



A Mélange
of Musings

Chris Calder

INTRODUCTION

Welcome, and thank you for accepting this little book. It is a compilation of short stories and observations, offered to you with my compliments. Its purpose is to give you a feel for my work. As an author I try never to lose sight of the fact that readers of fiction expect to be diverted and entertained. That said, not all of it is fiction.

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I hope you enjoy this mélange. I'd be delighted to hear from you and always welcome suggestions as to how I can improve my work, so do get in touch. I promise to do my best to respond promptly.

Chris

THE OLD HARDWARE STORE

Tucked away down a side alley in a sleepy rural town near where I lived in France, there was a small hardware emporium of the old-fashioned kind. Stock was displayed apparently randomly from floor to ceiling, with garden implements, tools, pots and pans and all manner of domestic paraphernalia jostling for space on the ancient wooden shelves. If you are British and of a certain age, you may know exactly what sort of retail store I mean. The shop has a French name of course, but the Brits who lived nearby affectionately called it “The Olde Shoppe”. I made my way there one day to buy a mousetrap.

The front door is half glazed and opens inwards to the melodic clang of a small bell fixed to the door frame. Presumably its purpose is to summon an attendant from the depths of the stockroom, but one can never be sure, since the normal response time is anywhere between two and five minutes when the place is empty. That isn’t often the case, but it would be quite long enough to allow a dishonest person to make off with items of displayed stock without paying. However such an event would have been unthinkable in that part of France. The natives were naively, wonderfully, honest.

There are of course no security cameras, nor any labour-saving device of any kind that could be dated after the nineteen-fifties. The cash tray is a wooden drawer placed below the counter. My particular favourite is the price list; a distressed ring binder fixed to a slope on top of the counter. I’m guessing that there must be over a hundred separate pages, each within its own plastic sleeve.

Every single item has its price. And every item purchased is price-checked by Madame herself or by her husband, every time. It can be a time-consuming process, especially if one is in a queue of customers, patiently waiting to be served. In this shop, queuing is the norm whilst Monsieur or Madame discusses all manner of issues with the customer in front. The interaction between owner and customer is more highly valued it seems, than time.

But hey, relax. That’s France. Where else would I have been gifted the time and attention to debate the efficacy of the types of bait that could be used to load the mouse trap? And where else could I have learned that mouse traps should be baited with chocolate, not cheese?

THE VISITOR

A couple of years ago on a bright, sunny but chilly Sunday morning, we had a visitor. Outside the glass patio doors that led from our dining kitchen to the garden, there was a small area of wooden decking. On that morning on the decking, we had a visitor. A wild dog fox.

It seems that in many towns and cities in the UK, foxes routinely scavenge for scraps after dark. They have learned two things about human animals: that they are best avoided in daylight hours and that they are a good source of edible scraps. Like their country cousins, urban foxes have to fend for themselves. These days when CCTV is everywhere, foxes are seen regularly on camera in the unlikeliest of urban habitats. Let's face it, even scavengers have to live. But they are invariably scruffy, unkempt and generally regarded as vermin.

Our visitor was the very opposite. When I looked up from my corn flakes and saw him standing there, just six feet away, I was astonished. He was big, really big, in size somewhere between a Labrador and a Dobermann. His coat was clean and in perfect condition and his eyes inquisitive and bright. But the most amazing thing about this beautiful creature was his attitude. He stood still for about half a minute, examining us through the glass door.

Did I detect a look of pity for the humans trapped behind the glass? Perhaps. He, on the other hand, was free. His curiosity satisfied, he turned and, in no hurry at all, loped away into the garden.

Never before in all the years that we had been living in France had we seen a fox, never mind one almost close enough to touch. Thank you, mister fox. It was a privilege to meet you.

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THE AWFUL TRUTH

In 1937, master tailor Isaac Bartelewski left his home in the Sudetenland and settled with his wife and son in London, where he soon established a reputation as the best bespoke tailor in the Mile End Road.

Isaac worked long hours, but every morning he took a tea break in Jacko's tearoom. In those days such places were not called cafes. Tea cost a penny, but only three farthings if you brought your own mug. Isaac's was a white enamelled one with a blue handle and rim. A farthing was a farthing, after all.

Isaac became one of a small group who spent their tea breaks setting the world to rights. Sometimes he took his seven-year-old son Daniel along for a mug of tea and a bun. Little Danny would sit listening intently, saying nothing.

One day the topic at the table was as it had been every day of late, the expected war and its outcome. One man said that he admired immigrants like Isaac who had fled the Nazis but, God forbid, what would they do if Hitler won?

To Isaac the very idea was unthinkable! Puce with fury he rose, leaned forward and placed his palms on the table. Little Danny cowered, his eyes saucer wide. Isaac, sputtering in frustration as he tried to find the right words, finally spoke.

"Hitler vin?" he thundered, shaking with fury. "HITLER VIN? Let me telling you, Adolf Hitler will becoming a Jew before he is becoming King of England!"

Thus did a little boy in the East End of London come to believe for a short while (for hadn't his own papa said so?), that Adolf Hitler would become King of England, after he had first converted to Judaism.

DRAMA IN THE THEATRE

This is a true story. The incident occurred quite recently, in France where I lived at the time. Let me share with you the experience I had immediately following an operation. It was the first of two which I needed to rid me of something nasty inside me. The surgeon used an endoscope, the tube thingy with some nifty tools on the end, which is inserted without the need to cut you open. The doctor was very good and he remembered my anxious request to please leave all the external bits alone.

I was admitted to the hospital on a Wednesday evening and the op was scheduled for the following morning. OK, I thought, the “nil by mouth” wouldn’t be for too long. The following morning I was prepped and ready by nine o’clock and told to stay in bed. Later I was told there were delays; I might have to wait. OK, no problem. So I waited, and waited. It was to be half past one in the afternoon when I was finally taken down, tummy rumbling like distant thunder, just when I had begun to wonder if I might make medical history as the first person ever to suffer bed sores whilst waiting for an operation.

Numb from the waist down, I watched on a monitor screen the whole procedure as it happened. Fascinating. All done, the anaesthetist left and the two theatre nurses started to move me from the table onto a bed, as they do. Routine stuff, I thought. At that point I was still hooked up to several plastic tubes connected to various parts of my body. The bed was drawn alongside; it was slightly lower than the operating table. One nurse took hold of my feet and the other put her arms under my armpits. With one extended hand, she started to fold down the safety rail on the side of the bed. It stuck. So she tried again, then (with me in mid-air) watched in horror as the bed slowly drifted away on its castors.

Panic! The nurse yelled, the surgeon sprinted around and took over from her, supporting my front end. Meanwhile my recumbent horizontal form very slowly started to dip in the middle, becoming U-shaped, drawing forward the little nurse hanging onto my ankles. (Now I swear to you that I am not making this up.) Thereupon the first nurse, also a small person, with commendable presence of mind immediately fell to her knees and, on hands and knees,

positioned herself strategically directly under my rear end. Voila! Position stabilised. On the count of “Un, Deux, Trois”, everyone heaved my inert form upwards. For me it was the most unnerving feeling, trying to help by “hoicking” myself, to find that I simply could not get my body to move. I could not hoick. Dead from the waist down, literally a dead weight.

With me finally bundled unceremoniously onto the bed, everyone relaxed. The surgeon, fortunately for me a fit young man, was ashen. “Sorry”, he apologised, “the bed broke.”

Next morning propped up in bed I tucked into my breakfast croissant and a bowl of coffee, my first hot drink for two days. It felt like the best coffee I had ever drunk. Then for some inexplicable reason I sneezed a mighty AAAA-TTISSHH–OOOO.....and my (hitherto) permanent implant of two front teeth flew out and disappeared into the rucked bedclothes!

Perhaps more French farce than a drama, then.

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THE ELIXIR OF YOUTH

Jimmy Belcher held the rodent up and looked him in the beady eye. “Well, Homer, I reckon we’re going to make the cover of *TIME* magazine.” The creature blinked. Is there, Jimmy pondered, a parallel universe in which rats use humans for experiments? He’d actually become quite fond of the little creatures. Some of them, anyway. Like this one. Friendly, engaging and unquestionably intelligent. Was Homer destined to deliver the real version of the mythical Elixir of Life?

Jimmy opened the door of the wire cage, one of nearly fifty in the research laboratory and smiled as he gently placed the fat, healthy rat into it.

“There you go,” he said, “You’re doing OK; almost three grammes lighter this month.” The rodent rewarded him with a bleary look over its shoulder before scurrying off into a corner. Jimmy shut the cage door and pulled off his protective gauntlets.

Across the room, lab assistant Gloria Potts rolled her eyes. “Bad enough that you give them names, but you actually *talk* to them.”

“Only a few have names.” Jimmy unbuttoned his white overalls. “That one next to Homer,” he pointed, “is Zak. Not much change in him. But Homer’s getting friskier, the little bugger tried to bite me yesterday. I only give names to the ones that, er – are showing promise. I talk to them because I want them to know that I care.”

“Huh,” she snorted. “You’re crazy, they’re rats.”

“OK, but you know what? We’re close. Sooner or later we’re going to hit the jackpot with one of these guys. We’re already slowing down their ageing, just a matter of time before we crack the formula for negative growth. Think about it, the mythical, *magical* elixir of youth. For rats, anyway.”

Gloria’s eyes sauced. “You’re close? Really? You serious?”

Jimmy tapped the side of his nose. “Perfectly, but don’t tell anyone, especially not Karl.” “What? The boss doesn’t know?”

He waved a hand dismissively. “Oh, he knows we’re making progress but I don’t think he realizes just how far we’ve come.” He shook off his overalls and draped them over a chair. “Coffee break,” he declared, heading for the dispensing machine in the corridor.

Gloria, he mused, glorious Gloria. He had been attracted to her ever since she joined the team. Blonde, very pretty with a terrific figure, and single. She liked him, he felt sure, but

come on; she was almost half his age. And he? A greying no-hoper who had been passed over for the boss's job. The company had parachuted Karl in from Germany when he, Jimmy, had been promised the position. Well, as good as. Worse, Karl was arrogant, always making things difficult. Anyway, Miriam would probably kick him out of the house if he tried anything with Gloria. He and Miriam had been married seventeen years. Happily at first, but now things were different; there was a Titanic glacier between them. In fact they lived separate lives using different bedrooms in the house. A stalemate, literally, that both had come to accept over time.

Next morning Jimmy followed his daily routine. First, he cleaned out the cages. Me, he thought, a qualified biochemist sweeping up rat droppings. Unpleasant, but necessary. Next, he injected ten of the rodents with serum, giving each the dose specially formulated for it, after which he weighed them and recorded the results. Each syringe had been pre-loaded and marked for its recipient by Ritchie who worked in the next room. Injections were administered once a week on a rota, ensuring that every animal received its updated dose once a month.

As usual Homer was the last to be treated. His weight had been reducing and his energy levels had soared, albeit with occasional brief periods of negative results, a phenomenon that was as yet unexplained. Jimmy had watched the graph rocket up, then flatten and dip suddenly, inexplicably, before rising again, a cycle that had been repeated several times. He had come to believe that the serum was probably working on Homer, but he kept the findings to himself. For some time he had been altering the records to hide the truth. This could be a fantastic breakthrough, why the hell should he give it away? Not now, and if his suspicions about its efficacy were correct, not ever.

One morning while shaving, Jimmy did some serious thinking. Way out stuff, he admitted to himself as he stared into the mirror. He leaned forward and touched his right temple. Yep, the grey hairs were winning. And 'crow's feet' worry lines had appeared on his face. "Hmm, I'll have to make a decision soon," he muttered.

"*JIMMY?* How much longer are you going to be?" Miriam bellowed, hammering on the door.

He grunted. Well, this is my time, he thought, she can wait.

“*Can you hear me?*” She was screeching now.

Yes, and so can the whole neighbourhood. Aloud he said, “I’m shaving, won’t be long.”

“I need the shower, I overslept.”

He paused to reply, raising his voice. “It’s past seven-thirty. You get the bathroom until then, after that it’s mine.”

“Aren’t you *listening?* I know what time it is. I have to get in *now*, or I’ll be late for work.”

“Nearly finished, won’t be a minute.”

“Well, get on with it.” She was still shouting.

After a last critical look in the mirror, Jimmy put down his razor and wiped his face with a towel. He moved to the door and opened it. “You can come in now, but I’ll need to finish my...”

She bustled past, glaring daggers. “This is ridiculous. I’ve had enough and I want a divorce. We’ll sort it out tonight.” She shoved him out onto the landing where he stood holding his damp towel as she slammed the door behind him.

“Suits me,” he muttered. She’d used the threat more than once recently and it used to worry him. Not any more, things were different now. He chuckled as he made his way back to his bedroom.

A few weeks later the atmosphere in the house had improved. The divorce petition was going through and both Jimmy and Miriam were more relaxed. Jimmy seemed invested with a new *joie de vivre* and his improved demeanour had not gone unnoticed at the lab. One Monday morning he breezed in and slipped off his jacket before reaching for his overalls. Gloria was already at her desk.

“Morning, Gloria,” he chirruped, “You’re looking gorgeous. Good weekend?”

She treated him to an old-fashioned look. “It was OK. And what makes you so cheerful today? A new magic breakfast cereal?”

Jimmy grinned and rubbed his palms together. “More like a new me. Isn’t it obvious?”

It was a few moments before she responded, tilting her head. “Hmm, come to think of it, you do look a bit different, somehow.”

His grin broadened. He spun around on his heel and spread his hands. “Ta dah!”

Gloria frowned. “You’re slimmer. You look ...” She raised her head and looked him

up and down, narrowing her eyes. “You been working out?”

He moved to her desk, bent over and drummed his palms on it in a cheery rat-a-tat manner. “Better than that, much, *much* better.”

Quite suddenly her expression changed to one of disbelief. She gasped and put a hand to her mouth. “You haven’t been – you can’t have...?” As the truth dawned, her eyes widened and she shook her head. “You *have*.”

“Yes,” he admitted, grinning broadly. “Homer’s medicine.”

Gloria leaned back with a look of stark horror on her face. “You’ve been taking that stuff? You – you’re mad, crazy, *insane!*”

“No, no Gloria.” Jimmy could not contain his delight. He drew his hands in, pointing towards himself. “Look at me. Go on, take a good look.”

She sat down heavily. “Good God, Jimmy, what have you done?”

“What have I done?” He moved forward to take her hands in his. “Gloria, lovely Gloria, I’ve finally made it.” She stared at him, wide-eyed, as he went on, brimming with enthusiasm. “Do you realise what this means?” He let her take it in before adding, “It’s *true*, it really is. I’m ten, maybe fifteen years younger than I was a few weeks ago. Younger, fitter, stronger and more alert, with loads more energy than I’ve had in years.” He let go her hands and stepped back, immensely pleased with himself.

Gloria, on the other hand, appeared to be in a state of shock. Her face paled, wearing a grim expression. “You’ve been taking an untried drug, with God knows what possible side effects. Is that really true? Tell me I’m wrong, Jimmy.”

He held up his hands and shrugged. “All right, I admit I’ve taken a chance. It was a risk, but worth it. Well worth it. Don’t you see? Being able to reverse ageing? It’s the Holy Grail of science, Gloria, and I’ve cracked it. *Me*, Jimmy Belcher.”

She appeared unimpressed, replying in a monotone. “So what are you going to do?”

He tilted his head back, briefly glancing at the ceiling. Then he lowered his gaze and looked into her eyes. “First, I’m going to quit this job, but I’ll give them a month’s notice. We don’t want them getting any ideas, do we? Then – OK, let me ask you,” he spread his hands. “If you had all the money in the world, what would you buy? A mansion? A Ferrari? Clothes, jewellery? Maybe a Caribbean island?” He watched her closely. “Even your own private jet?” At last he seemed to be getting through. “Think about it. There are companies that would give a king’s ransom for what I have. Then you, my lovely,” he grinned, “can have ab-so-lute-ly *anything* you ever wanted.”

For the rest of the day Jimmy went about his business with a spring in his step. He had agreed to wait a week while she thought about his proposal and in return Gloria had promised to give him her answer then.

On the following Monday morning exactly a week later, Jimmy was early, eagerly anticipating Gloria's arrival. He donned his overall, scarcely noticing that it seemed looser than usual, because his head was buzzing with ideas about how his life was about to change forever. He *knew* that he was now a young man, shortly to be united with the woman of his dreams, not at all bothered by the fact that he was still losing weight. He'd researched companies that he was certain would willingly pay out millions for his secret. With an eye on the door he hummed in contentment. Any minute now she'd walk in and he could then take his letter of resignation and tell Karl where to shove his job. Life was great.

Gloria entered looking apprehensive, not at all what Jimmy had been expecting. He went over to her immediately. "What's the matter? You should be happy; this is going to be the best day of our lives."

"Uh, hello, Jimmy." She seemed to be forcing a smile, removing her coat without looking at him. He felt deflated. What was going on? Surely she wasn't going to turn him down? He asked, "Is something wrong?"

Gloria moved to her desk and sat down. "I'm really sorry, Jimmy, but it won't work. You'd be stealing the formula and I can't go along with that." She did not look at him. "And who knows what's going on inside your body? I couldn't live with the worry."

There was no reply, just the sound of quiet sobbing. Gloria raised her head and looked across at Jimmy. Instantly the blood drained from her face. She collapsed, her knees buckled and she sank to the floor.

What she had seen was a wretchedly distressed boy, the white lab coat hanging on him like an over-sized shroud.

THE CHASE

Detective Sergeant Brewer was tired because his shift had over-run. He did not mind, he preferred to be at work than at home. Since the divorce he had lived on his own in a small apartment over a grocery store. It was little more than a place to sleep and to eat take-out meals.

He loved the station, where he felt comfortable among his colleagues in familiar surroundings, especially at lunchtime. Brewer looked forward to the canteen lunches where he could get stuck into a hearty meal and drink as much tea as he wanted, without having to bother with cooking for which he had no talent, or washing up, which he loathed.

He was a large man, six feet tall and over two hundred and fifty pounds in weight. Yet he was fit enough to give chase on foot when necessary, which was quite often because Sergeant Brewer was an old-style copper, much more a ‘thief-taker’ than a cerebral detector of solutions to crimes.

Twenty-seven years of grafting in the service had given him a living, but he knew he would never rise any higher than his present rank. He was too old, too set in his ways and he did not have a University degree, the magical element which these days was the fuel that rocketed smart kids upwards in the force.

On his way home after the long day he called in to the newsagent’s to buy cigarettes. He parked in the lay-by outside and entered the shop.

“Evening Mr Brewer,” the owner said, “It’s good to see that there are still a few smokers around.”

Brewer grunted. “Most coppers smoke, it’s the stress of the job.”

“Smokers are a dying breed, Mr Brewer.”

The irony was wasted on Sergeant Brewer, who grunted again and turned to leave without answering. He heard the newsagent mutter, “Miserable sod.”

Brewer emerged just in time to witness a crime being perpetrated. Fifty metres away a felon was in course of breaking into an old Morris Minor, using the time-honoured bent wire coat hanger method. Brewer knew that a “Moggie”, as the model is known in the used car trade, in reasonable condition was worth a bit, although its locks could be opened by a trained monkey using a toothpick.

“Oi!” he shouted, breaking into a run, but the felon did not hear him and pulled away. Brewer sprinted back to his own car to find that it had been hemmed in, front and back. “Oh shit!” he exclaimed.

The sergeant was man of action though perhaps light on common sense. Rapidly assessing the situation he decided to commandeer a passing car. Without warning he stepped into the road and raised an arm to stop the next approaching vehicle. The astonished driver braked hard, then swerved, narrowly missing the policeman whose anger turned to fury when the driver treated him to a two-fingered V-sign over his shoulder.

“Shit, shit, shit,” he swore, always a man of pithy words, especially expletives. The next car was approaching more slowly, an opportunity not to be missed. This time the policeman placed himself smack in the path of the oncoming car, legs apart and both arms raised. “STOP” he yelled.

It was perhaps a risky move, given that this was a driving school car complete with an instructor in the passenger seat and a learner at the wheel, which is of course why it had been moving slowly. Had the fearless guardian of the law noticed this sooner, he might have thought better of risking life and limb so impulsively.

The car braked jerkily and stopped just inches from Brewer, who at that instant had shut his eyes and braced himself, realizing at last that jumping into the road in front of a learner driver was not a wise thing to do. Relieved to be unharmed, he gathered his wits and raced around the side of the car, flung open a rear door and jumped in.

“Quick,” he blurted, pointing forwards, “Follow that blue Morris.”

The driver, a skinny teenaged youth with large round spectacles and volcanic acne, swivelled his head and dropped his jaw. Quicker to react, the instructor beside him turned.

Clearly astonished, he exclaimed, “What the hell you playing at? I’m a driving instructor, not a bleedin’ taxi. Get out!”

Brewer leaned forward and hissed, “And *I’m* a police officer, you moron.” He pushed the startled youth’s shoulder. “What are you waiting for? Get moving.”

The lad’s expression brightened immediately. “Yeah, right on,” he squealed. Clattering the gears he shot the car forward in kangaroo leaps so that his instructor’s next utterance, directed first at Brewer and then his pupil, emerged in hiccoughs.

“You-can’t-do-this-I’ll-report-you-for-this. Lookoutforthatbike...”

Twenty seconds of this was as much as Brewer could take. “This is bloody ridiculous,” he snarled, “STOP!”

The car’s brakes were as sharp as the driver’s reactions and the car stopped abruptly, pitching Sergeant Brewer’s considerable bulk forward in an undignified heap between the front seats.

Grunting with the effort he hauled himself upright, unbuckling the youth’s seat belt as he did. Then he flung open his door, scrambled out, yanked open the driver’s door, grabbed the boy and heaved him out.

“Waaaaaaa...” the youth screamed as his backside hit the tarmac. With some difficulty Brewer squeezed into the seat, bent double because he did not have the time to fiddle around trying to move it back to accommodate his frame more comfortably.

The instructor revealed sharp presence of mind. He grabbed the keys out of the ignition and hopped out. “Oh no you don’t, you can’t drive this car.”

The furious policeman reacted by throwing open his door, thereby striking and knocking over the unfortunate youth who had only just picked himself up. The impact dumped him onto the tarmac again.

Brewer grunted as he rocked in the seat to gain the momentum he needed to launch himself out. He sprinted around the car, bellowing, “Give me those keys you cretin, that criminal is getting away.”

The sight of two hundred and fifty pounds of manic fury hurtling towards him must have terrified the instructor who fled around the car to the driver's side. "No, never," he screamed in a quivering falsetto, "You ain't insured to drive this car".

Brewer hurled himself at the man, grabbed him by the collar and pinned him against the door. Leaning menacingly forward with his face inches from the other's, he snarled, "Well, *you* bloody well drive then, but *get a move on.*"

The man was shaking as he stumbled into the driver's seat, while Brewer raced around the back of the vehicle to get to the passenger's side. Most unfortunately, in his way stood the youth who was just about to open the rear door. With a sweep of his meaty arm the policeman shoved the boy aside with such force that yet again, he found himself spread-eagled on the road.

Brewer scrambled into the passenger seat, pointed at the Morris in the distance moving sedately in a line of traffic, and shouted, "There he is, get on, get on!"

The instructor buckled his seat belt and was adjusting the rear view mirror. He was still shaking, but that did not deter him from carrying out the correct procedure, policeman or no policeman.

Brewer bellowed, "For God's sake, man, GET GOING."

The instructor flinched but seemed determined to make his point. In a firm, quavering voice he said, "I am a professional, I do things right." With a hasty glance in the mirror he indicated and moved off into the traffic, failing to notice that his pupil had been about to make another attempt to get in.

Sergeant Brewer turned to see the stranded youth staring at the departing car with an expression of disbelief on his face, pausing briefly before breaking into a run in pursuit. The policeman could scarcely contain his impatience. He pointed forward. "There! There he is. The blue Morris. Get after him."

The instructor said nothing, staring ahead, his face set like cement. "If you're not a copper, you're gonna regret this," he muttered.

The Morris car had been delayed in a queue of traffic waiting to turn right at traffic lights at the next junction. It completed the manoeuvre and was followed by four cars just as the lights went to red. Approaching the traffic lights, the driving instructor pulled up.

Brewer screamed, "Go through, go through."

The driver answered, his teeth clenched. "I told you, I'm a professional. I don't jump red lights."

Brewer exploded. "For God's sake, stop farting around like a sodding nun and *get after him!*"

This appeared to have snapped the driving instructor's patience. "Right," he muttered, "I'll show you how this nun can drive." Slamming the car into gear he accelerated rapidly and with tyres squealing, turned at speed through a gap in the line of oncoming cars, narrowly avoiding a collision.

In that line of traffic was a police patrol car. The constable in the passenger seat could scarcely believe his eyes.

"Bloooooody hell!" he exclaimed. "Did you see that?"

Beside him, the patrolman driving seemed impressed. "You got to admit," he said admiringly, "He's certainly taught that bloke to drive."

"After him," retorted his companion, as he switched on the car's flashing light and siren.

In the driving school car Brewer swung around in his seat. He moaned. "Oh hell. *This* I don't need."

The instructor took his foot off the accelerator. "It's the police, I'm stopping."

"No you're bloody not," snapped Brewer. "Keep going or I'll do you for obstruction." He took out his warrant card and waved it their pursuers, saying, "They know who I am."

Speeding forward, the instructor skillfully overtook a car. Another slowed and moved over dutifully to allow the patrol car past.

In the police car the copper in the passenger seat stared in amazement at the sight of Brewer frantically waving something at them. “What’s that idiot doing?” He lowered his window he gestured, shouting, “Pull up, pull up!”

The driving school car with the squad car in hot pursuit weaved through the traffic, the patrolman unable to stop his quarry or to overtake. Finally, with a clear stretch of road ahead, the police driver seized his opportunity. He shot past, swerved to cut in front and screeched to a halt.

Despite Brewer’s frantic efforts to wave the patrol car off, the instructor had no choice. Braking sharply he pulled in towards the kerb, but not quickly enough to prevent his front wing being struck by the patrol car. Brewer watched helplessly as the old Morris continued sedately on its way. He moaned, shaking his head in despair.

The instant the car stopped he leapt out, charging forward. “You stupid, *stupid* noddies,” he shouted, “I’m D.S. Brewer from Aldgate. I told you to back off, I was on a pursuit. Why the hell didn’t you pull back and follow?”

The officer who emerged from the patrol car seemed astonished. “With *respect*, sir,” he said in a tone which betrayed none at all, “how was we to know? You went through a red, and you was speeding, we was gonna nick you.”

“I kept waving my sodding warrant card at you,” Brewer snarled, “You blind as well as stupid?”

The constable looked distinctly unhappy. “It’s a driving school motor sir,” he responded stoutly, “You could of been taking a lesson.” His colleague who had emerged to join them seemed to be suppressing a grin.

Meanwhile the driving instructor stooped to examine the damage to his vehicle. “Here, look what you done to my car,” he wailed.

Brewer decided that the situation called for him as the senior officer to take charge, so he did. “Right!” he said, pointing to the two constables, “You and you, I’m having you both, you’re on a charge.” He turned and said to the driving instructor, “You know my name, contact Aldgate nick.” He motioned with his thumb. “Now sod off!”

The man’s face reddened, his nostrils flaring. “You haven’t heard the last of this,” he warned, waving an arm as he climbed into his car. “I got witnesses. You’ll see.” He started the vehicle, slammed it into reverse to get out of Brewer’s reach and shouted to the two constables, “You saw what happened.” He pointed a finger at Sergeant Brewer, saying “You’re a bleedin’ nutter, you’re off your bleedin’ trolley. I’m gonna make sure you pay for this!”

At that moment his pupil arrived red-faced and breathless, apparently close to exhaustion. He peeled off his steamed-up spectacles and, leaning on the roof of the car for support he stammered, “I’ve still...I’ve got another...” he gasped, “twenty minutes of my lesson left.”

“What?” The instructor scowled, looking the boy up and down. “Bugger off!” he said, gesturing as he drove away.

Sergeant Brewer addressed the two constables. “We’ll sort this later. Now get me back to my car. It’s in Brook Avenue.”

The driver had been kneeling to examine the bent wing. He stood up, shook his head and pushed his cap back. “The steering’s shot,” he said. “You’ll have to wait for the breakdown truck with us.”

Sergeant Brewer considered this for a moment, then decided that the day had been quite long enough already. “Nah, bugger that,” he said. “I’ll walk.”

As he strode away, the constable knelt down, gripped the bent wing and eased it away from the wheel. “Well now, fancy that,” he said, grinning. “Looks like we can drive it after all.” He glanced up at the retreating figure of Sergeant Brewer and shook his head. “Shame he decided to walk.”

His companion laughed. “Yeah, shame.” Turning to the youth he said “Want a lift, kid?”