

CLEAR SPOT

Victoria Road
Friday, 31 May 1974

STEVE PERCIVAL PROPPED HIS bike against the railings of the Co-operative Dairy just off Sleaford Street and went inside. He glanced at his watch and saw with relief that he was a few minutes early. He found it hard to imagine that punctuality might be a cardinal attribute for a milkman, but it probably was for any kind of interview.

He looked around to get his bearings. Though he had hardly expected to find cows in milking stalls and milkmaids on three-legged stools in the back streets of Cambridge, the term dairy seemed a considerable misnomer. No doubt there was milk on the premises, in fact the smell of stale milk was almost overpowering, but surely some bland term from management discourse like milk delivery depot or facility would have been more appropriate. Given the size of the depot, it was remarkably devoid of human activity, but he supposed that most of the roundsmen had finished for the day.

Alongside the loading bay a large milk tanker, with a hose snaking out of it, was presumably offloading its cargo. A thick-set man in overalls was nonchalantly rolling a cigarette from a tin of Old Holborn while watching a gauge on the back of the tanker. Steve approached him and asked where the foreman's office was. Wordlessly, the hand-roller nodded in the direction of a dirty prefabricated building, really no more than a big shed or cabin. Steve crossed the yard, knocked on the door and pushed it open. Through the fug of cigarette smoke he

saw a middle-aged man sitting behind a cheap wooden desk apparently reading a copy of *The Sun*. Steve assumed this must be the foreman. *The Sun* reader tilted his head in enquiry.

'I've come for an interview for a job as a roundsman.'

'You Steve?' asked the foreman.

Steve nodded.

'I'm Sid, but round here I'm known as the gaffer. You a student at the Tech?'

Ignoring the fact that the gaffer seemed to find the use of verbs unnecessary, Steve thought that his chance of getting the job might be enhanced if he continued confirming the gaffer's suppositions as far as possible. His application might be marginally more credible if he seemed to be a Tech student rather than a University undergraduate. Taking a leaf from the gaffer's laconic style, Steve nodded and responded with a scarcely enunciated 'Yeah.'

'Live nearby?'

Once again, Steve grunted something that could be taken for an assent and turned his head briefly in the implied direction in which he lived.

'Clean driving licence?'

This one he could answer in good faith, but confined himself to an imperceptible nod of the head.

'Right, let's see what your driving's like.'

The gaffer took a set of vehicle keys off a peg behind his desk and tossed them to Steve, who managed to catch them with unaccustomed aplomb. The gaffer pushed his chair back and headed out of the door of the cabin towards a series of parking bays. Steve felt a rising sense of anxiety. Absurdly, it hadn't occurred to him that he might be required to pass a driving test and while he was a reasonably experienced driver, he had never driven a milk float. He had in fact driven other sorts of commercial vehicles, including fork lifts and dumper trucks on holiday jobs, but he had never had the pleasure of an electric vehicle. As it turned out though, it was not a milk float that they were walking towards, but a small flat-bed truck. The gaffer climbed in on the passenger side and indicated to Steve to get in on the driver's side. Once they were both inside, he said, 'You okay with a crash gear box?'

Steve wasn't sure that his policy of confirming the gaffer's assumptions was entirely advisable when it came to driving on the public highway, but it seemed too late to change tactics now and he nodded with what he hoped was an air of insouciance, even though he had no

idea what a crash gear box was. He studied the dashboard in the hope that it might provide some hint, but there was a notable paucity of dials and switchgear. At least this made it relatively easy to identify the slot for the ignition key. He found the right key and pushed it in. He then gave the gear stick an exploratory waggle. The gear stick was so loose and so close to the calliper style handbrake, that he wasn't at all sure whether it was in neutral or not. He pushed the pedals to get an idea of the amount of travel on each and was not surprised to find that the clutch was very heavy. He then realised that the first manoeuvre he was going to have to make was to reverse the truck. As if in answer to his unvoiced question, the gaffer said 'Reverse gear, across to the right, press and pull back.' Steve depressed the clutch and searched for reverse. Eventually he found the slot and then returned the gear stick to what he hoped was neutral. The gaffer sighed heavily, 'Well, come on then, get on with it. We haven't got all day.'

Steve gulped, pressed the clutch in again to be on the safe side and fired up the engine. He repeated the sequence for putting the gear in reverse and was relieved to get it to stick in position. He slowly let the clutch out and simultaneously pushed down gingerly on the accelerator. 'Handbrake,' growled the gaffer. Steve hurriedly squeezed the calliper handle and felt the truck jerk backwards. He checked the wing mirrors and then swung on the huge steering wheel, which felt very heavy. He was extremely grateful that the yard was so empty and that he had plenty of room in which to execute the reverse leg of the three-point turn. Once he'd got the truck pointing in the right direction, he tried to engage first gear, but the gear stick didn't seem to want to engage. In desperation he banged it in. The truck lurched forward and they kangarooed slightly across the yard. When they got to the gates, the gaffer indicated that they should turn left and he proceeded to guide Steve around some of the narrow streets he had just cycled through.

They had only just started, but Steve was already clammy with sweat. The truck was by some way the largest vehicle he had ever driven on the public highway. Judging the width of the vehicle in such narrow streets was tricky and he was relieved that there wasn't too much traffic in the back streets. The real problem was that each time he changed gear, he had great difficulty in engaging the new gear, resulting in complaining noises from the gearbox. But somehow he managed not to stall the engine. Eventually they came to Coldham's Lane, a much wider road. His gear changing was still not any smoother, but at

least he was able to keep the truck in a particular gear for longer once they got up to a reasonable speed on the bigger road. The only problem was that he knew that he was going to have to deal with a roundabout soon. He didn't much fancy stalling on a roundabout. He was consoled by the thought that the majority of other vehicles would give the dirty old truck a wide berth.

When they came to the roundabout the gaffer indicated that they should go all the way around and head back the way they had come. Steve's entrance and exit of the roundabout was no smoother than his earlier gear changes, but somehow they got around without stalling or crashing. The gaffer sighed deeply again, but said nothing. Eventually they re-entered the network of narrow streets near the dairy and the gaffer guided Steve back to the yard. He indicated the parking bay where they had picked up the truck. Steve was feeling exhausted and was only too pleased that he hadn't been asked to back into the space. He brought the vehicle to a halt, pushed the gear stick into neutral, engaged the handbrake, switched off the engine and only then took his foot of the clutch.

The gaffer turned to Steve and shook his head slowly, 'Fucking awful.' He then climbed out of the cab and stomped over to the cabin. Steve cursed under his breath and, putting his head in his hands and closing his eyes, had a brief vision of his plan to pay off his college bill before graduation crumbling in ruins. He sat in the driver's seat for a few moments, trying to collect himself. The gaffer's judgement had been unequivocal. He climbed out of the cab and took a deep breath of the sour air. He wanted to get out of the yard as quickly as possible and process the sense of humiliation he was feeling before he got back to the house in Victoria Road and had to face his housemates. He really had no desire to waste any more of his or the gaffer's time, but an atavistic politeness forced him to go over to the cabin and say thank you. He pushed open the door of the cabin and put his head around the jamb.

'Er, thanks ...'

'Fucking awful. I've had some bad drivers in here, but that takes the biscuit.'

The experience seemed to have given the gaffer access to a handful of verbs, but the last thing that Steve wanted was an itemised list of his driving failures. He turned around and said over his shoulder, 'Well, thanks for your time anyway.'

A brief grin flashed across the gaffer's face. 'Not so fast, matey. I need a few details.'

Steve turned back. 'What details? If I haven't got the job.'

'Who said you hadn't got the job?'

'But I thought you said I'd failed the driving test.'

'I said it was the worst bit of driving I've ever seen. But you didn't fail. The fact that you started in second gear most of the time, but didn't stall and that you managed to change gear without double declutching once suggests that you have hidden talents. I'm blown if I know what they are though. At least you're resourceful. Anyway an electric float is nowhere near as tricky to drive as that old jalopy. It wasn't really a driving test. We get plenty of students turning up here. I need some way of weeding our the wankers.'

'You mean I've got the job?' said Steve in disbelief.

The gaffer nodded and started filling in a form.

He asked Steve a few questions, outlined the pay and conditions and then said, 'Right, we'll see you here five-thirty Monday morning. And don't be late. You'll have to be up early, seeing as you live in Victoria Road. Thought you said you lived around here?'

Steve realised that in his dazed state he had given his real address. But what other address could he have given? Giving the college address wouldn't have been any better. But the gaffer was on to *that* too.

'And you don't go to the Tech neither, do you?'

Steve shamefacedly admitted that was the case. By way of explanation he said, 'But I really need the job.'

And then after a pause, recognising that the gaffer was wily old bird, 'I need to put together a bit of money quickly.'

The gaffer grunted dispassionately. Clearly that was a motivation he had no problem accepting.

'But let's get one thing clear. I don't want you giving me some eyewash about how far away you live when you're late.'

Steve gulped and nodded.

'As you will be,' he added.

Steve already understood that it was better not to protest. This guy had heard and seen it all.

'Right, back to business. I'm going to put you with Ron for the first week. You learn his round, then you run it on your own for the rest of the summer, while Ron covers people who are on holiday. Ron knows all the rounds. He's our top man and a bit of a stickler. Ex-squaddie. So

there'll be no slacking when you're with him. Upside is you'll be finished early, downside you'll be absolutely knackered. When you're on your own, I won't be expecting you to get the round done as quickly as Ron. But that doesn't mean you can roll back after lunch.'

Steve was already feeling apprehensive about his first encounter with Ron, but decided to put it out of his mind.

The gaffer asked if he had any questions. Steve was too stunned to think of anything sensible to ask and with that the interview was terminated. He walked to where he'd parked his bike and pedalled slowly back down Mill Road wondering what he was letting himself in for. Uppermost in his mind was the fact that he was going to have to get up ludicrously early and build in enough time to get across Cambridge. There was not much he could do about that for the next couple of weeks. Fortunately the tenancy of the house in Victoria Road was coming to an end, so he would have to be looking for other accommodation anyway. A friend had told him about a postgraduate student called Beth Worsthorne who wanted to sublet a small house off Mill Road for the summer. He had dropped a note off at Newnham for Beth a couple of days previously and was waiting anxiously for a reply.

When he got to the bottom of Mill Road, he crossed over onto the path that led diagonally across Parker's Piece. At the magnificent lamp post in the middle of the green, Steve dismounted and admired once again the beautiful new paint job that had mysteriously appeared the previous autumn. He was pleased to see that the words *Reality Checkpoint* which had previously been inscribed with a marker pen were now properly painted. He'd always considered the inscription to be a joke on those stoned undergraduates making their way across the expanse of Parker's Piece in the fenland fogs that frequently engulfed the city, but now he saw it as symbolising the transition from life as a spaced-out student to the life he was about to embark on full of crash gearboxes and canny gaffers.

Back at the house he let himself in by the back door, made a cup of tea in the kitchen and went up to the room he shared with Angie.

Angie was sitting writing at the little table in the bay window of their room. She looked up. 'Wow! You've been a long time. How did it go?'

'Got the job. I start Monday,' Steve said, with an unmistakeable note of pride, as he threw himself on the bed.

'Amazing. They must be desperate.'

‘What? You mean to take on an incompetent like me?’

‘No I didn’t mean it like that. For them to want you to start on Monday.’

‘Yeah, well, they need to organise holiday cover and so on. And I’ll have you know that the driving test was a bit of a bugger.’

Steve then proceeded to give her a somewhat exaggerated account of driving the flatbed truck around the narrow streets off Gwydir Street. In his telling the truck was bigger and more decrepit, the side roads were full of traffic, the examiner was a stickler for procedure. All in all he was quite pleased with the way he had shaped the anecdote. With a little polishing he felt sure it would become one of the mainstays of his repertoire. Angie realised that Steve was probably embellishing the account. He always did that. But she could also see that he was looking drained. She came over, climbed on the bed, gave him a sympathetic hug and getting into the spirit of the anecdote made appropriately consoling noises.

‘Were you expecting a driving test?’

‘Well, I thought they might show me the controls on a milk float or ask me to drive one around the yard. I didn’t expect to have to drive a truck around the public streets. At least they didn’t ask me any Highway Code questions. I’ve forgotten most of it.’

Angie took a deep breath. ‘You probably realise that I was hoping that you wouldn’t get the job. I happen to think that it’s a crazy idea. Where are you going to live?’

He told her about the possibility of renting a house nearer to the dairy from a Newnham postgrad.

‘But if you have to pay rent on a whole house, that will surely defeat the whole point of having a job like that in the first place,’ Angie pointed out with impeccable logic.

Steve agreed, but said that he had to start somewhere. He was hoping that he might find some others to share the place. ‘What about you? I know you’ve got this English language teaching job in Brighton, but maybe you could get something similar in Cambridge. There are tons of language schools here.’

‘Steve. It’s a bit late for that. I start in three weeks. I don’t want to let them down. The people who run the school are friends of my parents. And I’ve already put down the deposit on a room. Not only that, I need the money before I set off for Edinburgh. Why don’t you just come down to Brighton with me? It’d be great to spend the summer together at the seaside. I’m sure you’d get a job in no time.’

'That sounds like a no.'

'And it sounds like you're giving the idea of Brighton a no. You've only just come up with this idea of staying in Cambridge for the summer. I thought that you were going to start work for your German company in the City.'

'I've gone right off that idea. I'm a writer. I don't want to be a city broker. That's even worse than working in a bank.'

'But I thought the idea was that you'd just do it for a couple of years, save pile of cash and then retire at the grand old age of 25 with enough to fund your writing until you can live off your book sales.'

'Yes, that was the idea, but I just don't think I could stick it. And even if I could, I don't think that I'd be any good at saving. I'd spend it all and then I'd be trapped. You know what I'm like. Anyway, I haven't been in touch with them for a while, so I'm not even sure the job still exists.'

Angie wondered if Steve was having some kind of breakdown and just needed time to pull himself together before he moved on from Cambridge. Yes, she could cancel her arrangements and look for something in Cambridge, but it wasn't even clear yet whether the sublet was a real possibility. She asked Steve when he expected to know. He admitted that he had no idea. He'd only sent the postgrad a note a few days earlier. Angie suggested that they talk about it further, when Steve knew whether the house near the dairy was more than just a hypothetical possibility. Steve had to admit that that made sense, but felt a bit deflated.

Angie was sympathetic to Steve's dilemma.

'Look, Steve, I know that money is a difficult issue for you. And that your mother can't help you out. And I know it's been hard for you here, where there are so many people from privileged backgrounds. But I'm sure that if you explained the situation to the college, they'd be accommodating.'

'I don't want to ask them. I don't want charity from a place like St Radegund's. I thought the bank would just let me extend my overdraft for a couple of months. You'd think a Cambridge graduate would be a pretty good bet.'

'It must be something to do with the state of the economy, oil price rises, the miners' strike, three day weeks and so on.'

'Yeah. Just my luck.'

'Wouldn't it be better to find someone you could stay with for a few weeks. And then once you'd got your finances in order, quit the job

and come and stay with me. It would be fun for us to be in Brighton for the summer. And then if I get the place in Edinburgh, we could go there together.'

'I know, And that all sounds lovely, but I just feel that I'd be tagging along. You'd be starting your PhD and you'll be getting to know all the other postgraduate students. I would have no reason for being there.'

'Surely, our being together is reason enough. Steve, this last year together has been fantastic. I love you. And I think you love me. We can look forward to enjoying life together.'

'Yes, that's true. But I need to establish myself.'

Angie knew that Steve lacked the easy self-assurance, so evident in their public school contemporaries. The only thing that really mattered to him was intellectual standing. But perversely, even though he had the brainpower to establish that standing, he had deliberately wrecked his chances of doing postgraduate work. He was impatient with the academic world and already considered himself a writer, without as yet having written anything substantial. For goodness sake, he was only just 21.

'Steve, I know things haven't always been easy for you. But because of your amazing brain and your ability to work hard you've transcended your background. I'm sure your mother is terribly proud of you and your father would be if he were still alive. And you will go on to do great things, but possibly not in a conventional way. I'm happy with that. And I'm prepared to put up with some of the byways we might travel, so long as we can be together. That's all I really want, but the best way I can help you is by holding steady to the course that I'm on, then you'll always know where to find me.'

Steve was mystified by this speech, but recognised its generosity. He rolled over and gathered Angie in his arms. 'Anj, you're an amazing person I love you like crazy. I don't want to hurt you, but I need to make my mark. And I'm afraid that I might hurt both of us.'

'Look, we've got the weekend ahead of us. We can talk some more, but let's try and enjoy it too.'

Steve agreed that that was the best thing.

'Anyway,' she went on, 'Remember we've got the grand end of Finals house party tonight. That should take our minds off things. Once we've had one of Jez's joints or Harry's hash cakes. And then we've got the whole weekend to do nothing. We could walk to Fen Ditton or take a punt to Grantchester.'

Steve agreed that that was the best way to deal with things. They spent the afternoon in their room, reading, chatting lazily, reflecting on the year they had spent together. Steve picked up his guitar and strummed it idly for a few minutes, which reminded him of Alan's new song. He did his best to reproduce the chord sequence. Even though he was unable to play it as smoothly as Alan, the hook in the riff caught Angie's attention.

'That's nice.'

'Alan's latest, I can't quite get it right.'

'Sounds nice all the same.'

'It's about you.'

'Really?'

'I'm not sure you'll entirely approve of the lyrics?'

'Why not? I hope it isn't inappropriately personal. I have no desire to have my breasts immortalised in one of Alan's ditties. Or any other part of my anatomy for that matter.'

'No, nothing like that. But if I were to tell you that it's called "Hazy Little Lady", you might get some idea of its approach.'

Angie considered this piece of information. She wasn't delighted by the diminutive in the title, and if *hazy* implied she was a scatty blonde, she would have words with Alan. But if the portrait was affectionate, she would be prepared to put up with a degree of artistic licence.

Towards five o'clock, they went downstairs to join the others. Harry was happily at work cooking a large bolognese. Harry seemed to love cooking and was good at it. The other males in the household had negligible culinary skills. The two women were both good cooks, but fought against being gender typecast as house mothers, while Harry's resistance to the conventional typecasting of a tough northern male was in the diametrically opposite direction. He loved to take charge in the kitchen. In fact he loved to take charge *tout court*. He combined extreme sociability, the capacity for hard work and the ability to recover rapidly from bouts of inebriation in equal measure. He was cut out to be a major in a combat battalion, but given his progressive political views, he was more likely to become head of a voluntary sector organisation or large inner city school, Di and Harry's girlfriend Jackie, who was down for the weekend from her medical school in London, were commis-cheffing for Harry, chopping vegetables and salad materials. Alan was sitting on a stool in the corner of the kitchen, guitar on knee, providing a sinuous soundtrack to the culinary prepar-

ations, while Jez perched on another stool and rolled joints on the windowsill. All in all, a very homely scene, one that was shortly coming to an end.

Harry looked up from his cooking and said to Steve and Angie, 'So nice of you to join us.'

'We just followed our noses,' quipped Angie. 'Smells delicious.'

'How did the interview go?' asked Alan over the top of his guitar.

'Got the job. Start Monday,' Steve replied, with a degree of pride.

This news was met by a general air of incredulity.

Di paused in her chopping of sticks of celery. 'You mean you start on Monday?'

'Yeah, might as well get on with it, no point in hanging around.'

The housemates understood Steve's family circumstances and so no one voiced what they all thought, that there must be some other way of dealing with his immediate financial needs. Jez took advantage of the embarrassed silence that had developed by holding up a joint and saying, 'In that case we'd better make sure that you have a memorable weekend, meaning if you do remember anything of it, we won't have done our job properly.'

Everyone laughed at what they had come to recognise as one of Jez's stoned Zen koans. Steve thought that seemed an appropriate way of bringing his student career to an end, and took the proffered joint, inhaling deeply. He passed the joint on to Harry, who saw nothing unhygienic in smoking while cooking.

Steve said to Alan, 'I told Angie about your new song. Why don't you play it?'

'I thought you said that the feminists will be after me, if I played it in mixed company.'

'No feminists here,' Harry said, exhaling a large cloud of smoke.

Jackie, Harry's girlfriend, folded the tea towel she had over a shoulder and gave Harry a smart thwack across his shoulders with it. 'Watch it, Edwards.'

Angie cut in, 'I understand the song is about me, so I think we'd better hear it.'

Alan started retuning the guitar. 'Let's say that the subject of the song bears some resemblance to you, but in other respects is completely different. It would be an elementary error of interpretation to assume that the protagonist of the song and the model on which the protagonist is based are identical. When in fact the model is just the starting point for a fictional character.'

Steve said, 'Okay, we all know you did a paper on modern drama. Just sing the song.'

'Well, I'm just saying ...'

Angie intervened. 'Even if I'm just the model, I would still like to hear it. I'm sure Steve will remember to make sure to depart from a slavish depiction of our personalities when he eventually gets around to immortalising us in the novel we all know he's got in him.'

Steve glared at Angie. 'You'll be waiting a long time, if you want a novel from me. I might manage to squeeze one or two of you into the odd haiku.'

Alan, having finished retuning his guitar, interrupted these absurdities with a big chord and launched into the song. Everybody liked it, even Angie.

'Nothing like me, apart from the flowing hair. I've never run in circles for the simple reason I don't run. And as for going nowhere, in three weeks I'm going to Brighton and at the end of the summer I'll be on my way to Edinburgh. Those two places are only nowhere in the stoned ravings of a spaced-out Cambridge undergraduate.'

There was a murmur of approval at this deft response by the supposed model for the song's protagonist and the song with its Californian vibe was pronounced a hit and nothing like the real Angie.

While Alan had been performing the song, Harry had been draining the pasta and declared the meal was ready. Glasses were filled with beer and wine according to taste and the housemates sat down around the table and filled their plates. Such meals had been a regular feature of the previous year. Everyone knew that an era was coming to an end, but for now they were doing their best to put it out of their minds. The mood was lighthearted and utopian, loving even. Reality was to be held at bay for a day or two longer.

After the meal had been cleared away, the gang moved into the sitting room. Jez had kept the joints coming and the conversation had descended into enigmatic nonsense. Di slipped Joni Mitchell's *Court and Spark* out of its cover and put it on the turntable. As the luscious chords and Joni's soaring voice filled the room, even the enigmatic nonsense petered out. Joni's sound world and bitter sweet lyrics occupied everyone's attention.

When that record finished, Jez who now took over as DJ, asked what people wanted to listen to next. Steve suggested Dylan, but was shouted down.

Alan observed that he thought *Planet Waves* was crap.

Harry countered this opinion with, ““Forever Young”, man’.
‘Yeah, okay, apart from that track.’

In the end they settled on Captain Beefheart’s *Clear Spot*. As the spiky chords of ‘Low Yo Yo Stuff’ filled the room, Steve slid from the clear plastic sleeve a white card on one side of which was printed the cover illustration and on the other the track and personnel listing. Beefheart was generally considered a major freak. It was typical of Beefheart’s art school sensibility that an album entitled *Clear Spot* should have a clear plastic sleeve. The cover photograph intrigued him ‘Where do you think this photo was taken?’ he said, mainly to himself. ‘It doesn’t really look like part of a recording studio. If you ask me, it looks more like the quarterdeck of an interplanetary spacecraft. And why on earth is Don wearing a coolie hat?’

Di surfaced from her reverie and asked ‘Who’s Don? And what’s a coolie hat?’

Steve told her that Beefheart’s real name was Don van Vliet and pointed to the strange headgear he was wearing in the photograph. But Angie had her own issues with the cover. She pointed out that all the band had pseudonyms, but Beefheart’s real name was given on the composing and performance credits, whereas there was no indication as to the real names of members of the Magic Band. She felt this suggested a basic inequality between Don and the rest of the band, who were clearly in a subordinate position. This prompted Harry to abandon for a moment his habitual deep contemplation of the workings of the dialectic in history to point out that Beefheart was behaving like a capitalist exploiter and appropriating the surplus labour of the band members and adding insult to injury by not giving them their real names.

Di was still contemplating the revelation of Beefheart’s real name. ‘Don Van Fleet doesn’t sound like a real name to me. Sounds like a car rental company.’

They all laughed and Alan said that everyone knew that Americans could be called anything. Angie pointed out with an unusual degree of self-assurance that van Vliet was a Dutch name before going back to her original point ‘So, does anyone know Zoot Horn Rollo’s real name?’

Jez, who had been concentrating on rolling another joint, lifted his head from his intricate handiwork and said in an even tone ‘Zoot Horn’s real name is Bill Harkleroad, Rockette Morton’s is Mark Boston, Ed Marimba’s is Art Tripp and Oréjon’s is Roy Estrada.’

For a moment there was a stunned silence until Alan said 'There speaks the only one of us who will eventually get a PhD.'

Di, who was wary of Jez's deadpan sense of humour, accused him of just making up another set of names, but Harry said that he was pretty sure that Bill Harkleroad was Zoot Horn's real name, which prompted Angie to say that Harkleroad sounded as fake as Rollo. 'And as for Art Tripp being Ed Marimba's real name! His real name, if it *is* his real name, sounds more far out than his pen-name. Or whatever term is appropriate for a drummer's pseudonym.'

She looked over the list of the names again and said 'I'm beginning to feel sorry for Mark Boston, though. He's the only one who has a regular real name. Poor old Rocket.'

Everyone laughed again at the thought that they should feel sorry for a guitarist in the Magic Band. When the laughter had subsided Jez said 'Rockette. Not Rocket. Stress on both syllables. Spondee not trochee.'

Steve who'd been silent throughout most of the discussion said 'Ladies and Gentlemen I would now like to bring this seminar on Expropriation and Nominative Determinism in Beefheart's Magic Band to a conclusion. Thank you very much for your contributions.'

The crew ignored Steve's convoluted humour and returned to grooving silently to the music. Inevitably, the evening ended with Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*, Alan and Di entwined on the battered old sofa and the others sprawled on bean bags. There was no conversation and little movement for the next forty-five minutes, during which everyone lost themselves in the Floyd's *musique concrète* linked soundscapes. As the record faded out over sinister synthesised heartbeats and a spoken word coda, Di sat up and said, 'What does he mean, *there's no dark side, it's all dark?*'

The same thing had puzzled Steve when he had first listened to the LP and he had subsequently done some research in the library. Never slow to share the product of his haphazard reading, he said, 'Both sides of the moon receive on average the same amount of sunlight. It only seems that there is a permanently dark side because the moon rotates once on its axis for every orbit of the earth. In the two weeks that it takes the moon to go from new to full, it also makes a half revolution.'

On the assumption that Steve must be bullshitting, Harry said, 'That's the trouble with you, Percival, you're only half a revolutionary.'

Al joined in the mockery, 'Yeah, you can't imagine John Lennon singing about half a revolution.'

Steve laughed. He should have realised that it was pointless to be serious on such occasions. Switching deftly to the same register, he shot back, 'Is that the same Lennon who said that nothing was going to change his world? Or the one who said we all want change?'

'Cake and eat it, if you ask me,' said Harry.

But Di felt that her question hadn't been answered. 'So, is there a dark side or not?'

Steve tried again. 'Yes, but the side we call the dark side when the moon is full is actually fully illuminated by the sun when there is a new moon, which is also confusingly known as a moonless night, because at that point the side that faces us is now dark so we can't see it.'

Di considered this further explanation and decided that it clarified nothing, a view which was widely shared. Wishing he'd never opened his mouth in the first place, Steve announced that he was heading up to bed. Angie got up too, blowing kisses in hazy little lady mode at the others and followed Steve up to their room.