

Running Away from Home

Extract from the notebook of D.S. Tim W. Aster, based at Auchternaughtie Police Station, relating to events of 3rd June 1995:

'At 11:08 on the morning of 3rd June 1995, I received a call on the radio to attend the scene of a traffic accident at the Auchternaughtie Sewage Works on the Killin Road. I arrived there at 11:12 precisely. I noted a van lying upside down at the edge of one of the sludge ponds. It was evident that the back doors had been thrown open. I observed a number of animals crawling out of the van. I noted a tortoise - which later seemed to disappear from the scene - a reindeer, two teddy bears, two wolves and a penguin. I identified also a hamster, a lamb, a mole, a racoon, and some creatures which I could not identify due to the sludge. At some time later, a hare also turned up, but I did not observe its arrival. I discarded my jacket and managed to throw a line to the animals and pull them from the sludge basin. All were badly shaken but none needed medical attention. I became suspicious of the behaviour of the two wolves, and recognised one of them as Bobo Wolf, from over Duntyme way. At 11:47, I asked the wolves to accompany me to the Station.'

Extracts from a statement made to the Auchternaughtie Police on 3rd June 1995 by Comet. The fact that this witness is a reindeer with a peculiar face and lacking in the usual stuffing for soft toys need not diminish the credibility of this statement:

'Early in May, I had decided to leave home and run off to seek my fortune. You see, sir, I have an ambition to become a dentist, to take patients with toothache into my care, to cure and peer into cavities and drill and polish... Yes, sergeant, sorry. Well, on the 29th May, which was Monday, I was packing my possessions into a large red handkerchief - all the essentials such as toothbrush, antler-polish, wax for the sled-runners. I had just finished tying the handkerchief to my antlers and was preparing to slip out of the front door, when I was approached by the Big Bad Wolf which lives in Kats' wardrobe. He asked me where I was going, and I explained. He then advised me that modern-day runaways did not have to tie large handkerchiefs to sticks - or in my case antlers - but - to use his words: 'did it in style'. I asked him what he meant, and he winked and advised me to stick around until morning.'

'I noticed that later that day he was often to be found deep in conversation with some of the other animals. Yes, sergeant, I certainly can: the ones I noticed most particularly were the Polar Bear, the Lamb, the Penguin, the two teddy-bears and the Hare-that-turns-into-a-Tortoise. Yes, sir, that one over there. Yes, sir, I know it looks like a tortoise, that's because it's a Tortoise-that-turns-into-a-Hare just now. No sir, I am not being cheeky. Yes sir, it is turning into a Hare - now it's a Hare-that-turns-into-a-Tortoise. Yes sir, I'll get on with my statement.'

'The following morning, the Wolf advised me that there was transport waiting outside to take me to a dazzling future - I think those were the words he used. I looked outside and saw a van with the words 'Runaway Coach Hire' painted on the side... Well, since you ask, sergeant, I was a little puzzled why the word "Hire" was spelt "Higher" and why the paint seemed to still be wet. Yes, sir, I did also ask myself why it had no windows. But the Big Bad Wolf threw my

handkerchief into the back of van, and shouted "One for the School of Dentistry!", so I just got in. Yes sir, my owner has on many occasions advised me never to get into strangers' cars. But the Wolf wasn't a stranger. And he told me the driver was his cousin, and the driver was wearing a peaked cap, so I was not worried. Yes, sir. No, sir, I certainly will take that advice, thank you, sir.'

'In the back of the van were a number of other animals - now I come to think of it, they were the ones I saw the Wolf talking to before. No, they did not seem worried - most of them seemed quite excited and happy. We all made ourselves comfortable, the Wolf got in beside his cousin, and we drove off.'

Transcript of an interview of B.B. 'Bad Boy' Wolf by Auchternaughtie Police on 3rd June 1995:

'Why were you travelling in the neighbourhood of the Dark Forest of Auchternaughtie this morning?'

'Well, Superintendent, sir, only to give some poor orphaned animals a day out in the countryside. My cousin and I, we run a charity to help poor friendless and homeless animals, and today's the day of our annual summer outing. Why, your own Chief Constable, Harry Mason, he contributes to our cause! So we let them out in the country to smell the trees and gambol about in the fields and woods...'

'Why were those roasting-spits and steak-knives under the van-seats?'

'Oh those, Inspector! Those were only for the barbecue we wanted to surprise the animals with!'

'And the ropes?'

'Ropes, Chief Inspector? I don't know nothing about no ropes...'

'OK, Bad Boy. Tell us about the journey after you passed through Auchternaughtie. What happened?'

'Of course, Your Honour. Well, we were all enjoying ourselves, naturally - you know, singing "The Wheels of the Bus", "Row Row Row" and so on, and I was handing out sweets and us all having a good time, like. And then all of a sudden - bang! crash! wallop! - the van turns head over heels and we end up all tangled up! No one more concerned than me and Bobo, of course. I got out the first-aid kit and bandaged a few of the animals. And then, Your Worship, you lot arrived and pulled us out.'

'And how do you explain the fact that several witness saw you speeding at eighty through the town, with a wolf in the passenger-seat apparently twisting the arms of a teddy-bear, while the driver was drinking from a bottle of whisky?'

'Officer! How could you suggest such things? Me? Hurt a poor defenceless teddy-bear? No, no, no! I was simply comforting it. The poor darling had been feeling car sick.'

'And the driver?'

'My cousin Bobo? Well, you know, Detective, he has been tee-total since birth. Never touches a drop, ever since he saw his poor mother pass away from too much gin. Poor Auntie Vulpina! No, sergeant, these witnesses must have seen someone else.'

'Let's go back to those ropes we found in the van. Can you explain why the polar bear was tied up with rope and why the reindeer had been shackled to the side of the van?'

'Oh, that? That, sir, was just a little game we were playing to pass the time. Nothing sinister at all. Oh, my goodness, how it must seem to you! Dreadful! Ha ha ha! Almost as if we were going to drive them to a dark spot and gobble them up! Not that I wouldn't say "no" - nothing better than a spot of fresh meat!... But no - what an idea!'

Extracts from a statement made to the Auchternaughtie Police on 3rd June by Bobo Wolf:

'Well, it's perfectly straightforward. I was driving along, keeping well within the speed limit. I never do more than 30 in the built-up areas, and rarely get past 40 in the countryside. Too many accidents these days. The animals had hired the van for a day-trip. Struck me as odd that there wasn't anybody supervising, but I don't ask no questions in my line of work. Got to keep the wolf from the door. My poor old mother is sitting at home waiting for us to return. Anyway, there we were, pottering along, and all of a sudden - bang! Both my front tyres explode and the van shoots off the Queen's highway. Of course, I fought to control it, and managed to steer it through a gap in the hedge. Couldn't stop, so we crashed through the sign that said "Auchternaughtie Sewage Works", straight down the slope and into the sludge. You can take it from me, the Sewage Department will be hearing from my solicitors, just as soon as I've finished with you.'

The animals in the back? Oh, me and my cousin had them strapped in just like the regulations say. Firmly anchored so they wouldn't get thrown about. Nothing worse than bruised meat - er, bruises... Some of my competitors, now, they don't care a jot about animal welfare, just bundle them into vans and lorries and off they go. Dreadful. You should be harassing them instead of picking up honest tradesmen like me and my cousin. I'll be speaking to Chief Inspector Mason down at the lodge about this!'

'The van? It's a write-off, you know. I'll be asking my solicitors to sue that woman whose horse galloped across my path and made me swerve through the hedge. That van was unique - one old lady owner before me, never did above 25 and waxed it every Sunday. It was immaculate. No, don't look like it now, does it? All covered with... OK, OK, what do you want to know about it? Tax-disc? Must have fallen off when we crashed. "Runaway Coach Hire"? Well, that's just a little joke, like. Wouldn't want to paint "Slightly Questionable Day Trips" on the side, would we - that'd look daft, wouldn't it?'

'No, never saw no ropes, no steak-knives. Must have been in the Sewage Works before we got there. Eat the animals - leave it out! There's a laugh! I've been a vegetarian since the day I was born. Took it from my mother. Never get me to touch no red juicy steaks and I hate those tender white chicken legs, especially in wine sauce. Anyway, when are you letting me out of here? Where's my lawyer?'

Extract from the journal of Kats, dated 4th June 1995:

'Got a call from Auchternaughtie Police Station. The policeman said all my soft toys were there. Got bus over. Found all my animals in a bit of a state,

Wolf being questioned by the police. Very strange story. Comet told me everything. Wolf denying everything - just like him! So I whispered in his ear: "If you don't tell them the truth, I'll have you stuffed with cotton-wool just like the rest of them..." Wolf turned pale, asked to speak to the investigating officer.'

Full statement made by B.B. 'Bad Boy' Wolf to the Auchternaughtie Police on 4th June 1995:

'All right, it's a fair cop. We done it, me and my cousin Bobo together. It was his idea: he thought that if we could get all those animals into the back of the van and get them out to the Dark Forest, and lock them up in the little hut he's got there, then we'd be laughing. Lots of fresh meat for picnics, that sort of thing. Impresses the girls, you know what I mean? Anyway, it was his idea. All I did was to find the animals who wanted to get out. All right, I might have been a bit pushy. That Comet, the reindeer fellow, he was wanting to get out anyway - some daft idea about becoming a dentist. That gave me the idea for the others. I just went around and asked them what their ambitions were - you know, airline pilot, TV star, that sort of thing. Well, it wasn't hard to find that the Polar Bear wanted to train to be a chameleon, and the Penguin wanted to be a road-racing cyclist - with her short legs! and the teddy-bears wanted to be trapeze-artists - can you get shorter arms, I ask you?! And then that funny Hare-Tortoise creature had seen something on TV about wine waiters in a posh hotel, and that was enough. They were all daft, that's my opinion.

So I just persuaded them that they wanted to leave home in style, got my cousin Bobo to borrow his mate's van and paint up something suitable. "Runaway Coaches" - good that, wasn't it? That was my idea...

Well, it was all going OK until we got past Auchternaughtie. The Dark Forest was in sight, I was getting hungry, we'd managed to get the big animals tied down in case of trouble. Bobo, he was speeding and drinking. I warned him. He's had a wild streak in him all his life. Then, that crazed teddy-bear leaps over from the back with the hamster and tries to grab the steering wheel. There was a struggle, Bobo lost control and over we went.'

'That's all. Nothing serious. I can't see what you're going to charge us with...'

Extract from the journal of Kats, dated 6th June 1995:

'Washed animals in washing machine. Much cleaner and sweeter. Polar Bear looks whiter than ever. Penguin shrunk a bit. Afterwards, Comet came to see me. Still wants to leave home and seek fortune. Quite excited about it: "Dentistry! Looking down into people's mouths, easing pain! Drilling teeth! Polishing enamel, tickling gums! A dentist's life for me!" Did not like to upset him by suggesting that antlers might get in way, so helped him pack large red handkerchief. Made him some moss sandwiches, all waved goodbye as he set off for bus. Promised to send postcard.'

'None of the other animals want to leave. Wolf back. Police dropped charges - orders of Chief Constable Mason. But Wolfie a changed creature now in wardrobe: just need to mouth the word "stuffing" in his direction and he turns into quivering wreck...'

