

## SIGNS OF VENGEANCE

By

Kevin Kaysworth

'I think this is the last of the *No Wanking Between 6 am an 8 pm* signs,' the council workman said, as he threw the metal sign he had just unclipped from a near-by lamppost, into the back of the flat-back truck.

'Yeah, but there's still the *Road Jerks Ahead* ones to do,' the workman's colleague said. His pony-tail swishing to and thro as he clambered into the passenger front seat.

Arnold loved being sat outside the *Café Blanc*. Especially on a lovely crisp October morning. And even more so, when council workers suffering the after effects of weekend binge drinking, had to do unnecessary cleaning up first thing on a Monday morning.

Two weeks ago Arnold had sat where he did now when the very same men had cleared away the *No Entry Unless Wearing A Sheath* signs.

'I'm not a prude,' the seventy-something, large woman, donning a pair of huge, square spectacles said, while sitting at an adjacent table, 'but it's past being funny when they put things like *Drive Carefully Until You See Some Bastard You Don't Like* around the town. Don't you think so?'

'Well, it beats graffiti. They can hardly throw brick walls into the back of a truck, can they?' Arnold answered.

'Yes, true, I must agree. But they are getting a bit more intimidating now, aren't they?'

'You think so?'

'Well, yes, I do, actually. My daughter gives counselling to young people trying to come off drugs and when she came to visit me last weekend, she was disgusted to see, that these idiots had put up signs with *Reduce Your Speed And Increase Your Coke* at the entrance to the rehab hospital.'

Arnold had to make out he had something in his eye to prevent the woman from seeing that he was actually trying his utmost to stop himself from bursting out laughing. And when trying to down his *Americana* coffee, which resulted in him spraying the space in front of him, he had to go on to making out he was having a choking fit.

'Sorry, went down the wrong way,' Arnold lied.

'Ooh, you poor love. Here. It's clean,' the woman said handing him a handkerchief.

'I wonder what they'll come up with next?' Arnold said, hoping the conversation would end so as he could read the newspaper he was just opening.

'That's not this week's local rag, is it?' the woman said, as she plonked herself down on the chair next to Arnold and her drink next to his.

'Not much in it, I'm afraid,' Arnold conceded. Letting the woman practically commandeer the paper, in the hope she would see he was correct and leave him alone.

'Just get a load of this!' the woman began. '*No Right Turn Wrong Ones Only.*'

After a few seconds the woman was off again. ‘They’ve even started writing on the roads now. Three of the town centre’s box junctions have had, *Leave Clear For Bitch That Wants Her Space*, written across them.’

It was no good. Arnold knew he couldn’t stop the determined laughter from breaking out, so went into choking mode again.

‘Ooh, goodness, you are suffering. Look, why don’t you pop back with me to my place. I’ve got just the thing for that,’ the woman insisted, almost dragging Arnold to his feet. ‘My name’s Rita,’ she added.

In his sixty-seven years on the planet, Arnold could remember only one other time when he had laughed like he wanted to now. This being when he and his brother

had placed Jumping Jacks at Bonfire Night inside a neighbour’s bra, left out that night on the communal washing lines. Watching from their bedroom window as the bra did a violent Bacchanalian dance.

Minutes later Arnold found himself sat next to Rita, in a car the size of a cat’s litter tray and probably about as aerodynamic.

‘Can I ask where you’re taking me?’ Arnold said, as he was being driven along. ‘Memory Lane.’

‘Oh,’ Arnold muttered. His thoughts on what sort of an excuse he could use to get out of this strange woman’s car, rather than on scanning his mind to see if such a road did exist. But instead, he had soon started to drift off into a deep reflection on his past inner fight with his local council and the reason for his artistic vendetta.

Over the years Arnold had watched them putting sign after sign up wherever they felt the need to disrupt people’s going about things, until he thought it was time to put his old skill as a sign writer to good use again. Having seen more than enough *Do Not Park Here. Do Not Park There, Do Not Park Any-Bloody-Where* signs overwhelming every street in town. Signs that only needed the lyrics to become a *Beatles* song.

Then there had been the *No Whatever Here. No Whatever There* signs. The *Keep Clear* notices, where it was impossible to unless you could fold your car up and carry it around tucked under your arm. Raising the council tax bills every year in order to do

all of this. Even having gone as far as putting signs up outside churches. With many a bride and groom having driven off to their honeymoon, with the usual streamers and cans tied to the back bumper and a parking fine of £200 to go with them. And all for being too into their Wedding day, that they had failed to spot what was exhibiting a wedding car and hearse with a red diagonal line through them. And this was the same heartless, money-grabbing council that had caused Arnold’s one time sign writing business to go bust. Forcing him into premature retirement.

This being when they had sold off the lush, tree-infested greenbelt land his business stood on the edge of, to some big corporate giant that had set up a factory dedicated to fast track production of what he did. Or of anything else that needed a motif, picture or whatever displayed.

It was Rita that shook Arnold out of his deep and bitter reflection. ‘Ah, at last the first showing of the fruits of our labours.’ Arnold immediately seeing what she was referring to.

Hanging Basket Close, Arnold knew to be a very quiet, select and narrow cul-de-sac. But with the blatant directions for Town Centre being displayed and pointing that way, every bus, truck and car was starting to storm down into the leafy

artery not wide enough to take two disability scooters side-by-side. The eye-opening anachronism destined for only one outcome in Arnold's eyes; residential carnage and massive insurance payouts.

'You did say our labours?' Arnold asked, trying to tear his eyes away from the continuing scene before him.

'Yes. And I must say, you taught my son well.'

'I did?'

'Oh, yes. You did my Noel proud.'

'The only Noel I've ever known was...Not Noel Nibbles? He's not your son?'

'He certainly is.'

'But he's Bob Nibbles son.'

'Yes, my husband. One time proprietor of Bob's Best of British Baguettes, Bread Buns and Bakes. Or maybe, I should have said my late husband?'

'Bob's dead?'

'Tragically, yes. And while working for the bastards that did him out of business. But not before my Bob turned the whole store into one giant loaf.'

'Yes, I remember that incident. It was on the local and national news. But didn't it turn out to be some religious nut that put the store's whole stock of yeast into the furnace, because he swore he was Jesus and wanted to feed the five thousand?'

'Bollocks was it,' Rita grinned. 'They weren't going to admit to my Bob embarrassing them like that. The press would have started digging and who knows what would have come to light...Yes, they say it was the only wholegrain uncut, that could be seen from Space. And of course there was a down side to it.'

'Don't tell me poor Bob was gluten intolerant?'

'No. Worse. My Bob ended his days as part of the ingredients.'

Arnold can never remember a time when he screamed like a girl. And that includes the time when he was ten and a firework went off in his pocket. Burning him and nearly cancelling out puberty from putting in a later appearance. But now Arnold did scream. A scream that would have done the Bee Gees proud.

'They're tipping toxic fucking waste all over *Sells The Lot's* car park!'

And so they were. Several trucks with cylindrical tanks attached, were emptying their contents all over, not just the empty parking bays, but the occupied ones as well. Adhering to the sign he had no doubt his protégé had placed there, which read: *Contaminate Here!* in bold red.

'Yes, I know. Pure bloody genius, don't you think?'

'You consider rendering a whole town a nuclear fall-out zone an act of pure genius?'

'Look at it like this. My Noel has ensured those bastards that killed my Bob, are going to be out of business for a considerable amount of time, if not indefinitely.'

Taking the car around a round-about and headed back towards the town centre, Rita hissed gleefully, 'Now for the grand finale.'

Arnold sat hoping the ageing pelvic muscles he was tensing up in order to stop his bowels from opening, held out. Held out until he had witnessed something this Rita considered worse than contaminating a whole town. But when Rita pulled the car to a halt some fifty yards from the Town Hall, Arnold had a lot less confidence in his pelvic area than before.

The town's most prestigious listed building with its attached Italian design campanile, was no longer the Neo-Renaissance Town Hall. A place whose visitors book had been signed by the likes of T.S. Eliot. And on the not so proud side, Sid

Vicious.

What once took pride of place on every picture post card purchased by tourists, was about to get fame by other means.

Road sign after road sign were stood on poles next to each other covering the width of the building. Signs so dense it resembled a metal copse a good ten meters deep. Poles holding aloft either a round or triangular instruction you would expect to find in the *Highway Code*. But you wouldn't find any of these in such a book.

As proud mother Rita decided to start the car up and move slowly closer, Arnold could see just what the mass of public, TV cameras and jostling journalists were so interested in.

The first Arnold noticed was the round red circle with white background, that within it was the very detailed painted face of who he knew to have been the head of the council, back when poor old Bob had been driven out of business. The rectangular plate underneath saying : *Caution: Corruption Ahead!* Which above was the cartoon face, of who Arnold instantly recognised as Cecil Backhander, the councils Head Of Parks And Greens back during that time. A grin spread across his flabby face, while handing a blade of grass to a man in a suite, who was handing him a wad of tenners in return. While another sign, also consisting of a round red circle, had within it a painting of a loaf of bread. The label on the package reading; *Council Thick Sliced Baked with real intimidation*. Underneath this, the words, *Caution! Contains high quantities of ruined livelihoods*.

There were many more that exhibited the faces of those involved in the violation of once so-called protected land and that showed those flocking around, a well portrayed pictorial account of things.

Then Arnold saw him. His old protégé. Stood dead centre of the Town Hall's steps. Stood at a stall packed with pamphlets, papers, books, t-shirts, flags, scarfs, you name it.

'You said I taught him well. But I think he must have been moonlighting after work with Michael bloody Angelo,' Arnold gasped.

'Oh, Noel, you god,' Rita wept. 'Come on, Arnold,' she said nudging him. 'I want one of those t-shirts with that old hateful bastard Mayor Marcus Makeout's mush across it. Come on. Before they're sold out,' Rita finished. Nudging Arnold harder.

So off they walked together. To purchase a t-shirt portraying a scenario Mayor Makeout had always categorically denied. The painting of more than one pair of women's shapely legs sticking out from the back seat of a car, while the Mayor himself lay slumped up against the open back door, his trouser still half way down and while wearing a sleepy grin. The words below reading; *Warning! Road Humping Ahead*.

**THE END**

**(2108)Words**

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