponsibly breaking the quarantine. Suddenly, empty weeks stretch ahead of me. What am I to do?

I may reread my son-in-law's book, *Scripts of Terror*, which was launched on Ash Wednesday. It is about the history of terrorism in the Middle East, and I had found it challenging. Time for another go.

I was at Putney, the birthplace of Thomas Cromwell, on the day in early March that the final volume of Hilary Mantel's trilogy about him was published. It is nearly 1,000 pages long and has also got a feel of terrorism about it.

That day at Putney was gloriously sunny and I watched the women's eights out practising for the biggest women's rowing event in the world – the London Head of the River. I checked on Google to see who had won, but it was cancelled at the last minute because the Thames was too high. I love walking along the Thames path and possibly I could try walking its whole length or hire a single seater scull, but I reflect that, if it was too dangerous for the fit ladies, I may be in for self-immolation.

Does exercising the dog count as self-isolation? For some reason our dog, Mowgli, likes my company – in the morning he fetches my socks and turns pirouettes of joy as I approach his food bin. He stays very close to me (as long as there are some treats left) as we explore the innumerable puddles in Mereworth Woods. I have never known him to refuse an outing and, in the coming weeks, we will rely on each other even more for solace in our solitude. Where I am sluggish, he is spontaneous; when I complain about the puddles, he jumps straight into them.

However, I cannot indulge Mowgli all day, and so I may have to look after the garden. At the Chelsea Flower Show last year – is it also off? – I lost my self-control at the tulip stall and bought loads of bulbs which have been planted and should bloom during the ‘lockdown’. Every morning I shall count them and tick off the days to the end of self-isolation. I am good at deadheading, so I will tackle the daffodils and the camellia. I will not neglect the hand cleansing – especially in church as I, alone, am allowed to use the hand gel (because of panic buying) and I, alone drink the wine (not because of panic buying).

That reminds me: I haven’t washed my hands for at least half an hour – better go to the safe and apply the hand gel.

Caption competition

With thanks to Chris Brooks (Bass)



A suitable prize will be forthcoming to the provider of the best caption

Please send by email to secretary@tonphil.org.uk and put ‘Caption’ in the title

Poetry corner

Meg Crane (Sop 1) suggested this poem, reminding us that Sassoon was from Matfield, and therefore a Man of Kent, and that the orchards are in blossom now as they were for the poet.

Everyone Sang

Everyone suddenly burst out singing;
And I was filled with such delight
As prisoned birds must find in freedom,
Winging wildly across the white
Orchards and dark-green fields; on - on - and out of sight.

Everyone's voice was suddenly lifted;
And beauty came like the setting sun:
My heart was shaken with tears; and horror
Drifted away ... O, but Everyone
Was a bird; and the song was wordless; the singing will never be done.

Siegfried Sassoon



Memories are made of this....

For those many members like you who are too young understand the arcane reference in the last edition, Helen Kemp (Clarinet) has kindly supplied the visual reference:



Sent to her by a friend with the comment

so that's how the virus is spreading so quickly....!

Short story

Lucky Frank

The bar was quiet, even for a Sunday night. It was a regular workday evening for me though. I was on my way to a night shift in the IT department of an international bank.

'Say, Joe,' I called down to the barman, 'hit me with another Bud, will ya?' It is an Ordinance of the City of New York that a fresh glass must be provided with each drink, and the young man leaned under the bar to pull a mug from the freezer. He pushed the frosted tankard along the bar so it carried the couple of yards to where I was sitting. The glass stuck to my lips in a frozen kiss.

'They gonna make it to the Superbowl this time?' Joe asked, nodding up at the screen showing a football game between the New York Giants and the Miami Dolphins.

'Fifty-fifty I reckon.' I'd learned not to be optimistic long ago, and anyway, I couldn't stay in the bar to the end of the game or I would be late for work.

The Park Sports Bar was close to the building where I worked. Like many bars in this city it had heavy doors and steps down into a troglodytic gloom. Kaleidoscope fragments of the drinkers' faces reflected through prisms of coloured spirits and syrups in front of a mirror running the whole length of the bar counter. I used the place as my transit stop between home and work. Here no-one wanted anything from me, other than the price of a beer. I never moved on to bourbon though, I knew it would be the beginning of the end. My father went that way, whiskey lubricating a smooth passage down to his own personal hell. So far this was one of the few promises to myself that I'd ever kept. Now the question was, how long could I afford to keep on coming in here. After what had happened with Judy, things were going to be tight.

My name is Frank O'Brien and, if you asked them, I suppose my friends would describe me as a tall guy in his early forties, an unremarkable, slightly scruffy man in a city of sharp suits. Like everyone else, I'd been horrified as I watched the towers of smoke rise over Ground Zero, the sirens' keening rising far up into a clear blue sky. Of course, I knew some IT guys working in those buildings: some got out, some didn't. Lady Luck, I told myself, they'd been in the wrong place at the wrong time. I'd always believed a calendar somewhere had my name against a particular date. I couldn't tell you who was the custodian of the calendar though, not the God of my Catholic youth, who went missing years ago.

I've sure had moments when I thought my time was up. The tangled cord on a parachute jump during my Air National Guard training. A Mack rig on the I-75 in Florida, his irresistible air pressure pushing my rented Taurus off the road towards the water and that stretch wasn't known as Alligator Alley for nothing. But luck has not been especially kind to me. I never win on the lottery or at the races, and my sports teams rarely do well. In fact, my life has only managed a low average, looked at like that.

On the screen above the bar, the local news service was broadcasting in the half-time break. The anchorwoman smiled as she announced:

'Someone in this state is tonight richer by nearly three hundred and nineteen million dollars. This was the biggest payout in the history of the **mega millions** lottery. We take you live to the newsstand where the ticket was sold. Here's Andy, with the owner, Mr Rogowski.' The man blinked at the microphone.

'So, Mr Rogowski, how does it feel to have sold the winning ticket?' the reporter asked.

'It makes me feel warm inside,' he responded with a grin.

'You bet it does,' said Andy as he turned to camera, 'he even gets a bonus of ten thousand dollars just for having sold the ticket. Now I'm handing back to Linda in the studio...'

'Thanks, Andy. Let's look at the weather for tomorrow...' Linda carried on talking, but I tuned out.

'Wouldn't mind having some of that cash,' Joe said, 'what would you do with it all? It's some stash.'

'Don't suppose it'll be that much once the IR and their buddies at City Hall have gotten their slice,' I replied.

'Even so,' said Joe, 'it'll be a helluva payout.'

What would I do with that sort of money? First thing, I'd find one of those hot-shot lawyers who would know where to put it, and who could deal with the divorce at the same time. Why should Judy share my one slice of good fortune? She'd done nothing even approaching kind for me in the longest time. Hell, we saw less of each other than if we were regular flatmates in our fourth-floor walk-up apartment. Most days I had breakfast at the Roxy Diner on John Street, same order every day, eggs easy over, bacon and hash browns, so Kathy did not even have to ask as I took my seat. Once I'd finished eating, sunk two cups of coffee and scanned the headlines of the New York Times, I could be pretty sure Judy would have left for her teaching job. Sometimes we collided when she got home, but I usually had my act together and was out of the apartment by five, even if it meant sitting in the bar for a couple of hours before the start of the evening shift.

With cash like that I could get out of here, down to Baja California and spend my days in the sun chasing marlin and dorado off Cabo San Lucas or some such place. What I certainly would not do, I thought as I pulled on my coat and signalled a goodbye to Joe, was carry on my rat-like existence in the city. A hostile wind threw grit into my face as it battled down the canyons of high-rise buildings. I turned the corner into a new assault of cold air, and then stood and looked up for a moment at the looming bulk of glass and steel where I worked. I'd have given a lot to get away to somewhere people-sized, but knew it would take something like a win on that lottery to make it possible. I waved 'hi' to Julio the security guard as I placed my ID card on the reader. I thought he did a double-take when he saw me, and turned to speak to the cleaner who was standing beside him, pointing towards me and shaking his head. I did not have time to find out what was up with the guy.

The lift swept me heavenwards at five hundred feet per minute, which felt a deal too fast for the tide of beer rising in my stomach. I tried to avoid my own gaze repeated back off the mirrored walls. Who wanted to see the bags under my eyes and evidence of a bad shave? My arrival at Floor 32 was announced by a half-hearted ping, and I stepped out. Through frosted glass screens I could see people at their desks, even though it was Sunday evening - it was already Monday morning in lots of the places the 'foreign' dealers had to talk to.

'Hey, Frank' one of the men called out, 'didn't expect to see you here tonight.'

'Why not?' I replied.

'Oh, well, you know...' The phone rang and the man turned away to answer it. This was getting to feel real strange. I tapped in the code to the IT suite. All was quiet, just the glow from the monitors lighting up the area. I saw no sign of Jed and Sarah, the other analysts on that night. I walked on down to the alcove housing the coffee machine and microwave. No sign of anyone here: even stranger. I poured viscous black coffee into my New York Giants mug and went back to my desk. No notes to say someone had phoned in sick. I opened my e-mails and the screen scrolled down to display one hundred and eighty-three new messages in my in-box. Two were red-flagged, demanding my immediate attention. One from the guys in Hong Kong, and another from London. Those Brits were such prima donnas, expecting a reply instantly. They could wait. I was opening up my current project files on screen when my skin prickled. I sensed a movement behind me. I turned and saw Steve leaning against the cupboards with his arms folded.

'Didn't expect to see you here tonight, dude.' Steve smiled and held out his hand to shake mine. 'You're one of the good ones, that's for sure. Don't know if I would, though.' I stared at the outstretched hand. What he was talking about? This was getting to be really weird, as if I was in some sort of parallel universe to the rest of them.

'Man, what you saying? I'm on the rota so, sure, I'm here. I'm just trying to find out what's happened to Jed and Sarah – they should be on with me.' I searched among the avalanche of coloured notes and pads on my desk. 'Jed I could understand, but Sarah, she's always reliable. I'd have put money on her calling in if she was sick.'

'You're kidding me, buddy, aren't you?' Steve peered down at me.

'What's to kid about?' I looked up at him.

'Well, the lottery, of course. The big win.'

'What big win?' I asked.

'The **mega millions**, of course, last night.' Steve was becoming repetitive.

'What's that to do with me?'

'The syndicate, man. The **mega millions** was won by your syndicate. The IT guys. But surely Mike rang to tell you?' My stomach went into free-fall, my hands were cold on the keyboard. Mike went to the store each week, and checked the numbers against the winners on a Saturday night. Mike had a list of the phone numbers of everyone in the syndicate. Mike had not rung me. I shook my head slowly. All was suddenly clear and there was not a damn thing I could do about it.

'No, he didn't ring me.' This explained Julio's reaction and that of the trader as I was coming in. How could I be that unlucky? But luck did not come into it, it had been my choice.

I'd still been at home when Judy came in from work last Wednesday, the day when Mike collected the lottery contributions. She was searching through the drawers and I made the mistake of asking what she was looking for.

'I'm trying to find the box of photos of my family,' she snapped and when I asked what she wanted them for, she went crazy, screaming and throwing things around, at me, just anywhere. I backed off from the hurricane of noise, shoes, papers, clothes.

'You'll never make anything of yourself, Frank O'Brien, you're just content to sit on your butt at that bank. Look at Jim' – her brother – 'at least he's made money out of being in IT.' True, he ran a business recycling pc's, but he was not exactly in the Bill Gates category. 'And even Tom and Aaron,' – my brothers – 'their dealership is making a profit.' Cars. Then she dealt the coup de grâce, the stiletto between the ribs.

'I've found someone who is going somewhere, and I'm going with him.' He was a teacher at the High School who had just got promotion.

Now it had finally happened and I was sorry. Sorry we had got to this place, sorry we hadn't tried harder to resolve our problems. She carried on at the top of her voice, all the years of frustration hustling to get out, no longer giving a damn about the neighbours. She yelled that if she stayed with me she would be trapped in this shitty rented apartment for ever. That I couldn't even get her pregnant. That I was a loser and she didn't know why she'd even stayed this long. That she would be moving out at the weekend and she expected at least half of our savings. By the following Friday. I knew there would be three month's notice to give on the apartment, and my salary on its own would not cover the rental for those weeks. Without her contributions I could see my overdraft opening its jaws wide to consume me.

I fled her scorn and bitterness, got out of the apartment and made my way down to the Park Bar. Sitting in the semi-darkness of a booth at the back I went over Judy's words, testing them, picking at the raw hurt they had caused. I had been working for the bank for twelve years, which was something in this city. We'd never been late with our utility payments, and we'd gone on a two-week vacation every year, to Hawaii or California or Europe. Judy had always had spare money to spend on clothes and shoes. Oh boy, the shoes! Her middle name should be Imelda, she had that many shoes in her closet.

When we got married we had planned there would be kids, three of them, but it never happened. One of each plus a spare was the expectation, by which time we would have moved out to the suburbs. I thought of those winter Sunday mornings when we were first together, cosy in our rumpled bed, listening to the communal heating pipes gurgling and banging throughout the building.

'Aurora,' a voice suggested from the warm cocoon.

'Nah, poor kid, we couldn't do that to her.' Conventional, me. 'What about Susan?'

'Boring, she'll never stand out from the crowd,' Judy always wanted more from life, and now she had decided someone else could give it to her.

I was still on the downward spiral when I got to work. Almost as soon as I got in Mike came over and leaned on the top of the small screen separating the workstations.

'Need five dollars, old buddy, it's lottery time again.' I shook my head.

'You sure?' Mike persisted, 'might be our week this week.' No chance, I thought.

'Come on, you can't drop out now, Frank.' Sarah was standing behind Mike. I knew she tried her best to keep me in with the group of younger analysts.

'Yeah,' I insisted. I didn't know when I might need those five dollars after all that Judy had said.

I looked up at Steve and said quietly,

'No, he did not ring me. There was no need.'

'What do you mean, Frank?' Steve asked with surprise, 'why not?'

'Because I didn't pay my share last week, so I'm out.' Steve's whistle was almost silent.

'Gee, I'm so sorry to hear that, Frank.' He turned and walked away quietly, as you do in a house where someone has just died.

I sat for a long time, ignoring the blue flashing lights on the 'phones and the red flags that kept appearing in my in-box. Forget Baja, I would be lining up with the bums outside the St Paul's House centre to get my evening soup and bread. I looked up at the silent

screen high on the corridor walls. It was sports news time. The Dolphins had beaten the Giants 31 to 25.

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In another bar, in different part of the city, six members of the syndicate sat around a table. All were drinking French champagne, except for Jed, who was working his way through the bar's extensive collection of whiskies.

'Champagne's for faggots,' he declared dismissively when they were ordering, 'whiskey is what real guys drink.' Sarah and Mike had looked at each other apprehensively. This wasn't going to be easy. Bob wasn't there, his wife was about to have their third child. Nor Frank, of course. Alicia, Sam and Haydon had come, still stunned by what had happened. The tapestry of excited voices intermingled,

'... and I, like, I'm gonna have a Harley and she can have a...'

'.... been looking at the prices of houses on Long Island, meeting the realtor Monday' then

'... so I said to Mom, time she was out of there but she....' the conversations stitched one on top of the next as the embryonic plans were shared. None of them intended to go back to work at the bank.

'Hell, no,' Sam declared, 'what have they ever done for us? None of the managers thought about what it meant for our lives when we had to work over three weekends to prepare for the Australia launch. It was my daughter's fifth birthday one of those Sundays, and she cried all day 'cos her Daddy wasn't there.'

'That's right,' Haydon picked up the theme, 'they gave me one crummy day off when Mom passed, even though I had to go all the way down to Tucson.'

'They can't even come up with medical insurance,' Alicia reminded them. 'It would be a drop in the ocean to them, but a big deal for all of us.'

'What if they sue us for not showing up?' asked Sarah.

'Nah, they won't bother with that. They'll just ship in a bunch of temps to cover and try to get our replacements at lower rates than us.' Jed's standard bitterness seemed to have ramped up a notch in the face of what had happened. They didn't know what was behind his attitude, just knew that he was a nasty taste in all their mouths. They silently contemplated the hole they would leave in the bank's corpus, a hole they knew would rapidly be filled so that, in a year or two, people would still remember the syndicate that won the **mega millions**, but nobody would recall their names.

'So,' Mike broke in, 'the lottery people called this morning. They're sending someone out to Albany to meet with me tomorrow. You're all welcome to come too. I ticked the boxes for 'lump sum' and 'no publicity', like we agreed when we first started the syndicate, gee, it must be over four years ago now, so those parts are already dealt with. Now they want to see the syndicate agreement signatures, and they need our bank account details so they can transfer the money.'

'When will that happen?' asked Sam.

'Soon as they have all the data, it will take another twenty-four hours. Bob's given me the numbers for his account; I suppose he trusts me.' Laughter rippled around the group. 'I'll give you copies of the paperwork, so you can see how it's all worked out. The split and so on...'

'Some of us might not be as trusting as Bob, is that what you're trying to say?' Jed's interjection was blurred around the edges. Sarah wondered when he'd started drinking that day.

'No, of course it's not,' replied Mike, 'it's just, I want everything to be as straight as possible, to avoid any chance of problems later.'

'What sort of problems?' Jed persisted. The others looked at him with distaste.

'Give it a rest, Jed,' Sam said, 'the guy's only trying to do his best by us.' Mike shot Sam a grateful look.

'There is one other thing...' he started to say, his fingers busy picking at the layers of a beer mat.

'What now?' Jed interrupted.

'I said, give it a rest, man,' Sam said, moving to sit between Jed and Mike. 'Go on Mike, don't take any notice.'

'Well, it's a bit tricky, but me and Sarah have talked it over,' Mike started and the others looked at him, curious at his hesitation. 'It's Frank.'

'What about him,' asked Alicia.

'Well, when I first called Sarah we were talking about it, and I said it felt like it was a bit unfair. I mean, Frank was the second person to join the syndicate, after me, so he's been in four years now.'

'I can see where this is going...' Jed's indignant voice rang out across the quiet bar, and a couple of other customers turned their heads to see what was going on.

'Shut it, Jed,' instructed Sam, 'go on Mike.'

'I'm sure the rest of you will have worked it out. Me and Sarah, well, we really feel it isn't right Frank should get nothing. This is the first week in all the time he didn't put in his stake, and now we've won so much.'

'Maybe his bad luck was stopping us from winning,' Jed muttered. 'Sure seems funny we win when he's out. The guy put no money in, so he don't get no winnings.' He gazed around the group, challenging anyone to contradict him. He'd never got on with Frank, not since Jed had made a major balls-up of a project and Frank had recovered the situation. Jed did not like feeling beholden; he'd taken every opportunity to undermine the older man. Several of the group looked down at their drinks, turning glasses by the stems, swilling remnants of beer in the bottom of dewed glass tankards, unwilling to make eye contact with him whether they agreed or not.

Sarah's voice was placatory.

'It must be awful for him, knowing we've got all this. Imagine how you would feel. Come on, guys, this was a chance win for us all. Don't you think, like, we should share a little of what we have with him?'

'Maybe he won't know it was us; we ticked for no publicity, didn't we?' Haydon suggested hopefully.

'Course he'll know, stupid, why else would we all quit the bank at the same moment.' Jed did have a point there, clearly.

'What are you suggesting,' Sam asked, 'we should split it eight ways instead of seven?'

'No way,' Jed exploded out of his chair, 'no way is that creep getting any of mine.' Mike and Sam stood up too. The barman moved towards them, ready to deal with trouble.

'Look, Jed, if you can't keep quiet, we'll do this without you. Just sit down and keep your mouth shut unless you have something useful to say.' Jed looked from one man to the other. Mike put a hand on his shoulder and pushed him back down.

'Yeah, well, it ain't right, no money, no share I reckon.' His voice was quieter but still loaded with venom.

'We know how you feel, Jed, but there's more than one option,' said Mike.

'What else are you suggesting we could do?' asked Alicia.

'Well, even if we weren't going to give him an equal share, we could each give him a bit, say a million, or even half a million. Wouldn't make much of a dent in what we'd still have, and none of us ever reckoned on having that much, so we wouldn't miss it.' Jed snorted but did not speak.

'You know,' said Haydon, 'I think Jed's got something, if you don't put in your stake, how can you expect to win? Like, if you go to the racetrack and don't bet this week when you did all the other weeks, you don't get paid if the one you would have bet on actually wins, do you?' He looked around to see Jed smiling at the apparent support for his position.

'But he did put in his stake,' persisted Mike, 'week after week. He even filled in with extra when there were gaps 'cos someone had left. He's a good guy; he's helped us all out at some time when we got stuck with a problem.' Jed glowered.

'Yeah,' Sam added, 'and look how he always covers weekends for us when we have some special family event on.'

'Only 'cos he wants to avoid being at home when his old lady's there!' Jed countered. 'We all know they don't get on, don't we? He wasn't just doing it to be nice to us.'

'You don't know that for sure and, anyway, isn't it even worse if it is true. Maybe with a bit of money they could sort themselves out, move away from the city and start again?' Sarah could not believe these guys were so hostile to the idea of sharing a part of their winnings with their colleague. It might have been different had he just joined the syndicate or was new in the company, but he'd been there longer than most of them. She dammed her tears of frustration at their unwillingness to share their good fortune. Mike looked around and observed to himself how interesting it was to see money flushing out the real characters to stand in the spotlight and take a bow.

'Okay,' said Mike, 'this is a big thing for us to decide. We have all sorts of options, from the full eighth share,' he glared at Jed to stop the inevitable intervention, 'downwards. Could be we give him a fixed sum each, a million, half a mill, a hundred thousand, ten k's, or whatever. We can do it openly or anonymously, whatever the majority want to do. I know I want Frank to have something, and so does Sarah, but it's up to the rest of you if you don't want to join with us.'

The cold wind sliced at Sarah's ankles as she stepped out of the stuffy atmosphere of the bar. She and Mike had left the bar together, glad to get away from Jed and his constant bitching.

'How can the guys be so mean? After all, they haven't really done anything to get the money and it is such an enormous amount we all have. It wouldn't make a material difference to what happens for Jed or Haydon in the future if they were to give up part of their share, but might mean so much to Frank.' Her questions were as much to herself as to Mike.

'Well, we knew it wouldn't be easy to get an agreement from all of them. I suppose I can see the logic in their arguments, I just don't happen to agree with them,' he said.

'Me neither, but we are going to have to come up with something clever, if we are going to make it work.' They parted ways at Grand Central Station, promising to meet up earlier than the others the next evening to work out their strategy.

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Eighteen months later.....

I nosed the *Lucky Lady* up to the fuel dock in Marina del Rey as another 747 rumbled through the brown haze into LAX airport. The forty-foot sea-fishing boat had made good time from Cabo san Lucas, but I needed to re-fuel both me and the boat, and catch some sleep before going into town for dinner. The *Lady* was not new, but she was big enough for me to live on. I was happier now than I had ever been. This was not the first time I'd made the trip up the long spit of land between Mexico and the US, taking several days over the two thousand or so kilometres. It did me good to come back to a big city every so often, to remind me why I make the choice to escape.

As I tied up, I thought back to that Tuesday night, just after the others had heard of their big win. I'd been trying to keep things under control as I got the temp workers in line and functioning, and it took me a second or so to recognise Mike's voice on the 'phone.

'Hi, Mike, how are you?' was the best I could manage.

'Frank, I'm sorry it's taken me 'til now to call, life has been a bit hectic here since Saturday night.'

'I can guess.' It had been real hectic for me too, with all of them gone.

'Look, old buddy, will you come and have a beer with me tomorrow evening before you go in to the bank?' *No, no, I won't*, screamed through my head. I was struggling not to blame Mike as much as I blamed Judy for the mess I was in; the timing had been so god-awful.

'Mmm, not sure, Mike, got a lot on with all the new guys...'

'Please, Frank, me and Sarah want to see you.' Mike broke into my silence. 'Come on, Frank, please?' The lights on the console were flashing dementedly and the new guys were lined up with queries. I gave in, just to get rid of him.

'Ok, ok, I'll see you in the usual place at seven.'

In spite of everything I was glad to see my former colleagues the next evening. We talked about what was happening at the bank, and then Sarah said,

'We got together and decided you should have some of the money. It'll all be done anonymously, so you won't know who gave what, that way everyone is free to give what they want.' Or not give, I thought, in Jed's case. The chilled air of the bar was warm against my hands but my face had burned like I had been out on the water for days. This felt too much like charity.

'Well, you might look pleased!' she said.

'It's yours as soon as you give us your bank details, but it'll all come in from the lawyers who are handling it for us,' Mike added.

I could not form words into any sensible pattern to express my reaction. It felt like someone had sucked all the oxygen out of the bar, I could hardly breathe. This was how it felt to be lucky after all.

‘Guys, I can’t tell you’

‘It’s all right,’ Sarah helped me out, ‘just be sure you give in your notice at the bank tonight.’

‘You bet.’ And that is what I did. I packed up my things in the apartment and used my two week’s notice from work to reduce my stuff to a minimum and to find that lawyer.

Now the sun-bleached wooden pontoon glowed silver in the moonlight as I made my way to the bar where I was meeting up with a couple of fishing buddies I’d connected with since I got down here. They didn’t mind my beard and my clothes that never saw an iron. Hell, I looked like one of them.

The evening air was cooler in LA than in Cabo, and I was sure we would wake to mist in the morning. The metal handrail was cold and damp to the touch as I jumped across to the main walkway and strolled towards the lights of the bars and restaurants ranged around the water’s edge. The dazzle of blue lights and police activity had been hidden by the bulk of a building, so it was a shock to see them as I rounded the corner. Unable to resist, I went over to see what was happening. A diver was in the water, and two or three dark-clothed men were pulling at a sodden, heavy bundle.

‘Nother drunk took the wrong way in the dark,’ muttered an elderly man standing next to me in the meagre crowd, ‘happens all the time’. I turned away and continued on to where we were meeting. We passed the evening with beer and tales of fish that just kept getting bigger. There was no sign of the police as I made my way back to the *Lady* later that night.

The next morning I woke early to the groan of the foghorns out in the bay. I had a meeting with the lawyer to sign the last of the papers for the divorce, and wanted to see the bank manager before I headed south again. I wandered along to a café and sat outside with a coffee and bagel for my breakfast, glad of a sweater against the morning’s chill air. The front page of the *Los Angeles Times* was full of the latest troubles in Palestine, troops coming home in body bags - reminiscent of the scene last night. Then an article three pages in caught my attention with the headline:

MAFIA WAGES WAR ON LOTTERY WINNERS
– inside information key to identities

*Last night in Marina del Rey folks saw another grisly example of the work of the Bonnarino family. The body of Mr Jed Schalgen, 31, from New York NY, was pulled from the water at around eight in the evening. He had been shot twice. Mr Schalgen was among a group of lottery winners in his home state eighteen months ago. Seven colleagues netted a cool \$30m apiece, but their identities were kept secret by prior request. Now it seems someone at the **mega millions** organisation sold their personal details to Marc Bonnarino, so the winners could be targeted for ‘protection’ money. It looks likely Mr Schalgen refused to pay for such protection with his money – and so he ended up paying in another currency.*

*Ms Jody Schmidt, spokesperson for **mega millions**, commented that the company was totally shocked to think that one of their employees might have been involved in any way. Mr Mike Boyer, 36, the lottery syndicate leader, spoke to LA Times and told us Mr Schalgen had been part of their group for around two years, and they were all devastated to hear of their friend's death.*

I folded the newspaper together and decided that I would leave early that afternoon, as soon as my business was done. It hadn't been difficult to find out that Jed was down in LA to visit his sister before hitting the casinos in Vegas. Nor to find someone who might be interested.

I had four million and something dollars in the bank. Was anyone watching me?

There are lots of opportunities to carry on making music and listening to it. Here are just a few:

- **Choraline:** join the Self-Isolation Choir which now has over 2000 singers around the world. They plan sing Handel's *Messiah* and rehearse live on Monday at 19.30 (but you can catch up later if you wish). Find out details at www.theselfisolationchoir.com. The Choraline website also offers vocal exercises.
- **Wigmore Hall:** www.wigmore-hall.org.uk for lots of live-streamed concerts. Chris Brooks (bass) particularly recommends the masterclass by Thomas Quasthoff
- **Royal Opera House:** streaming of past performances on particular dates, find the list on www.roh.org.uk
- **Carry on singing**

Hello everyone!

I hope you're all coping during this new and interesting time, and not going stir crazy with isolation! Like many others in the performing arts industry, Coronavirus has really turned my world upside down, however I have bounced back with something which we can hopefully all do together!

I've set up an exciting, new 10 Week Online Singing Programme called 'Carry On Singing' to bring the joy of singing back into all our homes at this difficult time. This programme is totally flexible for entire families or individuals as one email address is valid for each household.

With 'Carry On Singing', participants will receive rehearsal materials every Friday (starting Friday 3rd April) as we get to know unique arrangements of three songs over a ten week programme.

In your own time, and from the comfort of your own home, you'll discover entertaining warmups and fun, useful exercises, before being guided through each vocal part with step-by-step video tuition. At the end of the programme, you'll then be invited to record your part (either audio or video) to be compiled in a Virtual Choir Concert recording that you can share with your friends and family – all for the price of just one singing lesson!

If you're interested and want to find out more, please visit my new website: www.carryonsinging.com

Thanks all and stay safe!!

Best wishes,

Laurie Denman
Carry On Singing

Laurie is from Tunbridge Wells, currently residing in Manchester

- and if you fancy a break from music, go to nationaltheatre.org.uk and find the details of the plays they will be screening

I'm sure that there are lots more like this – if you send them to me I'll add them to the list – secretary@tonphil.org.uk