

Summer Ghost, coming soon to a screen in front of you.....

It was nine in the evening by the time Jim arrived back at the hall. The CO Installation Team had free run of all the offices after nine, especially in the quiet summer period. Wednesday, 8th July - but it could have been any day that week or any week since March, really. It had two things in common with all those other days. One, he was working from nine until two in the morning installing PCs in the new offices and two, he had just argued with Clara, his wife ...again. It seemed all they did was argue. Why did he have to work overtime every night, every week? Had she never heard about money? Well she had and she was earning a lot of it after her promotion. And she had the company car. And he had the Consistent Office roll out, which was extremely important to HIS company. It involved putting new PCs on everybody's desk throughout the company and you can't do that when they're sitting at them. And that means working every night until two am. Important! More like extremely impotent Clara had quipped. And she was increasingly away "on business".

Jim parked his car close to the old hall. The distant rumbles of thunder were growing louder and more frequent, and sheet lightning attracted his attention as he tried to lock the car. He struggled with the key. The Escort was old and you needed to get it just right to get the lock to work. At last the key turned and he walked towards the main door of the hall. It had history. Originally built in 1790, so he was told, with major additions in the 1850s. General something, back from India with a fortune and more than a few secrets by all accounts. Who cared? Now it belonged to AdRan Inc. It was their European headquarters, set in 100 acres of leafy Buckinghamshire countryside. The original hall was extended by a low rise, two-storey block that would contain their European customer assistance centre and the European processing centre. From here, dedicated AdRan employees would assist their cherished customers all over the world during the hours 8 am to 5 pm. After that, the responsibility moved to San Francisco.

Jim walked up the gracious steps to reception and let himself in with his magnetic card. The area was deserted, the lighting low with deep shadows in the recesses of the hall. He ignored the two sweeping staircases that were once graced by the rich

and famous and carried straight through to the link to the new block. As he left the old hall, the lighting was brighter, more in keeping with the AdRan image of high tech equipment.

Tonight, he was working on the first floor installing the PCs that the Help desk people would be using as soon as the whole centre was in operation. There were two hundred PCs still to unpack, screw together, put on desks and connect. The floor was vast, sitting over the data centre and the ground floor offices, space for over three hundred people. As he entered the new building, the silence was broken by Steve and Sandie coming through a double door with a trolley loaded with PCs.

“Hi Jim,” called Sandie. She had such a sweet smile, thought Jim. Sandie should have been just another member of team, but the tight jeans and bare midriff made her something special. From her first day she had teamed up with Steve. “Why not me?” Jim thought.

“Well if it isn’t the Buckingham Bodger come to create more works of devastation!” Steve and Jim did not get on.

“Hi Sandie, Steve” Jim responded, not rising to Steve’s barb.

“Glum again! You should sort out ‘er in doors you know. See Sand, that’s how it will be if you marry that boy of yours! You should move in with me and stick to bonking. You do it so well!” Steve chortled with laughter. Sandie blushed a little and took a mock swipe at Steve.

“Ignore him Jim, he’s a prat sometimes”

“Sometimes?”

A pause. A flash of lightning turned them all to the windows.

“You working upstairs tonight?” asked Sandie. Steve leant on the trolley.

“Yea.” Replied Jim

“Good job you’re not in the old Hall on a night like tonight. Summer storm. Gets the ghoulies out. Arrah! Arrah!”

“Shut up Steve” called Sandie

“We best let Jim get on. He needs all the time there is to screw things up as well as he does”

Sandie dragged him away.

Jim climbed the stairs to the first floor. What really hurt was Steve was right. HE should sort out Clara and his work was not good since the arguing started. And all over a simple thing really. Jim wanted children. Quite normal. That’s what husbands and wives do. That’s why they married. But since her promotion, ‘not keen’ had moved to ‘no’. Well more, NO! Maybe their summer

holiday, just a month away now, would do the trick. Playas de las Americas. Tenerife, The Canaries! Just like all their richer friends. Be great. Warm sun, no work.... Clara in her bikini. She would see the sense when she was away from that job. Never know, he may even be able to put the whole thing out of question and get that baby started. The other thing that hurt was that Sandie was all over Steve, and Jim fancied her something rotten. She didn't argue like Clara.

He collected the boxed up PC kit and used the trolley to take it to the designated desk. The rest was mechanical. Unpack the bits. Base unit first. Fit in network card, attach monitor, keyboard, mouse, connect to network, start up, load software, and test. He was at "test" before he had stopped re running the unjust stance that Clara was taking. He restarted the PC. Various messages flicked on the screen, then the familiar AdRan logo appeared. Jim chose the AdWeb icon and clicked on it. This connected to AdRan's internal information web, and from there onto the Internet, the World Wide Web. He had bored of the more exotic web pages. You can only download Pammy so many times, even the one of her lying in shallow water. He would join one of the live conversation sites. He

sat back in the chair waiting for the response, still imagining their holiday.

The screen flicked to blank. The office lights snapped off, leaving only the distant glow of the emergency lighting. A power cut. Well, the storm seemed very heavy. Outside he heard the low rumble as the standby generators came on. The power would be back soon. The lights flickered first, and then the PC started up. Jim went back into AdWeb, on into the Internet and rejoined the conversation site.

">You must listen to me" typed up on the screen

Who are you, Jim typed back

">I'm the dead....." There were many weirdos on the Web.

Who killed you?

">She did and then she lied"

Who is she?

">Petal" He laughed - in better times, Clara was his "little petal".

Why did she do it?

">I tried to make love to her. Now I'm stuck here"

I'm not following, thought Jim. What did she lie about? he typed

">Killing me. She said I was drunk and fell off the balcony."

Jim was distracted by Steve and Sandie walking across the floor. They were deep in conversation, giggling and laughing. Jim looked back to the PC.

What really happened? he typed.

">She pushed me off the balcony"

Steve and Sandie were close by now. Jim looked up.

"Hey, come and look at this. I got a right one here," he said excitedly.

Neither Steve nor Sandie reacted. They walked right up to the desk, still talking. Steve was fondling Sandie's behind. Her jeans stretched around her shapely hips. Holding the top of the chair back, Steve swivelled the seat around that Jim was sitting in. Jim looked up at him, but there was no recognition. Nothing. It was as if Jim was not there. Steve sat in the chair. In Jim. Jim was all around him. His head, his body, his legs surrounded Steve's. Jim could see Steve's legs inside his own.

"Another Buckingham Bodger job for us to sort out!" said Steve.

"You shouldn't say that!" responded Sandie, quite sharply.

Jim moved his arm upwards to touch his face. It passed through Steve's arm, then through Steve's face. He felt his finger rub the tip of his nose. Jim screamed. Loud, staring straight at Sandie, then again.

Louder. Sandie did not react, not even a flicker across her face.

“Well look at it,” Steve pointed at the screen. “This same rubbish again. Been coming up on every PC he installed. Must have known and programmed it in”

Jim followed Steve’s pointing finger. He matched the position of Steve’s hand. Their hands were side by side, overlapping to the third knuckle, both touching the bottom rim of the screen. Sandie bent down, her face next to Steve’s, studying the screen. Jim’s head was between them, but instead of being squashed, Sandie’s face just passed into the side of his head. She looked for a moment, then turned to Steve. Steve smiled. Sandie’s lips puckered, and they kissed. Inside Jim’s mouth. He stood sharply, the couple continued kissing in his waist. He looked down at the screen he had been typing into before they arrived. The electronic conversation was there. Jim moved his hands to the keyboard, and typed “Where”

“>Tenerife” And in the corner of the screen the date was 7 September.

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