

The Last Thursday of the Month.

“Ah! A thirty-eight.” 70-year-old Mabel felt the relief as she saw her bus home was still on the stop across the road in Market Street. ‘Soon,’ she thought, ‘I’ll be home. I can take this big brown coat off and have a nice cup of tea.’ When Mabel had left home that morning, she hadn’t realised how hot it was going to become. It was still quite cool and misty when she went for the bus at 8.00am. But now, at 10.45am the coat, along with her bag of shopping from Tesco and fruit and veg off the market felt like a ton weight in the growing heat. There had already been a long queue at the Post Office long before it opened at 9am. Mabel couldn’t understand this until she remembered, it was not just any old Thursday, Thursdays were always busy anyway with pensions and being market day, but this was the last Thursday of the month, the last day of the month in fact so there were people taxing cars and buying TV licences. When she eventually got served, she complained that she always seemed to be in the queue behind people wanting car taxes and other long transactions. “Oh! but we’ll soon have a remedy for that,” said the counter clerk, “Very soon we’ll have single-queuing. Everyone will be served in the order they came into the office. Now put that money away safe dear. There are some funny people about.” He said, nodding towards a group of new-age travellers on their way back from Stonehenge.

35-year-old Alex Ford was anxious. It was 9.45am. The bank was due to open at 10.00am and he had to get there to collect the wages for the factory. Problem was, as the only first-aider on duty he shouldn’t leave the factory without cover. Not with all that machinery there. ‘Well, I’ll try and be as quick as I can’ he thought. He wrote out the cheque, an extra big one this week. It was not only Thursday payday for the wages but it was the last day of the month so there were the monthly salaries as well. He checked the calendar and wrote the date, Thursday 30th June 1977. The last Thursday of the month. The bank was busier than usual. Alex felt a bit nervous as he strapped the holdall full of cash to the back of his motorbike, carefully watching the new-age travellers who seemed to be hanging around. He set off through the streets which were gaily decorated with bunting celebrating the Queen’s Silver Jubilee. As he turned into Market Street the clock over Woolworths said 10.45. The traffic seemed to clear so he twisted back the throttle on the Norton. He felt the impact and was aware of a large brown coat before he crashed to the ground, the bike still revving loudly.

Feeling quite helpless, Alex lay on his back. He instantly regretted riding the bike in just a thin shirt. He knew he was in trouble. *He was in severe pain from his ribs where he had been stabbed by the bike’s handlebars. He started to cough, he was coughing up blood, bright red oxygenated blood from his damaged lung. He could hear the gurgling from his chest with every breath as the cavity filled with air collapsing the right lung.* As a first aider he knew what had to be done but he couldn’t do it himself and how was he going to tell somebody else? He started to panic as he smelt the petrol seeping from his bike towards him while bystanders lit their cigarettes. Nobody seemed to be sending for an ambulance and Alex couldn’t speak to give anybody instructions.

Just a couple of feet away, Mabel lay on her back. She tried to move but couldn’t. *She felt the warm blood seeping into her stockings from a burst varicose vein. Dark coloured venous blood.* With the experience of forty years as a Red Cross Volunteer behind her, Mabel knew her condition was serious. She knew what had to be done, but like Alex had no way to communicate as she drifted in and out of consciousness.

Barely conscious Alex felt someone kneel beside him. He opened his eyes and saw a familiar face. 'It's that bloke Feltham' he thought. 'Lives in the flat above Mother. I hope he knows what he's doing.' Feltham knew what to do all right. Seconds later, he disappeared back into the crowd along with Mabel's handbag and the holdall containing the wages off the back of Alex's bike.

Rumbling around the corner came an ancient, battered Bedford SB coach. It stopped, screening the accident scene from passing traffic. First person out of the door was the big new age traveller they called 'Moose'. He immediately took control. Moved the crowd back and told them to put out their cigarettes. He turned off the bike's petrol tap. 4'10" Angel in her flimsy dress and bare feet was right behind him. She saw the two casualties and sprinted to the phone box. Robin grabbed some shirts and a big roll of adhesive tape off a couple of market stalls and ran to Batman who had gone straight to Alex. *Batman gently elevated Alex's left-hand side to assist the uninjured lung to continue working. He tipped Mabel's shopping out of the Tesco bag and taped the bag over the gaping hole in Alex's right side chest wall finally covering it in a shirt as a dressing. He used another shirt to improvise a sling for the injured side.* Alex felt Batman's knees against his back gently supporting him and found the smell of cannabis on his saviour's breath strangely comforting.

Meanwhile, Nightingale was on the ground beside Mabel, *She lifted Mabel's leg and put direct pressure over the damaged varicose vein to control the bleeding.* She loosened Mabel's tight clothing after giving immediate first aid and with words of gentle reassurance calmed her anxiety.

Robin was having a heated argument with two market traders until Atlas stepped out of the bus. He glared at the traders and they went back to their stalls. Two ambulances arrived. Batman and Nightingale told the ambulance crews what they had done and left the casualties in their care. When the Police arrived, the ancient bus disappeared along the street in a cloud of smoke.

Two days later Alex was sat up in the hospital bed when he received a visitor. Police Constable Everett. "Glad to see you are looking much better, Mr Ford", the policeman said. "Also, I am happy to report that Mrs Ingram will be released from hospital this afternoon to stay with her daughter. The nurses won't be sorry. Apparently, she's been giving them a hard time telling them how to do their jobs. More good news, we have arrested Feltham and charged him with theft. He is on bail at the moment but we are keeping a careful eye on him as we haven't managed to retrieve all the money. Apparently, he spent most of the day in the pub and the bookies.

"What about the people off the old bus?" asked Alex. "Oh! don't worry about them Sir. They've been moved on to the next County. You won't see them again." Alex went quiet and regretted he wouldn't have the chance to thank them for saving two lives that day.

"One more thing Sir", the Policeman continued, "We've looked into the circumstances of the accident and decided not to pursue any criminal charges. However, we did check the expiry date of the MOT on your motorbike."

'Oh Hell!' thought Alex. 'I knew there was something else I had to do before the last Thursday of the month.'